Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally

A Field Guide

Revised Edition

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

Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally: A Field Guide, rev. ed.
Written by Ronald W. Duty

Preface and Acknowledgments

The church today not only lives in a multicultural world, the church itself is also a multicultural body of Christ that is still struggling and learning to live fully into that reality. Two personal examples may illustrate this struggle and also why talking together as Christians cross-culturally is important for the church's life and mission. The congregation in which I grew up was located in a largely White blue collar suburb. When Latinos and African Americans started moving into the area in greater numbers, members of the congregation, many of whom lived in the immediate area, began to discuss this informally. When I suggested that perhaps we ought to welcome them, the pastor abruptly changed the subject. No effort was made to invite the newcomers to the area to worship with us. The congregation which once saw between 125 and 150 people worship on a Sunday now has about 30 at worship each week.

While this first example is a mission failure marked by fear of people who are culturally different, the other example concerns an effort at cross-cultural spiritual discernment about an urgent matter for church and society. A few of us from that same congregation also met with others in the Lutheran Human Relations Association at Messiah Lutheran Church—LCMS, an African American congregation in San Diego's Logan Heights section, during the late 1950s and 1960s. We met to discuss developments in civil rights campaigns of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and to talk about what the realities of race in America and these developments meant for us as Lutheran Christians in that time.

This church, the ELCA, imagines for itself a more flourishing multicultural future, a future for which it may now act in hope. This field guide is offered as a means to help this church live into that future. Any effort such as this one to provide a field guide for cross-cultural conversation in the church is naturally a cross-cultural one itself involving many conversations. This project gratefully acknowledges the collaboration of several ELCA congregations and their pastors, who acted hopefully by engaging in conversations that helped open up for the author how these congregations engage in public conversation in their own cultural contexts. These conversations inform the material in Sections 21-40 of this field guide.

Those congregations and pastors include: The Church of the Abiding Savior, Durham, N.C., Rev. Gordon Myers; Angelica Lutheran Church, Los Angeles, Calif., Rev. Carlos Paiva; Iglesia Luterana Ascención, Dorado, Puerto Rico, Rev. Vivian Davila; Ascension Lutheran Church Hmong Ministry, Milwaukee, Wis., Revs. Youa Kau Vang and Jon Jacobs, and Ms. Caitlin Vang; Augustana Lutheran Church, Portland Ore., the late Rev. Ramona Soto Rank and Rev. Walter Knutson; Chinese Life Lutheran Church, Alhambra, Calif., Rev. Timothy Fong; Christ Lutheran Church Cambodian Ministry, St. Paul, Minn., Rev. Ronald Johnson and Ms. Thaly Cavanaugh; Church of Dream Builders, Anaheim, Calif., Rev. Joel Lee; Iglesia Luterana Epifanía, Bayamon, Puerto Rico, Sr. Carmen Ramirez; First Lutheran Church, Torrance, Calif., Rev. Fumio Itoh; First Lutheran Church African Ministry, Sioux Falls, S.D., Mr. Samuel Gayetay and Rev. Natanael Lizarazo; Frederick Lutheran Church, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, Rev. Stephan Kienberger and Rev. Rochelle Lewis; Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Korean Ministry, Naperville, Ill., Rev. Jae-Bum Kim; Hmong Central Lutheran, St. Paul, Minn., Rev. William Siong; Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Fredericksted, St. Croix, Virgin Islands, Rev. Robert Wakefield; Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Hollis, Queens, N.Y., Rev. Perucy Butiku; Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Inglewood, Calif., Rev. James Lobdell and the late Rev. Carol Scott;

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This project owes a significant intellectual debt to two scholars and practitioners of cross-cultural conversation. We owe to Dr. Patricia Taylor Ellison a debt for her pioneering research on moral conversation in congregations and on congregational leadership of conversation which informs and helps to shape this project. We are grateful to her for her comments on sections 46 and 47 of this field guide on "Congregational Gifts and Assets for Talking Together" and "Leader Assets;" sections 46 and 47 of this field guide summarize some of her work. We also owe a significant debt to Dr. Thomas Kochman for his pioneering research on public conversation between African Americans and European Americans. His work has illumined

aspects of public conversation that are important in this field guide and helps to inform the ethnic-specific sections of this field guide. We thank him as well for his personal generosity with materials he uses in his consulting.

As you will see as you use this field guide, it owes a great deal to those who have developed processes and methods of moral conversation and deliberation. Rather than reinvent the wheel, this field guide takes their work as a gift, and endeavors to show ways to use their processes with deliberate care in cross-cultural conversation in a way that also honors cultural distinctiveness. The work for which we are grateful includes *Growing Healthier Conversations* by Dr. Patrick R. Keifert, Dr. Patricia Taylor Ellison, and Rev. Ronald W. Duty; the InterReligious Council of Central New York's *End Racism, Improve Race Relations, and Begin Racial Healing*, written by Ms. Beth Broadway; The Study Circles Resource Center's *Study Circles in Paired Congregations*; the ELCA's *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues*, written by Rev. Karen L. Bloomquist and Rev. Ronald W. Duty; the United Church of Christ's *See—Judge—Act*, written and compiled by Ms. Robin Peterson and Ms. Lou Ann Parsons; *Finding Common Ground in the Abortion Conflict*, by Ms. Mary Jacksteit and Sister Adrienne Kaufmann, and the Women of the ELCA's *Called to Deal with Difficult Issues*, written by Ms. Faith Fretheim and Ms. Joan Pope.

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We express our thanks to Dr. Frances Kendall for permission to use material from two essays, "Understanding White Privilege," and "How to Be an Ally If You Are a Person with Privilege," in the section on "White Privilege and Ally Responsibilities for European Americans," and, also to The Copyright Company on behalf of Chalice Press for permission to use material from Rev. Eric Law's, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb* in Section 19.

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The Rev. Ronald W. Duty,
Project Director
Chicago, Illinois
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Introduction 1

Welcoming Strangers for Cross-cultural Conversation: An Invitation

This is the right time—perhaps even a critical time—for cross-cultural conversation for the sake of the church's mission. God is inviting congregations and other ministries to reach beyond their own cultures to talk with people of cultural backgrounds different than their own about ministry issues that matter. To engage in these conversations, God calls us to welcome the stranger. God calls us to open ourselves up to others' perspectives, and to embrace those who are different from us also as creatures of God or as members with us of the body of Christ.[1]

Rich opportunities abound for ELCA congregations and synods to engage in ministry with the variety of cultural groups that exist both within the ELCA and outside of it in the United States, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Territories.[2] Some of these cultural groups have been present for a long time; others have come with recent waves of immigrants. They present the whole church with the opportunity to reach out with the gospel, and to partner with them to serve people in need, to work for justice, peace, and the elimination of poverty, and to receive the blessings of their partnership in ministry. These partnerships help all who participate in them to discover part of what God is up to in our midst and to participate in it.

The purpose of this field guide is to invite and equip synods and congregations to have fruitful public conversation across the frontiers of culture about the full range of ministry matters. It also invites ministries to go beyond conversation, whenever appropriate, to deciding and acting together with those of different cultural backgrounds. This resource will

1. Help ministries talk cross-culturally
2. Enable synods to equip ministries that want or need to talk cross-culturally to have those conversations
3. Show why we are called to talk cross-culturally as church

This field book can be used to help cross-cultural conversations about a variety of ministry matters. In this field guide, by ministry matters we mean:

- Outreach and evangelism
- Congregational ministry questions[3]
- Congregational social ministry
- Involvement in a variety of social justice and peace ministries, such as community development, faith-based organizing, public policy advocacy, or the practice of non-violence
- Partnership with community organizations or social ministry organizations of the church

The possibilities of ministry matters that can be discussed are limited only by your Christian imaginations.

God in the Conversation

The book of Genesis tells a story of Abraham and Sarah offering hospitality to three strangers who approach their tent at the oaks of Mamre (Genesis 18:1-15). During the meal and conversation they shared with the men, one of them promised Abraham (while she listened at the entrance to the tent) that Sarah would bear a son in her old age.

God was in the midst of this conversation the purpose of which was to tell Abraham and Sarah what God was about to do for them and with them. We know this because Genesis begins the story, "The Lord appeared to Abraham…" and identifies God's presence with the three strangers.

God is active in the conversation when Christians, who are the body of Christ, are in conversation about things that matter. As they talk and pray together, they should seek to discern what God may be up to in their midst, and what God's word is for them in that time and place.[4]

Cultures Addressed by this Resource

The primary focus of *Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally* is on ethnic cultures.[5] This field guide addresses most of the cultural groups currently present in the ELCA. These include:

- People of African Descent, including African Americans and Blacks, Caribbean Islanders of the U.S.
- Virgin Islands, East Africans, Liberians, Oromos, Sudanese, and West Africans
- American Indian People
- Arab Americans and Middle Easterners
- People of Asian Descent, including Cambodians, Chinese, the Hmong, Indonesians, Japanese, Koreans, Laotians, South Asians, and Thai
- European Americans
- Latinos

This project would not have been possible without the collaboration of congregations with people of the cultures that are addressed by this resource. Several congregations in the ELCA have graciously and patiently explained to us how they engage in public conversation about the ministry matters they face together. We are very grateful to these congregations and their pastors for their trust and collaboration in this project. They are identified in the Preface and Acknowledgements of this field guide.

What Do We Mean by Culture?

So far, we have talked about culture several times without saying what we mean. So, what is "culture" for the purposes of this field guide?

"Culture" is a very rich and complex concept. It is hard to exhaust its meaning or give a short definition that says everything important about it. But for the purposes of this field guide dedicated to helping Christians talk together cross-culturally, "culture" refers to two kinds of reality with which we are familiar.[6]

The first of these realities of culture is things we can see, recognize, and describe when we pay attention. These are a group's *distinctive habits* and *patterns of living*, its *customs,* the *way it organizes its relationships*, and its *history* and *the stories it both remembers and tells*. (See Section 18 for some cultural dimensions that matter for conversation.) For example, although all cultures tend to have some emphasis on the family, there are noticeable differences between the families of different cultures. European American families tend to allow more expression of individuality and individual freedom to their members than, say, Chinese American families, where the well-being of the family group as a whole is more important.

The second reality of culture is about things we do not see, but about things people in the

culture know, believe, or feel. It has more to do with *approaches to knowing*, *the way they see and understand life and reality*, *with their deep values* and *what they understand is really important in life*. The differences in the relationship of individuals to the family between those two cultural groups noted above are related both to different understandings of that relationship and their values.

Gifts and Assets for Conversation

All congregations and ministries have gifts and assets to help them talk together as church. Congregations have some of the basic knowledge, attitudes and values, skills, and practices or habits that enhance their capacities for leading and having conversation among people who are different or who think differently. Many congregations also have experiences of talking about ministry issues, and members who are willing to risk engaging in conversation with others of a different culture. Realizing that they have such gifts and assets gives these congregations hope for the gifts they may not yet have. *They have gifts and assets with which to work for the future*.

Realizing that these congregations have these gifts, assets, and positive experiences also helps them look beyond their fears and seek the gifts or assets they may lack. Seeking the gifts and assets they lack helps congregations realize that if they take the risk, cross-cultural conversation will be fruitful and worthwhile. Although they might experience some rough spots in the road, congregations can rely on the strength of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide them together along the way.

This field guide also builds upon asset-based approaches to congregational ministry that focus on what gifts they *have* for public conversation and deliberation rather than on those they *lack*. Some ministries may want to go more deeply into this and use a resource about asset-based approaches in ministry as another companion to this resource.[7] This may be particularly helpful if the cross-cultural conversations they have lead to common decisions and acting together.

Building on Existing Resources

This guide also builds on existing resources. Over the last several years, a number of conversation guides have been developed to help people in congregations talk together about things that matter. Most of them are described in Section 6 of this field guide.

The approach of *Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally* is to build upon what these existing resources help congregations to do and to use them as companion resources for talking together as Christians cross-culturally. Building upon these resources, this field guide helps us to identify ways in which ministries differ culturally as they talk together as church.

With the basic cultural knowledge which this field guide seeks to provide, people of different cultures can develop both an awareness of the cultural ground rules and expectations according to which their conversation partners talk, and the skills to interpret fairly what they mean.

The American Context for Cross-cultural Conversation

The United States and its present territories have been multicultural societies since colonial times. Contact between Europeans and American Indians dates from the first European presence, and African slaves were imported early to European settlements of the Americas. Dutch, Swedish, and

German settlers came along with the English, each with a distinctive language and cultural heritage. Spanish settlement in the Caribbean began soon after Columbus' first voyage in 1492; English, Danish, Dutch, and French colonization of the area soon followed. Spanish exploration in the West began in the 16th century, and Latino presence has been continuous in California since 1769.

In the United States, its territories, and Puerto Rico, cross-cultural conversation takes place in a context heavily influenced by race and social class.

In the United States, its territories, and Puerto Rico, cross-cultural conversation takes place in a context heavily influenced by race and social class.[8] With a legacy of African slavery, and conflict, violence, legal and informal discrimination, and prejudice against African Americans, the United States continues to be haunted by race. Both industrialization and the current transition to a global post-industrial economy have accentuated distinctions of social class. In this context cultural diversity itself revives earlier debates about whether American society is—or should be—a "melting pot" that eliminates cultural differences or a "mosaic" or "salad bowl" that embraces and celebrates them as gifts and strengths.[9]

How to Use this Field Guide

This field guide should be used along with one of the resources for faith-based conversation listed in Section 6.

This guide is organized into three main parts, focusing on the questions "what?" "how?" and "why?"[10] Part One addresses the issue, *why* talk cross-culturally as church? It will give good reasons for cross-cultural conversation in ministry. Part Two focuses on *what* talking together as Christians cross-culturally is; it aims at guiding participants to *experience* these conversations. We will attend both to what we share in common through conversation and to how we differ. Part Three deals with *how* we prepare ourselves to talk cross-culturally as church. Sections 9-14 are addressed to synod teams that will work directly with congregations to train them for having cross-cultural conversation. Sections 15-48 focus on how congregational leaders can prepare to lead cross-cultural conversation. Synodical or judicatory teams will also want to study this part of the field guide.

This Project and ELCA Commitments

Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally helps to support both the commitments and the general direction the ELCA has recently charted for itself in a churchwide planning process. The 2003 ELCA Churchwide Assembly approved five strategic directions for the future of the ELCA[11] and committed the church to:

- Pursue ardently the ELCA's commitment to becoming more diverse, multicultural, and multi-generational in an ever-changing and increasingly pluralistic context, with special focus on full inclusion in this church of youth, young adults, and people of color and people whose primary language is other than English."[12]

Since 1991, the ELCA has understood its self-identity to include being "a community of moral

deliberation."[13] By that it means a community of Christians that talk together about ethical and social issues that matter to both church and society. The ELCA has worked to help its members and congregations live into that reality ever since. The use of this field guide continues that work. To claim that identity and to continually remind ourselves of that claim as ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson has often helpfully done, however, is not to mistake that identity claim for the living reality of being a community of moral deliberation. To be a living reality in this church, *acting as* a community of moral deliberation will have to become *a regular part of the practice of most of the congregations of this church*. One challenge of this field guide is to do precisely that, and to do it cross-culturally. We invite you to take up this challenge in your own ministry setting.

Working to develop training opportunities for the use of this field guide, the ELCA and synods will "engage those of diverse perspectives, classes, genders, ages, races, and cultures in the deliberation process so that each of our limited horizons might be expanded and the witness of the body of Christ would be enhanced"[14] on a variety of things that matter for ministry, service, and working for justice, peace, and the elimination of poverty.

The Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence

Finally, this project is part of the ELCA's participation in the United Nations' Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence.[15] It encourages synods and congregations to practice and model a particular form of nonviolence as a way of dealing with cultural differences that could result in misunderstandings, disagreements, and potential conflicts both for their own members and for the communities in which they minister. Using this field guide provides a means by which members can learn a way of active, nonviolent peacemaking that promotes wholeness, self-respect, and peace in congregations and communities.

1 Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 78–80.

2 H. S. Wilson, "Multicultural Christian Community: A Bouquet of Flowers," *Word & World*, 24:2 (Spring 2004), 171–181.

3 One congregation even used the kind of faith-based conversation advocated here to address congregational staffing issues that had significant implications for its future ministry.

4 Patrick R. Keifert, Patricia Taylor Ellison, and Ronald W. Duty, *Growing Healthier Congregations: Talking, Deciding and Acting as Christian* community, (St. Paul: Church Innovations, 1997), B-35–B-44; Keifert, "The Return of the Congregation: Theological Method," in *Testing the* Spirits, Keifert, ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 21–22.

5 In the New Testament, the Greek equivalent of the English term "ethnic" refers literally to "the nations." The emphasis on ethnic cultures in this field guide means that we will not be concerned with regional cultures within the United States or with differences between urban and rural cultures, although that would be a justifiable extension of the approach of this field guide for some purposes.

6 *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-39. The authors treated these partly as a distinction between society and culture. But here it is important to recognize that patterns of relationships and social structures may vary among cultural groups.
7 Bob Sitze, *The Great Permission: an Asset-Based Field Guide for Congregations*, (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2002); and Luther K. Snow, *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts*, (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004).
8 See Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's social statement, *Freed in Christ: Race Ethnicity, and Culture*, (Chicago: ELCA, 1993), 4 (also online at *www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Race-Ethnicity-Culture.aspx*). Tex Sample, however, is among those who have also emphasized the importance of social class in American life. See especially his *Blue-collar Ministry: Facing Economic and Social Realities of Working People*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1984), and *White Soul: Country Music, the Church, and Working Americans*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996). The U.S. Virgin Islands have been a multiracial, multicultural society since the 17th century. Yet, I was told by an indigenous Virgin Islander that social distinctions among them tend to be based more on social class than race when I visited Fredrick Lutheran Church on St. Thomas in October of 2002.
For discussions of how American rule of Puerto Rico changed the views of Puerto Ricans on the island about color differences among themselves from class-based to race-based perceptions, and for how race affected perceptions of Puerto Ricans by Whites in the United States, see Victor M. Rodriguez, "The Racialization of Puerto Rican Identity in the United States," in *Ethnicity, Race and Nationality in the Caribbean*, Juan Manuel Carrion, ed., (San Juan: Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico), 1997), 233–273. A similar process tends to affect all Latinos, Asians, Arabs, and Africans in the United States. The common phrase, "people of color" testifies to the power of race-based attitudes and behavior in the United States even when it is used by people of color as a positive category.
9 See E. Allen Richardson, *Strangers in this Land: Pluralism and the Response to Diversity in the United States*, (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1988), 19–28.
10 We borrow this way of organizing our field guide from Snow, *The Power of Asset Mapping*.
11 These directions are: "Support congregations in their call to be faithful, welcoming, and generous, sharing the mind of Christ; assist members, congregations, synods, and institutions and agencies of this church to grow in evangelical outreach; step forward as a public church that witnesses boldly to God's love for all that God has created; deepen and extend our global, ecumenical, and interfaith relationships for the sake of God's mission; and assist this church to bring forth and support faithful, wise, and courageous leaders whose vocations serve God's mission in a pluralistic world." (*www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Presiding-Bishop/Plan-for-Mission/Our-Mission-and-Vision/Strategic-Directions.aspx*, accessed 10/26/09).
12 Ibid.
13 See its social statement, *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* (1991), also online at *www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Church-in-Society.aspx* (accessed 10/27/09). In claiming this identity as "a community of moral deliberation," the ELCA is echoing and interpreting somewhat a call by Christian ethicist James M. Gustafson for congregations to be communities of moral discourse as well as moral decision-makers. See his "The Church: A Community of Moral Discourse," *The Church as Moral Decision-maker*, (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970) 83–95.
14 "Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns," (1997), 8, also online at *www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Policies-and-Procedures.aspx* (accessed, 10/26/09).
15 See *www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Decade-for-Nonviolence/About-the-Decade.aspx* for background on the ELCA's involvement in the Decade (accessed 10/26/2009).

About This Field Guide

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Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally is a "field guide." It is a resource for "field work" by congregations and synods in communities that are engaged in mission across boundaries of culture. This field guide can help synod teams assist congregations to learn the skills to engage others across boundaries of culture. It can help those congregations as they venture forth to engage others for the sake of mission.

This resource is divided into three parts.

1. Part One focuses on the question: Why talk cross-culturally as church?

2. Part Two focuses on what talking together cross-culturally as Christians is. It guides participants through the experience of cross-cultural conversation. In these conversations they attend both to what they have in common with others and to how they differ.

3. Part Three focuses on how to prepare and lead cross-cultural conversation.

   - Sections 9-14 help synod training teams work with congregations that want or need to have cross-cultural conversation. It shows these teams

     —why it is important to tap the diversity of their own synods,

     —how to recognize and use their own gifts to discern their particular mission, and

     —how to work as a team to train conversational leaders or, when needed, to lead conversations themselves.

   - Sections 15-48 focus on leading cross-cultural conversations in congregations and other ministries. They deal with

     —recognizing and using the ministry's gifts and assets for conversation,

     —the activity of leading conversation,

     —the basic knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, skills and practices or habits that foster good conversation,

     —the cultural variations in how cultural groups talk together as church,

     —the gifts of various key sources for conversation such as Scripture and religious traditions, the experience of faithful Christians, and their cultural heritages,

     —the gifts, assets, and different roles of congregational leaders, and the influence of gender on conversation.

Each short section focuses on a certain aspect of talking together cross-culturally. As a whole, these sections will reveal the dimensions of a practice to make cross-cultural conversation part of your congregational life.

Companions in Conversation

This field guide has several good companions to help Christians talk together as church. This field guide is meant to be used with one of those other resources. Some congregations and synods may already have experience using one of them, and you are encouraged to use them whenever that is the case. You can find information about these companion resources in Section 8 of this field guide.

The role of this field guide is to complement and extend those other resources by paying particular attention to how to have fruitful conversations together across cultural boundaries. By using any of them with care and discernment together with this field book, meaningful cross-cultural conversation as church can be enhanced.

Two other companions to this field guide are the ELCA's *The Great Permission*[1] and Luther Snow's *The Power of Asset Mapping*.[2] That is because the focus on *gifts* and *assets* is common to both. This field book assumes that synods, congregations, and individual Christians all have gifts and assets already that can help them talk together cross-culturally. Much can be learned from *The Great Permission* and *The Power of Asset Mapping* about discerning what those gifts and assets are and calling them forth for talking together cross-culturally.

Talking, Deciding, and Acting

Talking together as Christians cross-culturally is more than an abstract exercise in polite conversation with nothing at stake. If it were only that, it would be a waste of time and no one should bother with it. But often, the ministry of the gospel is at stake. Or, caring for the neighbor in love and with justice may be at stake.

First of all, talking together cross-culturally is real work, sometimes hard work, sometimes exhilarating and productive work. It can be interesting, deeply meaningful, and energizing to come to know Christians from another culture and to work to discover common ground. It also can be very challenging to discover where you may differ from them and to have to respect those differences within the body of Christ.

Second, it is more than "mere talk," as hard as that may sometimes be. For ultimately, Christians usually do not talk merely for the sake of talking; like the council of apostles and elders in Jerusalem described in Acts 15:6-29, we sometimes talk in order to *decide*. Even if we talk primarily to understand others, our understanding will shape both whether and what we decide about something. Having decided, we may also *act*.[3]

People may have to talk for quite a while in order to adequately understand. Meanwhile, they may venture to decide based on their provisional understandings, and then act and learn from the results. In a real situation, things may not necessarily happen in a neat order of talking, deciding and acting. "In fact, they dance back and forth quite a bit as the conversation rolls along."[4]

You Can Do This!

But one of the messages of this field guide is encouragement and hope. Hang in there together! Mutual respect and understanding are possible. Talking together can be rewarding. Trust that God is in the midst of the conversation—indeed, that God is one of your conversation partners. God is up to something in your midst. Together by God's power, you can discern what that is, and what God may be calling and empowering you to decide and do together.

Using This Field Book

As you imagine your team in your "field" of ministry—your synod, your congregation, your community—with your fears and hopes for helping Christians to talk cross-culturally about ministry and other issues that matter, you can use this book and its companions to:

- Identify what you face together as a leadership team.
- Name your fears and hopes for cross-cultural conversation.
- Know why talking about difficult or sensitive issues as Church is important for ministry.
- Know what factors are important for good conversation.
- Identify what factors are important for talking together across cultural boundaries.
- Name your assets for engaging in such conversations.
- Build your personal and team skills for leading good cross-cultural conversation.
- Assure yourself that you can work through difficulties whenever they happen.

1 Bob Sitze, *The Great Permission: An Asset Field Guide for Congregations*, edited by Laurel Hensel, (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2002).
2 Luther K. Snow, *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts*, (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2004).
3 Distinctions among talking, deciding, and acting as Christian community, as well as their mutual relationship, are explored in one of the suggested companion resources to this field guide. See Patrick R. Keifert, Patricia Taylor Ellison, and Ronald W. Duty, *Growing Healthier Congregations: Or How to Talk Together When Nobody's Listening*, (St. Paul: Church Innovations, 1997), B-33–B-36.
4 *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-36.

Why Talk Cross-culturally as Church? 3

Why talk cross-culturally as church? Wouldn't it be a lot easier for us to talk with our own kind of Christian rather than with Christians from another culture? Sure, it would be easier. But we would be missing our calling to "go…make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). And we might also just miss out on a crucial encounter with God, which would be vital to our future and the future of our ministry if we avoid talking to others across cultural boundaries. In the 19th century, Christians responded faithfully to the call to "go…make disciples of all nations" by sending missionaries to Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The gospel was spread so well in those places that the church continues to experience explosive growth. Nineteenth century Christians discerned that God was active and up to something in those parts of the world and they responded in faith. Today, a variety of forces have brought Latin Americans, Asians, Africans, and Eastern Europeans to North America—war, immigration reform, political oppression, globalization, civil strife, the desire for a better life, poverty, hunger, religious persecution, environmental destruction, a desire for freedom, the necessity of resettling some refugees outside their own country. In the midst of the push and pull of these forces, God is active and up to something among those who come here, whether to large cities, small towns, or suburbs. God is also up to something among those who were already here among us but who European Americans have long marginalized. God is calling us and counting on us to be willing partners in what God is up to among all of us.

The suffering and injustices which help drive some people to the United States do not necessarily end when they arrive here. Sometimes these issues complicate their adjustments to a new life in the United States. New immigrants do not only need to adapt to a new culture. They also need to work out issues from their countries and cultures of origin which they bring with them when they come here, issues such as linguistic, ethnic, cultural, social, and political conflicts and injustices. These they often bring with them into their communities and congregations here so that old injustices or conflicts may tend to repeat themselves their new world.[1] Moreover, they are also beset by the poverty and injustices which some immigrants suffer *just because* they are immigrants, may be poor, are different, and may be taken advantage of. Part of what God may be up to among all of us is not only making disciples, but also calling us to address the poverty and the injustices others experience. Responding to God's call to help immigrants address these injustices will likely carry many of us beyond our comfort zones and our preconceptions about ourselves, our society, and our congregations. As we respond, we will become different kinds of disciples. As we enter into cross-cultural conversation with them about these things, God will put us into relationship with them and make us part of each other in the body of Christ.

"Conversation is a commerce, and when we give speech we become a part of what [or who] we speak with."

—Lewis Hyde, *The Gift* (New York, Vintage Books, 2007), 95.

Talking cross-culturally as church has to do with the church's mission: witness, service to the world, and striving for justice. It has to do with the work of the Holy Spirit. It also is about how

the church discerns its calling, Christian freedom, and how the church shapes a Christian community and its public ministry, and with the ELCA's own self-understanding as a church body.

Our Cross-cultural Mission: Witness, Service, and Striving for Justice

The Church's mission is inherently cross-cultural. Jesus defined this mission himself when he said, "Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28: 1920, emphasis added.) Modern missionaries and evangelists took this commission to heart with spectacular success. The explosive growth of the church in the Southern Hemisphere since the 19th century continues today.[2] Some of these Christians have migrated to North America, joining other people of color who were already here. Together, they contribute both to the church's growth here and to its need to talk together cross-culturally.

As the church proclaims Christ and serves the neighbor in love and justice, it points to the future coming of God's kingdom in all its fullness. In doing these things, the church manifests that future kingdom for all to see in the way that it lives and serves now. As an expression now of that future reality, Paul reminds the Church that it is a body of members from all nations, where all live in an organic unity and need one another.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The church's mission was defined by Jesus, but the church was created through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which continues to sustain it and all believers. Luther called the church "the holy community or Christian people."[3] He wrote that through the Spirit, God "gathers us, using [the church] to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases holiness, causing it daily

The Organic Unity of the Body of Christ—the Church

"For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us...."

(Romans 12:4–6)

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord: and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone."

(1 Corinthians 12:4–6)

to grow and become strong in the faith and in its fruits which the Spirit produces."[4] Through the church, we also obtain the forgiveness of sin, which has important consequences: "God forgives us, and we forgive, bear with, and aid one another."[5]

Through the power of the Spirit, the church *has* indeed made disciples of all nations. Theologian Michael Welker stresses the multinational, multicultural character of the Spirit's work, not only at Pentecost but continually since. "The holy community of Christian people" is therefore a complex, multicultural community by God's intent, Christ's design, and the Spirit's work.

God's intent, says Welker, is expressed through promises to establish "justice, mercy, and the knowledge of God through a 'Chosen One' on whom rests the Spirit of God, as well as through the 'pouring out' of the Spirit."[6] The Spirit of God rested on Jesus[7] and was poured out on believers at Pentecost with multicultural consequences that continue to mark the church. By making God's power and righteousness known to different groups of people and nations, they became both recipients and bearers of God's revelation.[8] The Spirit does not just tolerate such differences; it actually *cultivates* those "that do not contradict justice, mercy, and knowledge of God."[9]

These naturally occurring creaturely differences have implications for our talking together as church. As individuals or groups, they mark us as people from a specific context—culture, national origin, language, gender, age or generation, social class and wealth, education, occupation or profession, political ideology—and a particular set of experiences. From a human perspective, they "impose considerable limits on the capacity for dialog."[10] And yet, the experience of the power of the Spirit empowers diverse people to hear one another and share common, if sometimes, challenging experiences.[11]

Talking together as church cross-culturally about ministry issues that matter—justice, mercy, and the knowledge of God—is one of those shared, sometimes challenging experiences that Christians are enabled to have in common. It is one of the ways we "bear with and aid one another." Welker writes:

"When the spirit of God is poured out, the different persons and groups of people will open God's presence with each other and for each other. With each other and for each other, they will make it possible to know the reality intended by God. They will enrich and strengthen each other through their differentiated prophetic knowledge. From various perspectives and trajectories of experience, they will direct each other's attention to the agent responsible for their deliverance."[12]

Discernment

The life of this Christian community is very rich. Although we are to "observe all" that Jesus commands us, living as Christian communities involves more than copying what Jesus did and taught. That is important. But it isn't always so clear how we can live out what Jesus taught. To "love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12) sometimes means discerning how to do that appropriately. It may mean that we talk together "to determine what is best." (Philippians 1:10)

That's why Paul lifts up the gift of discernment—a gift which is given not only to particular Christians, but also to whole Christian communities such as the church at Rome: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you—[the assembled Christians at

Rome]—may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2) We are called to discern together how to live and minister as Christian communities.

When Christians discern together, they exercise their Christian imaginations to determine what to do in the specific circumstances they are facing. Their imaginations are formed by the Word of God, their experience of living under the cross and its suffering, and their experience of the sacraments and of Christian community. With such imaginations, they engage their community, society, and culture through prayer, study, and conversation to determine what to do in ways faithful to the promises of God.[13]

Christian Freedom

Our discernment together as Christian community is an act of our freedom in Christ. The apostles stress the freedom we have as Christians and Christian communities. "As servants of God, live as free people," Peter wrote, "yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers." (1 Peter 2:16–17) Likewise, Paul encouraged the Galatians this way: "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for selfindulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Galatians 5:13–14)

When we engage one another in conversation as Christians, we can discern freely how we are to live and serve as Christian communities and so be part of God's continuing story with humanity. And Paul argues to the Philippians that this sort of freedom manifests the mind of Christ, who freely chose a life of obedience and service to God's people.[14] (Philippians 1:27–2:13)

Forming Christian Community

By this kind of free discernment of what God is calling us to be and empowering us to do as Christian community, we form and shape, enhance and enrich our community through conversation with God and each other.[15] Such conversation becomes not only a way congregations have of talking, deciding and acting together; it also can become a form which our Christian community takes. That form of talking, deciding, and acting could be the community of believers in Christ gathered and empowered by the Spirit for free conversation and deliberation about ministry matters in the name of Jesus.[16]

Public Ministry

This form of Christian community is an essentially public ministry. Public not only in the sense that worship in Word and Sacrament is "open to the public"—to anyone who wants to worship—but also, the fact that the essential conversations about its life and ministry themselves—determining what is best—are public in three senses:

1. They are truly open to all the members of the congregation and anyone else they invite into the conversation. In those discussions, the participants free each other to join and contribute to the conversation.
2. The conversations are about the public ministry of one or more congregations in and with the communities where they carry out their ministry.
3. These conversations often can be about the common good of the local community or the larger society.

A Community of Cross-cultural Deliberation

Finally this kind of public ministry has shaped the ELCA's own selfunderstanding as a church. In 1991, it declared its aspiration to become "a community of moral deliberation."[17] It therefore encourages its congregations to live into this understanding in their own ministries.

Further, the ELCA envisions that all aspects of its ministry will be multicultural. It calls for the ELCA's "becoming more diverse, multicultural, and multigenerational in an ever-changing and increasingly pluralistic context, with special focus on full inclusion in this church of youth, young adults, and people of color and people whose primary language is other than English.[18] Evangelism, Word and Sacrament ministry, Christian education and formation, community service, work for justice, and ecumenical ministry are all to be multicultural in this vision.

The ELCA has also called specifically for its congregations and members to talk cross-culturally.[19] It encourages their commitment to model:

- "honest engagement with issues of race, ethnicity, and culture, by being a community of mutual conversation, mutual correction, and mutual consolation;
- "a healthy and healing response to the change that inevitably comes from cultural contact; exchanges in which people of different cultures can find points of agreement while sometimes 'agreeing to disagree.'"

As they model these things, it also calls on congregations and members

- "to bring together parties in conflict, creating space for deliberation;
- "to use such deliberation to identify the demands of justice, and work with others who would have justice for all."

1 I am grateful to Gemechis Buba, ELCA Director for African National Ministry, for this point.
2 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
3 Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther*, Second Part, *The Creed,* III: 53, in *The Book of Concord*, Theodore G. Tappert, ed. & tr., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 417.
4 Ibid.
5 Luther, *The Large Catechism*, *The Creed*, III: 55, 418.
6 Michael Welker, *God the Spirit,* John F. Hoffmeyer, tr., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 16.
7 See, for example, the account of his sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth in Luke 4:16–21.
8 Welker, *God the Spirit*, 21.
9 Ibid., 22, 23.
10 Ibid., 26.
11 Ibid., 234.

12 Ibid., 151.
13 Martin Luther, "Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings" (1539), translated by Robert R. Heitner, in *Luther's Works*, v. 34, Lewis Spitz, ed., H. Lehmann, Gen. Ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960) 2;85287; Patrick R. Keifert, "The Return of the Congregation to Theological Conversation," in *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 20–22; Ann O'Hara Graff, "Notes on Discernment: Learning for the Church," un-published paper given to the Congregational Studies Research Team of Church Innovations, St. Paul, Minnesota, February 18, 1995, 13–21; and Robert A. Kelly, "Oriatio, Meditatio, Tentatio Faciunt Theologium: Luther's Piety and the Formation of Theologians," *Consensus*, 19:1 (1993), 9–27. Brief discussions applying corporate discernment in congregational conversation are found in *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-43–B-44; and *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues*, written by Karen L. Bloomquist and Ronald W. Duty, (Chicago: ELCA Division for Church in Society), 4.
14 For a fresh interpretation of the Christ Hymn of Philippians 2 which informs this discussion, see David L. Fredrickson's Bible study, "Conversation Worthy of the Gospel" (with Patricia Taylor Ellison) , in *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-19–B-28. See also his essay, "Congregations, Democracy, and the Action of God in Philippians 1-2," in *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations,* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 48-66. Fredrickson also treats this text along with other Pauline writings on Christian congregations in "Pauline Ethics: Congregations as Communities of Moral Deliberation," in *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 115-129.
15 *Growing Healthier Congregations*, Preface—"What is Growing Healthier Congregations?" and David L. Ostendorf and Paul R. Peters, *Revitalizing Church and Community: A Resource Manual for Faithbased Organizing*, (Oak Park, Illinois: The Center for New Community, 1998), 3-4.
16 Fredrickson, "Pauline Ethics: Congregations as Communities of Moral Deliberation" 115.
17 *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, (adopted, 1991) online at *www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Church-in-Society.aspx* (accessed 10/29/09).
18 "Recommendations: Recommitment to Multicultural Ministry Strategies," *2005 Pre-Assembly Report*, (Chicago: ELCA, 2005), IV: 46, online at: *www2.elca.org/assembly/ 05/VotingMatters/Recommitment Multicultural-Ministry Strategies.pdf* (accessed 10/29/09).
19 ELCA social statement, *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*, (Adopted, 1993) 6-7, online at: *www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Race-Ethnicity-Culture.aspx* (accessed 10/29/09).

Talking among Christians of Different Cultures is Nothing New

4

Today people of many cultures bump up against one another both inside and outside of the Church. This situation poses many challenges—challenges of communication, of mutual understanding, of cooperating in mission, and of sharing power. Not only are there good reasons for Christians to talk together cross-culturally, as we have seen. In fact, it is a very old Christian thing to do. It actually goes back beyond the updated U. S. immigration laws of the 1960s which made the latest waves of immigration possible, beyond even the immigration of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to the birth of the Church in the first century.

The life of the Church has crossed cultural boundaries from the day of its birth until now. On the day of Pentecost, the followers of Jesus received an amazing gift of God's grace! (Acts 2:1–47) It wasn't just the tongues of fire that rested on each one. Nor was it only being filled with the Holy Spirit. Both of these are amazing enough in themselves. But there was more.

The Spirit was not content just to inhabit the faithful with its presence. It began to act in their lives together. For on that day our ancestors in the faith began to speak in other peoples' languages about the powerful things that God had done for them in Jesus Christ. Foreigners who had gathered in Jerusalem heard the message and began to ponder what it meant. Gathered together by the Spirit, people of different languages and cultures ate together and talked together about the meaning of Jesus for their lives as a community of believers. And they also worshipped together focusing on this good news.

Where once God confused the language of the people of the earth so that they could no longer act together against God's will for humanity (Genesis 11:1-9), on Pentecost God made it possible for people to talk together about God's grace given in Jesus despite differences of language and culture. That day partially fulfilled God's promise to redeem people of all nations and cultures (Isaiah 49:6; Luke 24:46–48).

People from many nations and cultures responded to the good news. Within a few decades, believers included Jews, Ethiopians, Syrians, Samaritans, Galatians, Ephesians, Greeks, Macedonians, Romans, and others.

Talking about Tough Issues Cross-culturally in the Early Church

From the Church's beginning, Christians have talked together across cultural boundaries and theological differences about things that matter and what it means to live the Christian life together. Some of these conversations have been about difficult and sensitive issues, not just about obvious things they all agreed on. People have had to negotiate their cultural differences about important understandings and expectations about what it means to be Christian.

One important conversation involving serious cultural differences was held in Jerusalem because Paul's preaching to Gentiles was so successful that it created a crisis (Acts 15). Some Jewish Christians argued that Gentile Christians had to conform to Jewish law and that all men had to be circumcised. Peter, Paul, and Barnabas argued differently. James persuaded the elders and apostles to resolve the matter largely in favor of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. They also asked Gentiles, however, to stop eating certain foods and to change their sexual behavior.

Our Lutheran Heritage

Lutherans trace our own origins to theological disagreements that involved serious cultural overtones. It all began in 1517, when Martin Luther followed the custom of his day and nailed 95 theses on the church door at Wittenberg for theological debate. Back then, that was a key way to raise important issues for public discussion. At issue was whether the church should be selling pieces of paper—called "Indulgences"—that assured people their sins were forgiven in order to raise money for elaborate building projects in Rome. Luther argued that God's grace was given freely to those who believe in God's mercy and grace given in Jesus.

Luther's act triggered intense debate for the next several decades. That debate fed partly on German resentment of both Italian control of the Catholic Church and of political rule by a Spanish king. In this case, Luther and his adversaries could not resolve their differences. Luther and his supporters had wanted to reform the whole church. Instead, they reformed only part of the church. Many of these issues were ultimately resolved only a few years ago in 1999, when a decades-long discussion between Lutherans and Catholics produced an agreement about the meaning of justification by faith.

Luther loved to talk with others informally in his own home about the meaning of faith and about how to live the Christian life. Almost every day, Luther's friends and students gathered around Katie Luther's dinner table to talk about these things with the two of them.[1] Like the first Christians at Pentecost, dinner with the Luthers was a cross-cultural gathering. The dinner guests included Poles, Slovaks, Bohemians, and people from other German-speaking countries. Indeed, this table talk was at least as important to those Lutherans as high-level formal theological discussions.

International Lutheranism

Today, this Christian and Lutheran heritage of talking together cross-culturally finds expression in international Lutheranism. Lutheran churches talk, decide, and act cross-culturally continually as members of a global communion in The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The LWF currently has 140 member Lutheran churches in 79 countries, an international staff, and a Council of member churches that governs Federation affairs, and holds an international Assembly every 6 years for member churches.[2] Much of the ongoing work of the LWF staff is cross-cultural, and involves relief and development, mission, study in theology and ethics, ecumenical affairs, and human rights.[3] All of this work involves constant cross-cultural conversation. So, talking, deciding, and acting together as an international communion of churches is something Lutheran churches do all the time.

What Does This Mean for Us?

Talking together as Christians cross-culturally is part of our Christian and Lutheran heritage. That heritage is a gift and an asset we can put into action in our own local settings for the sake of ministry.

We need not fear that we lack the gifts and the ability to do this. The Holy Spirit empowered the first Christians to take the ministry of the gospel across boundaries of culture and language. God has given the Church these gifts even in the midst of some of the most difficult issues it has yet faced. The Spirit will do the same for us, whatever our community setting for ministry. With God's

help, we can learn the skills, use the sensitivity, and find the courage we may need. Even when the issues we need to talk about are tough ones and cultural differences are deep and wide, by God's grace we have what we need to talk together constructively.

Talking together as Christians cross-culturally is a very Lutheran thing to do. God calls us to claim the heritage of Martin and Katherine Luther's dinner table, along with the other gifts with which the Holy Spirit has enlightened us. As it has done so to us, realize also that in the same way, the Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth"[4] whatever peoples' cultural background. As Lutheran Christians, we can claim our freedom to engage people in congregations and communities of other cultures for the sake of the gospel, and in service to our neighbor.

1 Notes from many of these discussions are printed in *Luther's Works,* vol. 54, *Table Talk,* Theodore G. Tappert, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967). Martin Marty pointed out in a 2004 talk at the Lutheran Center in Chicago that these notes are students' notes of the key theological points Luther made in these conversations, and not transcripts of the conversations themselves. So, they read like students' notes from a lecture rather than as a reflection of the actual give and take of those who participated in those dinner conversations. He also believes that Katherine Luther was likely an active participant in those conversations because she had a lively and intelligent mind herself and was personally engaged in the issues discussed at these dinners.

2 See *www.lutheranworld.org* (accessed 11/5/09).

3 For descriptions of these activities, see *www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/LWF-What_We_do.html* (accessed 11/5/09).

4 Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther for Ordinary Pastors and Preachers*, *The Creed* III: 6, in *The Book of Concord*, Theodore G. Tappert, tr. and ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 345.

Experiencing Conversation as Church 5

Talking together as Christians cross-culturally is conversation about things that matter in ministry among people of different cultural backgrounds. It involves deep listening to others—their experiences, expressions of faith, hopes, fears, and ideas. These things may often be expressed through the filter of their cultural backgrounds. Conversation also involves speaking one's own mind and heart, and experiencing being heard by others.

Above all, as we have seen, it is conversation that seeks ultimately to understand what God is up to among us, and what God's word is for us in that particular time and place. In these conversations, we may experience the discovery of common ground. We also may discover either how differently we think and feel about something, or the different decisions each one thinks they should make in response to it.

In this section, our goal is to explain basically what it is like to experience this kind of conversation.

Choices for Talking Together

Conversation comes naturally to most people. That natural experience is a gift they can use in serious public conversation about things that matter for Christian ministry. Public conversation about ministry is not necessarily something Christians do all the time; it may be less familiar to us than other kinds of conversation.

Fortunately, a number of people have given public conversation about things that matter in ministry some careful thought. There are several good ways of approaching this kind of conversation that build on the natural gifts people have for other kinds of conversation. Most of these are explained by the resources in Section 6 of this field guide.

Although we could use any of these guides, we will simply choose one of them for illustrating this kind of conversation. It is called *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues*.[1] (Actually, the issues don't have to be either social ones or that tough to use this process. It is good for any topic that matters for Christian ministry.) We will describe what conversation using the process it lays out is like.[2]

Ground Rules for Conversation

Conversation is possible because people know more or less what the "ground rules" are. People generally know how to behave in most conversations.

When people are talking together in public as church about ministry issues that matter, it helps to be clear about these ground rules and not necessarily assume that everyone knows them all. It is a matter of hospitality, of welcoming everyone into the conversation by being explicit about the ground rules for these conversations.

Because some may not have experienced this kind of public conversation as church, leaders will explain the proposed ground rules for this conversation, and ask participants whether they want to propose any suggestions or changes to them. The reason for having ground rules and agreeing in advance about them is to ensure that the conversation is as free as possible.[3] Ground rules that do anything else do not serve the conversation and enable people to participate freely.

Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues suggests the following ground rules.[4]

(Remember, in an actual conversation they can be amended or added to. In cross-cultural conversation, these ground rules might be amended in light of the expectations that various cultural groups have for how to talk together as church. See, for example, Sections 16–22.)

Follow the Golden Rule; in conversation, do unto others as you would have them do unto you—even if you disagree with them.

1. Listen carefully and respectfully to others
2. Speak honestly about your thoughts and feelings
3. Speak for yourself rather than as a member of a group
4. Realize that the Holy Spirit is present and active in the conversation and has given each participant a part of the truth you are seeking to discern
5. A true conversation needs give and take (all people and their views should be heard)
6. Maintain confidentiality about what is said in the conversation when requested
7. Keep an open mind and heart
8. Exercise care for group members who become upset over anything that is said
9. The outcome, quality, and safety of the conversation is everyone's responsibility

Elements of the Conversation

Using these ground rules, the conversation begins by approaching the subject of the conversation (which has been announced beforehand in the invitations made to participate) in four ways—through your experience, understanding the reasons for the situation, reflecting on both of these through Scripture and religious tradition, and deciding what to do. (See pp. 14–17)

Experience: First, talk about what everyone sees, hears, and feels about the topic under discussion. How does their experience influence the ways they view it? Are there common threads in the experiences of those in the conversation? How does the issue "hit home" for everyone? Does the issue raise tensions or possible conflicts?

Understanding: Next, talk in order to understand the issue, as well as why things are the way they are. How did things get this way? Why are the causes? What are the personal, cultural, social, economic, or political factors that affect this situation? What is at stake for you and for others affected? How are these things related to the experiences you have already shared?

Scripture and Religious Tradition: Now, begin to ask what God is up to, and what God's word may be for all of you in this situation. What stories, characters, passages of scripture, or biblical images come to mind in this situation, and why? How do the commandments, creeds, or Lutheran theological themes speak to everyone in this situation? How does their faith help them to imagine what possibilities God may be opening up for them? How does this situation affect their understandings of God, and how do those understandings of God affect how they see the situation? What may God be calling everyone to be and to do?

Scripture is key because not only is it the Word of God, but also because it is the source and norm for the life of Christians and the Church. Human experience and understanding are natural places for people to begin talking about a situation because they are concrete and immediate. But they are not primary or ultimate. For Christians, what God is up to in the situation and determining God's word and will for them matters more. But because they

seek to discern God's word and will for them in a particular situation and setting, their experience and understanding also are important for their discernment. Also, it is not necessary for anyone to be a trained expert in the Bible or the creeds and Lutheran confessions. People just begin with the knowledge they have and trust the Holy Spirit that it is sufficient for the conversation.[5]

Responding and Acting: If the situation calls for some kind of response, your discernment of God's word and will and your understanding of the situation may suggest some courses of action which you can talk about together. What alternatives are there? What are the possible consequences of each? How would those involved be affected? What is the right or the most just thing to do? Based on these considerations, you can take stock of your gifts and assets, decide what to do, and create a plan of action together.

Conclusion

As you become familiar with this way of talking, you will notice that you need not always go at these aspects in the order listed above. It is a helpful way to begin, however. Later on, it is natural to go back and forth between them, particularly with experience, understanding, and Scripture and religious tradition.

In your conversation, you will discover some areas of experience, understanding, Scripture and religious tradition, or ideas for responding where you stand on common ground. You may also discover areas where you may differ. This is common and natural. Some of these similarities may occur despite cultural differences; in other cases, differences may be due to cultural factors. In the following two sections, we delve more deeply into listening for what we share in common and for how we differ.

1 *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues,* written by Karen L. Bloomquist and Ronald W. Duty, (Chicago: ELCA Division for Church in Society, 1999).
2 If we were to use one of the other guides in Section 8, the precise steps would be somewhat different but many of the same things would happen and many of the same questions would be part of the conversation.
3 For discussions of the apostle Paul's view of the importance of free public conversation in the Pauline churches of the New Testament period, see David Fredrickson, "Pauline Ethics: Congregations as Communities of Moral Deliberation," in *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme, eds., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 15–129, and "Congregations, Democracy, and the Action of God in Philippians 1–2," in *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations,* Patrick R. Keifert, ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 48–66. A Bible study by Fredrickson, "Conversation Worthy of the Gospel," based on the latter essay is found in Patrick R. Keifert, Patricia Taylor Ellison, and Ronald W. Duty, *Growing Healthier Congregations*, (St. Paul: Church Innovations, 1997), B-19–B-28.
4 *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues*, 10. The other guides in Section 6 also suggest explicit ground rules; look for these if you use one of those guides.
5 Ronald W. Duty, "Scripture, Christian Imagination and the Testimony of Experience in Moral Conversation," in *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations*, Patrick R. Keifert, ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 132–158.

Listening for What You Share in Common 6

Starting From What We Share

As you have conversation about things that matter in ministry, you will discover things you have in common with others. People from different cultural backgrounds share things in common despite their differences. There may be different first languages, different attitudes, values, or ways of seeing and relating to the world, or different customs among us. God, who bestows on our common humanity different gifts and assets, also makes all our stories a part of God's story.[1]

In the midst of diverse cultural backgrounds, Christians share a core of important things:

- A common humanity as creatures of God.
- A common baptism into the body of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- A common faith despite the different ways they embody that faith.[2]
- A common mission to preach the gospel, to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to teach the faith.
- A common calling to care for others and "to strive for justice and peace in all the earth."[3]
- A common destiny to resurrection in the kingdom of God.

In short, they share a common experience of being caught up in God's story with humanity and the whole creation.

The tasks of Christians in cross-cultural conversation may be *to discern how God is now at work bringing them together in their diversity for the sake of mission, service, and justice,* and *to decide how to engage in mission, service, and working for justice together*. If so, discovering their common ground will be vital for discerning what that mission, service, or work for justice should be in a particular place.

Listening to Personal and Communal Stories

One way to discern what else we have in common is through listening to the personal and communal stories of others.[4] Personal experience can be shared by:

- Starting with a personal or family photo and describing the people shown in the photo and their experiences.
- Telling personal or family stories or sharing memories.

Communal experience can be shared by:

"Fundamental to this is the conviction that our truest bond is not one we make among ourselves but the one God creates with us. There is no more substantial or relevant connection between us than the life we first receive through Jesus Christ."*

James R. Nieman & Thomas G. Rogers

***Preaching to Every Pew: cross-cultural strategies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 150**

- Telling stories about congregational life.
- Telling stories about community life.

These personal and communal stories can be shared either one-on-one or in small groups. Communal stories can also be shared among larger groups.

"Listen" is an active verb[5]**:** Listening requires active engagement with those to whom we listen as they share their personal and communal stories and experiences. As we really listen to others, we

- Lower our self-consciousness.
- Put our own perspective and biases on hold for a while.

We listen to words, surely, but pay attention also to

- Gestures.
- Tone of voice and emotional expression.
- Facial expressions.
- Even to what is *not* said.

This kind of active listening "means hearing the whole message, seeing the whole person in the message, and appreciating that person for who she or he really is, considering everything." [6]

It also means listening for the voice of God in that person. When we listen actively, we might hear such things as:

- What it is like to be that kind of person or people.
- What is good about it.
- What is hard about it.
- What they don't want to hear us say about people like them.
- What they want from allies.[7]
- What their journey has been like.
- What they think about certain conditions, circumstances, or injustices they face.
- What they think should be done about them.
- What their fears are.
- What their hopes are.

Responding to What We Hear: Active listening also means listening to our own reactions to what we've heard in the personal and communal

"To be open means to listen to others and experience their lives before making any judgment. The challenge presented by being openly inclusive is to be so secure in our identity in Christ as children of God, that we have no sibling rivalry with our brothers and sisters from different traditions. On the contrary, we are able to see Christ in them. We are set free to hear Christ through them."*

Rev. Ivis LaRiviere-Mestre
St. Martin de Porres Lutheran Church
Allentown, Pennsylvania

*** *Living the Faith: a guide for strengthening multi-cultural relationships,* (Chicago: ELCA Commission for Multicultural Ministries, n.d.), p. 15**

stories of others. After deep listening to others, we need to bring our own experience and perspectives back into our consciousness.

- How are we responding to what we hear?
- How do we feel about it?
- What feelings do we share with the others in the group?
- What in their stories do we connect with or find similar to our own?[8]
- What are the strengths of their views?[9]
- How do their stories (and our story) connect with the stories and texts of the Scripture that we are familiar with?
- What do we think?
- How do what we hear and our responses to it affect our personal perspectives or biases?
- What might we do?

Finding Common Ground

"Careful listening builds trust, which is essential to a community's ability to adapt to change and build a healthy future."[10] It also encourages thinking that finds connections with others, and makes it possible to take risks with them.

Trust: Careful listening shows respect. When backed up by other respectful behavior, it builds trust that makes further conversation possible and desirable.

Connections: Careful listening also encourages making connections with others, discovering together things you all have in common. Mary Jacksteit and Adrienne Kaufmann picture this as the overlap—an "intersection"—between two different circles of experience or circles of attitudes, values, beliefs, stories, or cultural practices.[11] They emphasize that this overlap is not a "compromise." Neither is it necessarily a "consensus" or "agreement."

Jacksteit and Kaufmann talk about the importance of seeing these connections as a way to focus on the *gifts* and *assets* that others bring to the conversation in order to multiply them for the common good:

"A teacher once told her class, 'If you're talking, you can't be listening.' The same is true for the local congregation. To listen to someone else's story is to not talk, not dominate the conversation, not overwhelm the scene, and not take the center stage. Too often we're afraid to listen to people because we're afraid they're going to want something from us. They do. It's your time. Life is time. Give them your life as Christ gave his for you. Take a risk, be vulnerable and love the other person."

Rev. George Villa
St. John's Lutheran Church
Gardena, California

***Living the Faith: a guide for strengthening multicultural relationships,* (Chicago: ELCA Commission for Multicultural Ministries, n.d.) p. 17**

"Dialog encourages *connective thinking* that focuses attention on the *strengths* of the speaker, and encourages a search for the gems of wisdom, or pieces of truth in what is said. Over time, the practice of connective thinking in a group can lead to a web of shared knowledge woven from the threads of truth contributed by its members. Connective thinking fosters the building of relationships and the development of community because it ties together the best wisdom of each member of the group."[12]

Making these connections helps to build a "platform of understanding" which provides a fresh vantage point from which to view our differences:

"When participants stand together in the area of genuine intersection, they can also look at their differences with fresh eyes. The differences remain the same as before but the perspective on these differences has changed. The angle of vision is from the common space looking out, instead of from the areas of difference where adversaries glare at one another across the submerged and unseen area of what is shared."[13]

Risk: Seeking common ground together empowers people to take real risks. "They are willing to make themselves vulnerable, in order to create safe spaces for resolution in order to encourage others to do the same."[14] Or, they may create safe spaces in order to explore common activity in mission, service, or working for justice.

This willingness to become vulnerable in order to create these safe spaces also is an asset. But it is one that making connections and finding common ground *creates*, not an asset with which we necessarily have when we start a conversation.

1 *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-44.
2 R. Stephen Warner, "Coming to America," *The Christian Century*, February 10, 2004, 23.
3 An affirmation of confirmands commonly used from the Liturgy for the Affirmation of Baptism, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, (Minneapolis and Philadelphia: Augsburg Publishing House and the Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978), 201
4 This is stressed by *End Racism, Improve Race Relations, and Begin Racial Healing: Community Wide Dialog Facilitator Guide,* (Syracuse: InterReligious Council of Central New York, 1997, updated September 17, 1998), 8–10, which uses the following methods for sharing experience, and by *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-40, and Mary Jacksteit and Adrienne Kaufmann, *Finding Common Ground in the Abortion Conflict: A Manual*, (Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, 1995) 8–12.
5 *Growing Healthier Congregations,* B-35
6 Ibid.
7 *End Racism, Improve Race Relations, and Begin Racial Healing*, 10.
8 James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew: cross-cultural strategies*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 150.
9 *Study Circles in Paired Congregations*, (Pomfret, Conn.: Topsfield Foundation, Inc., 1995), 15.
10 *Together in Tough Times: Community Conversations in Iowa: Talk as the Power to Change*, compiled by Mary Delagardelle, Mary Swalla Holmes, and Sarai Schnucker Beck, (Des Moines: Ecumenical Ministries of Iowa, 2000) 3.
11 *Finding Common Ground in the Abortion Conflict: A Manual*, (Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, 1995), 8–9.
12 Ibid, 10.
13 Ibid, 9.
14 David Steele. Steven Brion-Meisels, Gary Gunderson, and Edward LeRoy Long, Jr., "Use Cooperative Conflict Resolution," *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War*, Glen Stassen, ed. (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1998) 55.

Dealing with How You Differ 7

Seeing Differences from Common Ground

When we find ourselves on common ground with others in conversations, we are more able also to deal with our differences together. We look at our differences with fresh eyes, with a changed perspective on them. "The angle of vision is from the common space looking out," say Jacksteit and Kaufmann, "instead of from the areas of differences where adversaries glare at one another across the submerged and unseen area of what is shared."[1]

Differences and Similarities *within* and *between* Cultural Groups. Remember that people within cultural groups do not all have the same experiences, interests, or opinions despite the things they share in common. Equally important, "each of us participates in diverse and multiple contexts" where there are "overlapping zones of difference and similarity within and between cultures."[2] This means that we all have complex multicultural identities which increase our capacity to understand and adapt to a variety of cultures.[3] People in the same cultural group do not all think alike about everything. And the zones of similarity *between* cultural groups—or between individuals in different groups—also provide common ground from which to explore zones of difference.

Listening is key both to exploring common ground we share and to exploring how we may differ from others. Although it is easy to assume that conversation is all talking, much of the important work of conversation is listening. In the last section, we noted the importance of hearing one another's personal and communal stories and gave some tips for doing so effectively. The importance of Christians listening to each other also was emphasized by the German pastor, theologian, seminary professor, and anti-war conspirator, Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

> **The *first* service one owes to others in the [Christian] community involves listening to them. Just as our love for God begins with listening to God's Word, the beginning of love for other Christians is learning to listen to them. God's love for us is shown by the fact that God not only gives us God's Word, but also lends us God's ear. We do God's work for our brothers and sisters when we learn to listen to them…. [L]istening can be a greater service than speaking. Many people seek a sympathetic ear and do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking even when they should be listening. But Christians who can no longer listen to one another will soon no longer be listening to God either; they will always be talking even in the presence of God. The death of the spiritual life starts here, and in the end there is nothing left but empty spiritual chatter and…condescension which chokes on pious words. Those who cannot listen long and patiently will always be talking past others, and finally no longer will even notice it. Those who think their time is too precious to spend listening will never really have time for God and others, but only for themselves and their own words and plans.**[4]

When Christians listen deeply to one another, as biblical scholar David Fredrickson likes to say, they

listen one another into free speech. In the course of doing so, they may also hear God together.

What is God up to? Because Christians believe that God continues to act in the world and that the Holy Spirit enlivens the church, it is important to ask from this common ground, "What is God up to in this conversation?" "Where is God in the midst of our disagreement? And where is God leading us?"

> **"We often claim the church is inclusive. But it is not inclusive if it does not incorporate another culture's understanding of Christ"**
>
> **Richard J. Perry Jr.***
> **Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago**
>
> *** Personal conversation with the author**

The Holy Spirit "produces a powerful public in which there is the possibility and the reality of *diverse* experiences of the removal of isolation and of individual and collective separation coupled with the preservation of cultural, historical, and linguistic diversity" among us.[5] It gifts and empowers faithful people to carry on the ministry of the gospel and to work for God's righteousness, justice, and mercy in the world both through and in the midst of this diversity.[6]

Since some issue of ministry or justice has led to our conversation together, it is important to ask where God may be leading us through our differences for the sake of this ministry or work for justice.

"Embracing" Others and Exploring Differences. One of the things God is always up to is continuing the work of forgiveness and reconciliation which Jesus began on the cross. "At the heart of the cross," says Croatian-American theologian Miroslav Volf, "is Christ's stance of not letting the other remain an enemy and of creating space in himself for the offender to come in…. [T]he cross says that despite its manifest enmity toward God humanity belongs to God; God will not be God without humanity."[7] Because of this fundamental decision that we belong to him, Jesus risks vulnerability to humanity on the cross and makes a space for us to enter into fellowship with him.

Another Look:

Jesus calls us to embrace others as he embraces us; to risk the embrace of those who are different and with whom we may disagree, to live as though we will not be ourselves without them, and to make a place for them in ourselves.

In calling upon his followers to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12), Jesus calls us to embrace others as he embraces us; to risk embracing those who are different and with whom we may disagree, to live as though we will not be ourselves without them, and to make a place for them in ourselves. "We will begin to trust one another," says Baptist Pastor Richard Groves, "when we become convinced that we are committed [to each other] for the long haul."[8]

This has practical consequences. "There can be *no justice without the will to embrace,*" says Volf. "It is, however, equally true that there can be *no genuine and lasting embrace without justice*."[9] Whether our concern is one of evangelism and outreach or one of justice, without the will to embrace those who are different we can neither understand and truly explore our differences nor deal with each other and work constructively together despite those differences.

All are Gifted; Differences are Not Necessarily Liabilities:

One barrier to embracing those who are different may come from the assumption that difference is itself a lack, a minus, a liability. Those with this attitude may tend to assume that a basic uniformity of culture, ways of thinking, or ways of life is required to share a common life in church or society. To the extent that these things are not shared, they may think the lack of a basic consensus makes the pursuit of a common mission in the church or sharing a common life in society too difficult. Rather than seeing others' differences as possible gifts and assets as contributing to a common mission and life, they may believe that those gifts and assets themselves are a major problem. Therefore, they may not expect much from either themselves or from people who are different as far as bridging differences or dealing with common issues is concerned.

"The faith in Jesus Christ, who made our cause his cause, frees us from pursuing our interests only, and creates in us the space for the interests of others. We are ready to perceive justice where we previously saw only injustice—if indeed the cause of the others is just." *

Miroslav Volf

***Exclusion and Embrace, p. 215**

"When we encounter a group from another race or culture wanting to deal with ours, we should ask ourselves, 'Does it want the best I have to offer, along with the legitimate claims I and others like me bring?' Likewise we should ask ourselves, 'Am I prepared to accept the best it has to offer, along with the legitimate claims they and others like them bring?'"*

Rev. James Forbes
Former Senior Pastor, Riverside Church
New York City

***Comment during discussion at The Hein-Fry Lectures, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, March 7, 2003**

But all people are creatures of God and are gifted in some ways and therefore strengths and assets. Because we engage in connective thinking as we talk, we look for strengths, wisdom, and truth in others even as we recognize differences. Our differences by themselves are not a lack, weakness, or liability. They are factors or challenges with which, however, we may have to deal together. *Everyone* has gifts to help meet these challenges together. Cultures also have gifts to help meet

them, although each culture may meet these challenges in their own ways.

Differences of Opinion and Conviction

People of different cultures can have real differences of substance—differences of vision, of opinion and conviction, or real differences of interests about things that matter. These differences may be related to some key elements of those cultures which a sizeable group in the culture will affirm and support. Of course, these same matters may also cause disagreement *within* their culture and not everyone in the group will think alike about them. Yet, how do we deal with our cultural differences as we look at them together from the common ground we share?

Seeing Cultural Identity through the Lens of Scripture: Christians of different cultures often have very different ways of seeing their identities and callings in light of how they interpret Scripture. These differences may affect how they interact with people from a different culture when issues of ministry, service, or justice are under discussion.

Without taking examples from every culture in this guide, consider how the story and figure of Moses is interpreted in *some* Christian cultural groups.

African Americans tend to identify with the Israelites and to see Moses as one who liberated God's people from slavery in Egypt, and to read the Bible story from Moses to Jesus as a story of liberation of all God's people.[10]

Similarly, in Anglo-American churches, Moses is seen as not only as the reluctant prophet chosen by God to lead Israel out of slavery in Egypt, but also as a giver of the Law—the commandments of God which he received on Sinai—which the people of God are called to follow. Like the Israelites, they also see themselves as the people of God. But they tend not to see themselves as ever having been literally a people enslaved by a political empire.

Native Americans may tend to identify with the Canaanites in the biblical story, those who already lived in the land promised to Israel and who were conquered and displaced.[11]

Also conquered by Europeans, Latino Americans may tend to see themselves as *mestizo*[12] recipients of the prophetic promise in Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) through Our Lady of Guadalupe that God will bring down the mighty and lift up the lowly, and also will fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty.[13] They see Jesus is the one through whom this promise is fulfilled in the Exodus-to-Jesus story.[14]

Arab American Christians tend to see themselves as direct descendants of Moses and the first Christians in the Holy Land who are now displaced and in exile from their homeland because of the political, economic and religious pressures of national, cultural, and religious conflict there.

How might these differences in the way they see themselves and each other affect their interaction? Let's look at one example of African Americans and White Anglos. Seeing themselves and others through the lens of the biblical story and their own experiences of slavery and racism, African Americans may sometimes see White Anglos as Pharaoh and the Egyptians. African Americans tend to focus their action on "building a world of freedom and transforming the structures of evil"[15] for all people in both the church and the wider world. White Anglos, in turn, may tend to

be blind to both African American experience and desire for liberation. They may tend to interpret African American impatience with impediments to full participation in both church and society as an unwarranted challenge to good order, and respond accordingly.

Seeing with "Double Vision": Recall that we seek to deal with our differences with connective thinking from common ground. For Christians that common ground is our baptism into Christ and the inclusion of the stories of cultural groups and their individual members in God's story together now with all the saints. It may also include other places where our stories intersect.

Since all Christians are the heirs of Pentecost together, "all receive a voice and all are allowed to sound it in their native language."[16] Each person's perspective matters. The challenge is *not* to see others from some neutral, "objective" place, but *rather* to see from the perspective of each—"from here" as well as "from there," as Volf puts it. It means learning to see with a kind of double vision. [17]

With theological insight from Volf and the cross-cultural experience of Celia Jaes Falicov, we can envision a process to seek double vision.[18]

- **Participants step outside of themselves** and their usual perspectives and attitudes about others and ourselves momentarily, and are willing both to examine them and to be "ready for a surprise."[19] Recall from the previous section that in conversation we

  —Lower our self-consciousness

  —Put our own perspectives and biases "on hold" for a while as we prepare to listen to others.

This stepping out is *partial*, for we cannot separate ourselves from ourselves completely. **But it *can* give us enough distance to be self-critical.**

- **Cross a social boundary and move into the world of others temporarily**. Here, people open their ears to how others perceive themselves, events, and their situation. They also open their ears to how others perceive them. In doing both, they should first try to be as accurate and descriptive as possible. People can also imagine why the perspective of some can be plausible to themselves even though it may be strange or offensive to others. We "seek to become as close to others as they are to themselves…."[2]

"A cosmopolitan worldview does not mean denial of one's race or culture. We can be fully aware of the views of others, able to appreciate their perspective, and able to work with them without denying our own perspective…. These differences are not to be silenced. They are to be celebrated. Because we value the differences, we can take part in intercultural dialogue without denying our own perspective on the truth."*

Hector Carrasquillo & Giacomo Cassese

***"A Wake-up Call to the ELCA," in *Reaching the Latino Community: A Manual for Congregational Leaders,* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2002) 6.**

- **Take the others into our world**. As we do so, we attend to differences, comparing and contrasting the view "from there" with the view "from here" as they stand side by side.[21] We become aware of how others' lives, thoughts, and preferences have been influenced by how they describe their experiences, as well as by social, economic or historical circumstances and their church or community settings. also become aware of how our own lives, thoughts, and preferences have been influenced by how we describe our own, as well as by our social, economic, or historical circumstances and by our church or community settings.
- **Reflect on different cultural meanings that exist side by side**. Talk together about the extent to which one or another view is appropriate or inappropriate, or whether some elements of each is partly appropriate and partly inappropriate, and how. If the views involve matters of ethics or justice, reflect together on the extent to which one or another view is right or wrong, or whether both are partly right and partly wrong, and how. If these views involve different interpretations of Scripture, explore these differences together. What implications or consequences does each interpretation have for the topic you are discussing together. If each view appeals to different passages of Scripture, explore why each view appeals to that particular passage. Reflect together about the importance these differences make to each view of the topic. (There will be more about the use of Scripture in Section 43.)
- **Reflect together on future possibilities for mutual relationship and action** for ministry, service, or working for justice. This may include living with ambiguity, or with views that have little or nothing to do with one another side by side.[22]
- **Repeat the Process**. Because our early judgments about the views from "here" and "there" can never be final, we continue to make and test them. We can't assume either that we see others without distortions or that we somehow come to possess "the truth" about them. "Every understanding that we reach," according to Volf, "is forged from a limited perspective: it is a *view 'from here'* about how things look 'from here' and 'from there.'"[23]

This process of "double vision" is how from common ground we may begin to understand one another's differences from ourselves and to talk about them together.

Here are **some simple practical things to help in this process**. We begin with crossing the boundary into the world of others.

- As people from two or more cultural groups talk together in small groups or pairs, someone who is listening to a speaker could be asked to paraphrase what the speaker has said. This allows speakers (and others) to hear how speakers are being heard. It also gives them a chance to correct any errors the listeners report back.[24]
- As listeners try to be descriptive and accurate in their hearing, they might ask questions intended to clarify what the speaker said so as to expand their understanding of what the speaker is talking about.[25]

- Conversation leaders can help by paraphrasing main points in discussion on an easel pad or chalkboard. This tends to put ideas from the different cultures up side-by-side, and helps further conversation about differences.[26]

- Conversation leaders can encourage participants to identify difference, help to identify the links between people's views and their context, and encourage exploration of questions about future relationships.[27]

1 *Finding Common Ground in the Abortion Conflict*, 9.
2 Celia Jaes Falicov, *Latino Families in Therapy*, (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998), 6.
3 Ibid, 7.
4 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, v. 5 Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness, trs., Geffrey B. Kelly, ed., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 98.
5 Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, John F. Hoffmeyer, tr., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 235.
6 Ibid, 241, 251, 108–182.
7 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 126.
8 Richard Groves, "Building a Foundation for the Work of Reconciliation," *Walk Together Children*, Ken Sehested, ed. (Lake Junaluska, NC: Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, 1997), 29.
9 *Exclusion and Embrace*, 216. Volf writes with first-hand knowledge of ethnic and religious conflict, violence, and mass-murder in his native Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina during the 1990s.
10 Charles R. Foster, *Embracing Diversity: Leadership in Multicultural Congregations*, (Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 1997), 93, Richard J. Perry Jr., "What Sort of Claim Does the Bible Have Today?" unpublished discussion paper given at the ELCA Convocation of Teaching Theologians, Milwaukee, WI, August 17–19, 2003, 2, Richard J. Perry Jr., "African American Ethical Action: The Will to Build," in *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme, eds., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 75–96, and J. Deotis Roberts, *Africentric Christianity: A Theological Appraisal for Ministry*, (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2000), 45-62. The Rev. Martin Luther King is often seen by African Americans as a liberator in the biblical tradition. For an example of his use of the imagery of the Exodus for the civil rights movement, see his *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) 124.
11 *Embracing Diversity*, 93.
12 *Mestizos* are persons of mixed ethnic or national ancestry. See Virgilio Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet*, rev. ed., (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000) and *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, rev. and exp. ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2000).
13 Jose David Rodriguez, Jr., and Colleen R. Nelson, "The Virgin of Guadalupe," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 13 (Dec. 1986) 368-369.
14 Jose David Rodriguez, Jr., "Confessing Our Faith in Spanish: Challenge or Promise?" in *We are a People: Initiatives in Hispanic American Theology,* Roberto S. Goizueta, ed., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 362.
15 Perry, Richard J. Jr., "African American Ethical Action: The Will to Build," in *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme, eds., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 82.
16 *Exclusion and Embrace*, 228.
17 Ibid., 250-251.
18 This process is based on insights from both Volf's theological work on deep differences and disagreements between people and groups in *Exclusion and Embrace*, 252-253, and Celia Falicov's therapeutic work with Latino Families to help

them deal with cultural dilemmas they face in the U.S. as presented in *Latino Families in Therapy*, 84-87.
19 *Exclusion and Embrace*, 252.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., and *Latino Families in Therapy*, 84.
22 *Embracing Diversity*, 94–95.
23 *Exclusion and Embrace*, 253.
24 *Finding Common Ground in the Abortion Conflict*, 64.
25 Ibid.
26 *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-66.
27 Here conversation leaders may address areas similar to those Falicov encourages therapists to deal with. But conversation leaders would not be acting as therapists. Rather, they would be encouraging participants to explore these dimensions as a part of their conversation.

Resources for Talking Together

8

There are several resources available that have processes useful for talking together as Christians. *With care*, any one of these can be used to lead cross-cultural conversation. The existence of these resources means that they should be used as companions to this training resource.

The qualification, "with care," means that there is something to be careful about when you use any of these resources as a companion to this training material. And that is that users need to be attentive to how the cultural tendencies in how people of different cultures talk together as church may influence their conversations.

But, as long as you are aware of this, the resources below are assets for cross-cultural conversation. And you can use any of those materials and this training resource *together* to help people talk together cross-culturally according to the way of talking they are most comfortable with.

Selected Resources. Here, then, are some selected resources about processes for talking together as church.

Called to Deal with Difficult Issues: A challenging ministry, (Chicago: Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2002), written by Faith Fretheim and Joan Pope. Available from Augsburg Fortress Publishers, ISBN 6-0001-6488-2 or contact Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 8765 W. Higgins Rd, Chicago IL 60631-410101. Ph: 773-380-2730; e-mail: *womnelca@elca.org*

The brief and clearly written guide uses a well-structured process of reflection and decision-making about issues in ministry and daily life. It includes helpful handouts which may be copied, and a list of resources.

End Racism, Improve Race Relations and Begin Racial Healing: Community Wide Dialogue Facilitator Guide, (Syracuse: InterReligious Council of Central New York, 1997 [updated 9/17/98]).

Address: InterReligious Council of Central New York, 3049 E. Genesee St., Syracuse, NY 13224.

Phone: 315-449-3552; e-mail: *irccny@aol.com*

This resource adapts a "Study Circles" approach to conversations specifically aimed at dealing with racism and diversity. It has detailed directions and suggestions for discussion processes.

Growing Healthier Congregations: How to Talk Together When Nobody is Listening, by Patrick R. Keifert, Patricia Taylor Ellison, and Ronald W. Duty, (St. Paul: Church Innovations, 1998). Available from Augsburg Fortress Publishers, ISBN: 6-0002-3012-5.

Address: Church Innovations, PO Box 390207. Minneapolis, MN 55439.

Phone: 651-644-3653, or 888-223-7909.

Web site: *www.churchinnovations.org*; e-mail: *info@churchinnovations.org*

This leader resource teaches the basics of an excellent process for talking together about a variety of ministry issues. It has many helpful suggestions for leaders. It includes a Bible study and a helpful videotape as a companion to the printed resource. Church Innovations offers training sessions for using this resource.

See—Judge—Act: Pastoral Planning for a Prophetic Church, (Cleveland: United Church of Christ, United

Church Board for World Ministries, n.d.)

Address: United Church of Christ, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115.

Phone: 216-736-3200.

Although this resource is out of print, it has a good basic process for discernment, discussion, and action on a variety of ministry issues. Ask local U.C.C. pastors for help in locating a copy, or contact local U.C.C. resource center. A listing of centers is online at: *www.ucc.org/marketplace/centers.htm*

Study Circles in Paired Congregations: Enriching Your Community through Shared Dialogue on Vital Issues, (Pomfret, CT: Topsfield Foundation, Inc., 1995)

Address: Study Circles Resource Center, P. O. Box 203, Pomfret, CT, 06258

Phone: 860-928-2616; e-mail: *scrc@enca.com*

This resource describes the basic guidelines and suggestions for leaders to use study circles in paired congregations to learn about and discuss a variety of social and political issues affecting their communities. The Web site has other Study Circle resources including *A Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators.* The Study Circles Resource Center offers training.

Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues, by Karen L. Bloomquist and Ronald W. Duty, (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1999). ISBN 6-0001-1197-5

Address: Department for Studies—Church in Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4101.

Phone: 773-380-2996 for single complementary copies.

To order multiple copies, call Augsburg Fortress Publishers at 800-328-4648.

This resource describes for leaders the basic elements of a process for talking together as Christians about a variety of social, ethical, or ministry issues. Has good practical lists of "how tos" for organizing and leading conversation.

Dialogando en Conjunto Como Christianos, by Karen L. Bloomquist and Ronald W. Duty, translated by Magdalena Meza, (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2000).

Address: Department for Studies—Church in Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4101.

Phone: 773-380-2996 for single complementary copies.

To order multiple copies, call Augsburg Fortress Publishers at 800-328-4648. ISBN 6-0001-3197-6

This resource is a Spanish translation of *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues*. It describes for leaders the basic elements of a process for talking together as Christians about a variety of social, ethical, or ministry issues. Has good practical lists of "how tos" for organizing and leading conversation.

Mapping Your Synod's Assets for Cross-cultural Conversation

9

Teams that want to encourage cross-cultural conversation by congregations or other ministries within their synods *have* gifts and assets for their work. The work may seem daunting and overwhelming at first, but you are gifted for it. So begin your work by recognizing your gifts and assets. For additional insights to what follows about mapping your gifts and assets, consult *The Great Permission* and *The Power of Asset Mapping.*

What is God's Will?

A place to start, suggests Luther Snow, is for members of your team to ask what God's will is.[1] Ask yourselves, "What is God's will for ministry with the variety of cultures in our synod?"

- On a sheet of paper or a series of note cards or sticky notes, the members of the group write down what comes to mind.
- Notice the things that you and other members of the group have written.

As Snow observes, "What you write down…isn't as important as the time participants spend about the question of God's will in their community."[2] As you continue to take stock of your synod's gifts and assets for cross-cultural conversation, you will begin to discern what the answer is to this question. You need not decide before you identify your assets, although you should keep the group of ideas you wrote down around for later reference as you work at recognizing your gifts.

Mapping Your Synod's Assets

The process of recognizing your synod's gifts for cross-cultural conversation is called "asset mapping." What does this mean? It means that your team will identify both your synod's gifts and the team's own gifts—things that you already have—for doing work in this area. Then it will figure out some connections among these gifts that will help you discern what you can do together to accomplish your mission in the synod for cross-cultural conversation. When you identify gifts and connect them in ways that suggest directions for some actions, you will create what is called an "asset map." It will help you both to see what you have and to understand how you can use what you have to get to where you want to go in mission.

Resources Useful for Mapping Your Synod's Assets

- Space to spread out, with walls, tables, or a floor you can use to arrange ideas (the map may get bigger than you imagine it will)
- Markers and a supply of Post-It™ notes or index cards
- Tape (if you use index cards)

Name your Synod's Assets

Ask each person to write one of your synod's gifts or assets per note or card that might be useful in helping ministries in your synod talk across the boundaries of culture. Ask them to think about such things as:

- Congregations and other ministries in the synod.
- Individuals with skills and experience.[3]
- Communities and community organizations within the synod's boundaries.
- Synod organizations and committees.
- Relationships that individuals,

congregations, synod committees, or organizations have.

- A sign of God at work in multicultural ministry in the synod.[4]
- Financial resources.
- Physical assets such as churches, Bible camps, colleges, and synod facilities.
- Something so crazy it just might help.[5]

This is not an exhaustive list. What else can you think of?

Don't forget about your team members. For each of them (including yourself) identify:[6]

- What they like to do.
- What they're good at.
- What they have that is useful for this work.

Connect Your Assets to Form Ideas for Action[7]

Now, look at all the assets which you have identified on your notes or cards together as a group. Look for various kinds of connections or relationships among them (such as cause and effect, logical sequences, similarities and differences, what allows or supports what, what's relatively easy, how many times something appears, whose gifts or assets they are). Also move them around and see different combinations that might be possible.

Then, ask yourselves what these various relationships and combinations among your assets suggest that *you might do with them* that would encourage cross-cultural conversation in your synod.

Choose One or More Ideas to Act On

Talk among yourselves about these various possibilities. Who is really interested in doing what? You may discover either that you are all interested in the same ideas, or that you are all interested in different ones. If you are all interested in the same one or two ideas, you have, in effect, made your decision. If you are each interested in pursuing different ideas for action, you will have to discuss whether it is realistic to pursue them all at once, whether you may have to prioritize them in some sequence that makes sense to the group, or instead choose one or two.

Then, you are in a position to plan and act to implement your ideas.[8]

1. Imagine a vision for your work. It may start with the things you identified as what God wills for ministry with the variety of cultures in your synod.
2. Remind yourselves of the assets you have identified.
3. What obstacles will you face in implementing your vision?
4. Outline a strategy that uses your assets to realize your vision.
5. Create a plan based on your basic strategy that gets specific about

   —the actions you will take

   —the measurable outcomes you expect

   —who will take what assignments

   —how you will be accountable to one another

   —how you will employ your assets

   —your timetable for action
6. Carry out your plan of action
7. Later, at an appropriate time, evaluate how things went.

1 Luther K. Snow, *The Power of Asset Mapping*, 43.
2 Ibid., 44.
3 *The Great Permission*, 80.
4 ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson asks where we see signs of God at work among us in *Faithful yet Changing: The Church in Challenging Times*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 6–9.
5 *The Great Permission*, 11.
6 Ibid., 85.
7 The following ideas are based on *The Great Permission*, 86-87, *The Power of Asset Mapping*, 17 and 59–64.
8 Based on the process for a SMART plan of action in *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-45–B-49. Versions based on this process are also found in *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues*, 17, and in *Dialogando en Conjunto como Cristianos*, 30-31.

Diverse Leadership of Conversation is Important

10

Culture and cultural diversity, we have said, are assets for talking together as Christians cross-culturally. Our unity in the body of Christ—marked by our common baptism—does not require uniformity in all things. This is also true of Christian leaders.

The gifts of different cultures include different ways of being human in community, different ways of relating to the world, and different ways of seeing and carrying out the mission of congregations—to proclaim the good news of God in Jesus Christ and to serve the neighbor and seek justice on their behalf, whoever our neighbor is. Leaders of conversation who are attuned to these different ways of being in Christian community can both assist cross-cultural conversation and model ways of working across cultural boundaries.

Diverse Leadership of Conversation is an Asset

When congregations or other ministries map the assets of people and discover those who have gifts for leading conversation (see Section 13), they are likely to find those gifts spread around regardless of their cultural, gender, and economic backgrounds, or whether they are lay people, pastors, or other church professionals. This diversity, too, is a gift of the Spirit you can receive and use for the sake of the conversations you want to have.

Using the gifts of this diverse leadership is important for several reasons:

- **It models the diversity of participants in conversation.** This sends a message that everyone's opinions and points of view are important, and that we need to talk this matter through together.
- **Diverse leadership is sensitive to cultural dynamics of participants.** When leaders of conversation reflect the diversity of the participants, they are more likely to understand the various ways people in your conversation are used to talking together in public. This helps them to include everyone in the conversation, and to deal with different ways their cultures have of talking together.
- **It models the presence of assets among all groups of participants.** It shows that the gifts of working together and of discerning what God is calling these Christian congregations to be and to do are spread around; God gives all people and communities of faith gifts for ministry.
- **It models sharing of tasks and power among people of different cultures.** Just as God gives all people gifts for ministry, so the work of discernment in ministry and of leadership utilizing those gifts should be shared among people of all cultures.

Culturally Diverse Leadership for Conversation

On Synod Teams: When synod teams work with congregations or other ministries, diversity on the team models the diversity of leadership you are seeking in congregations. When the diversity on your team reflects the cultural diversity in your synod, it also reinforces the message that your synod invites and encourages cross-cultural conversation between all cultures.

Within the Congregation: When conversation

takes place within the congregation, leadership that reflects the diversity of the congregation is encouraged.

Among Congregations: When conversation takes place between congregations of different cultural backgrounds, leaders that reflect the diversity in each of the congregations should be called forth whenever possible. They need to plan and prepare to work together on their common task. As the congregations themselves work to create a spirit of hospitality, they can reduce the temptation to be jealous about "turf" where they meet.

Between Congregation & Community: When conversation takes place between a congregation and its surrounding community, the ideal situation is to call forth leadership from both to plan and prepare to work together in the conversation. Again, a spirit of hospitality and generosity helps both congregation and community to explore common interests and hopes together, and prepare to share assets in common or complementary efforts.

Identifying the Purpose and Scope of Your Team's Work

11

Purpose

There are several purposes a synod might have for helping congregations and others to talk together cross-culturally. Your team will want to be clear about its mission. Some possibilities might be

- To train congregational or other leadership for leading their own cross-cultural conversations.
- To use cross-cultural conversation as part of a comprehensive multicultural ministry strategy.
- To use cross-cultural conversation as part of a comprehensive outreach and evangelism strategy.
- To use cross-cultural conversation as part of an anti-racism strategy.
- To use cross-cultural conversation as part of strategies for social justice, faith-based organizing, or advocacy.
- To use cross-cultural conversation as part of strategies by social ministry organizations to provide social services[1] or strategies by congregations to engage in social ministry.
- To lead conversation where it may not be possible to train leadership from the groups who want to talk together. This may be because the need to talk is very urgent, and because the local leadership does not believe itself capable of leading their own conversations.

Other possibilities can be imagined. What might they be?

Authorization and Accountability

Both in defining its mission and in its work for that mission, teams should consult with appropriate synod structures. Their accountability to those structures for their work should be understood, and appropriate lines of communication between the team and synod leaders or bodies should be put in place. This will not only help synod structures, congregations, and others to see the team's work as legitimate, but also to make it accountable in appropriate ways to synod structures, policies, and officially adopted strategies. It may also give you access to assets and gifts you find helpful in your work.

Settings for Your Work

Within any of the purposes noted above, your team could become involved in a variety of situations:

- Working with congregations that want to or need to have conversation within the congregation among people of different cultural backgrounds.
- Working with two or more congregations of different cultural backgrounds to have conversation.
- Working with congregations who want to talk with people or organizations of a different cultural background in their neighborhood or community.
- Working with social ministry organizations that want to reach out to

communities of a cultural background different than most of the staff or its leadership.

Other situations could also be imagined. What might some of them be?

Some Practical Issues

Your team will have some practical issues to face.

The team members each have certain assets—capacities, skills, knowledge, experience, relationships, or energy. What are they? How will you use them? How will you build on them to engage in the work you are taking on?

One good place to start is to practice leading your own cross-cultural conversation as a team. This would help you understand first hand what you will be helping others to do, and may give you some insights about how you might effectively help them. But what else might you need to do?

- How will the team and its work become known so that those congregations or others who might want or need it could take advantage of your services to enhance their own capacities, skills, and knowledge, and pursue the mission to which they are called? You may need to develop a strategy for making your work known. How will you do that?
- How will the congregations and other groups that may want or need your partnership be identified? Will you only respond to requests? Will you or someone else initiate contact? Will you work by referral only? Will partnerships be brokered? If so, by whom? It's possible, of course, that your team could do any combination of these.
- Will you focus exclusively on training local leaders to lead their own conversations? Or, will you help lead conversation when requested to do so? On what basis would you decide to do the latter? When would you not lead conversation yourselves? Why not?

Planning Your Work

As you begin your work as a team, make a plan together of how you will do that work. Revisit the process you used for mapping your assets, Session 7, pp. 28-29.

Periodically, you may find it helpful to re-visit and re-evaluate your plans. You may find that, depending on the character of the work you are doing, fulfilling your vision is not a simple progression from the beginning to end of this sequence but a complex process that continues.

1 Developing multicultural competence is a significant issue for social ministry organizations and social service agencies. See Jerry V. Diller, *Cultural Diversity: A Primer for the Human Services*, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999). Cross-cultural conversation with the people and communities they serve is only one such competence.

Working as a Team 12

Why Teams?

There are several reasons why it is important to work in teams to help congregations and other groups to lead cross-cultural conversation.

- The multicultural composition of your team demonstrates importance of multicultural leadership
- Teams model shared leadership for the groups you work with, and reinforce the importance for them of working in teams
- Teamwork uses the assets of more than one person, including everyone's different cultural skills and sensitivities
- Teams share the work, allowing each member to use their current strengths and to develop new ones
- Teams model various leadership styles and assets (see Section 30)
- Shared leadership provides flexibility to address different combinations of cultures in groups wanting training if the team itself is culturally diverse
- Shared leadership keeps the work from becoming overwhelming to any one member
- Team members also provide mutual support, constructive criticism, and coaching to other members

Team Tasks

Teams have some basic tasks to do:

- Securing authorization and appropriate support from synod structures and establishing accountability.
- Making your services known to the ministries of your synod, and inviting and encouraging them to work with you. Partnerships with synod staff and others may help with this task.
- Establishing relationships with ministries that want your partnership in developing their capacities for cross-cultural conversation.
- Training in cross-cultural conversation.
- Supporting leadership teams as they begin to lead their own conversations.

Here's **a checklist** of things you need to know or to do

Establishing Relationships with Ministries

1. What is the situation the ministry wants to address?
2. Why does the ministry want to talk cross-culturally?
3. What do they want to accomplish?
   a. Discuss a pressing issue
   b. Increase mutual understanding
   c. Make a decision and take action
   d. Develop a working relationship with another group
   e. Other

4. What is the ministry's previous experience with talking together?
5. What hopes do they have for talking cross-culturally?
6. What fears do they have?[1]
7. Has agreement to talk together been reached by the parties to talk together? If not, how will agreement be sought?
8. Has the appropriate approval been secured from formal leadership structures of the parties?
9. Has the leadership of each party started to prepare its congregation or group for the upcoming conversations? How? Or is this something they still need to do?
10. What training arrangements are acceptable?
    a. How many sessions? How long will each one be?
    b. Where will training be held?
    c. What arrangements should be made for refreshments and food?
11. How will leadership teams from each party be chosen? The parties need to understand that they will most likely be leading their own conversations. People who are willing and able to work as a team with members of the other party will be most helpful.

Training in Leading Conversation

Equipping Leaders for Conversation: Each leader you train should have

- A copy of this training manual
- A copy of the process resource they will be using for conversation (e.g., *Talking Together as Christians, Growing Healthier Congregations, See—Judge—Act, etc.* (See Section 6 for details)

Training Formats: You can use a variety of formats for training appropriate to the situation and the participants. See Section 11 for examples.

Mapping Assets:

- The team will need a working knowledge of the asset-based approach discussed in Section 15 in order to show participants how to "map" the assets of their congregations for talking together, and also show participants how to make a preliminary "map" of the assets of the training participants for leading conversation

Teaching the Model of Conversation

- One or more members of the team will present the model of conversation you are using to teach congregations and other parties to talk together. Those presenters especially need to have a working knowledge of this material.
- Other roles team members can play include monitoring or coaching conversation leaders when they work in small group discussions, paraphrasing or recording comments made during discussion, observing and being aware of the cultural dynamics of what participants are doing, how they are feeling, and their energy levels during various parts of the training so that you can help other team members and participants during training.

Noting Cultural Differences in the Way People Talk

- Cultural differences in the way people talk in public must be noted. Material on various cultural groups is presented in Sections 21-40 of this manual. Note particularly the descriptions of the groups you are dealing with and how these tendencies may affect the "ground rules" for conversation given in the model you are using with. See Section 14 for discussion of how to deal with these differences in your group.

Presenting Material on Similarities and Differences

- A member of the team will present the material on listening skills in Section 4, lead an exercise in sharing personal and communal stories, and use this exercise to show how people can discover things they have in common.
- A member of the team will also present the process for dealing with differences in people's points of view through the practice of "double vision" in Section 7. If possible, participants may practice this process using an example from the sharing of personal and communal stories.

Using Opportunities to Practice

- The skills both of having and of leading conversation are learned by doing as well as by explaining. Create opportunities to practice these skills before the participants begin to lead conversation between their congregations or groups. One possibility is for your team members to lead conversation in their home congregations.

Reviewing Steps to Organize and Lead Conversation

- Review the material in Section 14, and similar material in the other resource you are using.
- Begin to help participants work together as a team on these steps.

Follow-up Support for Leaders of Conversation

- Plan how you will give follow-up support to leaders of conversation you have trained, and review these plans with the teams you train.
- Continue to stay in touch with these teams as they lead conversations. Offer encouragement, advice, and coach when requested. Your job is not to tell them what to do; rather you want to nurture the teams in their use of the assets and skills that they have acquired.

1 The last three questions have been used by Church Innovations among others when working with congregations in a "self-discovery" process of members of congregations interviewing other members one-on-one. For a description of this self-discovery process and its rationale, see *Growing Healthier Congregations*, A-7–A-16.

Training Skilled Conversation Leaders 13

The core of your work as a team will be the important ministry of training skilled leaders of cross-cultural conversation in congregations and other ministries. You have been called to this work because your synod believes you have the gifts for the tasks involved.

What Leaders of Conversation will Need for Training

Each leader you train should have:

- A copy of this training manual.
- A copy of the process resource they will be using for conversation (e.g., *Talking Together as Christians, Growing Healthier Congregations, See—Judge—Act, etc.* (See Section 6 for details.)

Training Formats

Use a format convenient for the congregations or groups your team is training. Typical formats might be a full one-day (e.g., Saturday) training, or one that is broken into two parts that can be used on successive weekends or two evenings.

One-day format

Morning

Bible study—the biblical vision for multicultural ministry[1]
Reality check: What does our situation look like? What do we want it to be like? (discussion and reporting)

Break

A basic process for conversation
Listening exercise
Tips for leading cross-cultural conversation

Lunch

Afternoon

Practice leading conversation; debrief
Map your assets for cross-cultural conversation

Break

Basic knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, skills, and practices for cross-cultural conversation
Develop a plan for your conversations
Evaluation
Return to the vision—How do we understand our vision now?

Two half-days or evening format

First half-day or evening:

Bible study—the biblical vision for multicultural ministry
Reality check: What does our situation look like? What do we want it to be like? (discussion and reporting)
Break
A basic process for conversation
Listening exercise
Tips for leading cross-cultural conversation

Second half-day or evening:

Brief review of first session
Basic knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, skills,

and practices for cross-cultural conversation

Break

Develop a plan for your conversations

Evaluation

Return to the vision—How do we understand our vision now?

Mapping Assets

The congregations and the people chosen for you to train also have gifts for leading cross-cultural conversation. The gifts of these potential leaders of conversation can be identified, and their distribution within the leadership group and elsewhere in the congregation can be "mapped" so that they know who has what gifts.

- Present the basic idea from Section 6 of an asset as something you or your congregation have that helps you accomplish your work rather than something you lack that holds you back
- Present the process for mapping assets in Section 15 and ask the participants to make a "map" of the assets of their congregation for talking together. Discuss these maps together to get a sense of the array of assets each party has for talking together
- Discuss the fact that they have been chosen to lead conversation because somebody thought they had the assets to do so, and that perhaps they responded because they think so, too. Ask participants to have short one-on-one conversations in which they ask each other what they like to do and what they are good at. (Depending upon personalities and the cultural backgrounds of the people participating, it may be easier for members of each group to interview each other rather than someone from the "other side.") Share these observations with the whole group
- People from each congregation should map their own congregation's assets. If they have some reason to know or have impressions about the assets of another congregation or group in your training, that information may help make the maps of those other congregations
- Be sure to complete the step that says, "Ask yourselves how these clusters of assets help, or could help, your group accomplish things related to your overall purpose" of talking together cross-culturally

The people you are training should come away with an idea of their own assets, the assets of their colleagues, and the assets of the congregations or organizations represented in the training. They should also come away from the exercise with some idea of how those assets might help organize and carry on cross-cultural conversation. They can use this information when they actually organize and lead conversation.

Learning that there are assets among those chosen to lead cross-cultural conversation and in the congregations and organizations that will be talking together should also give reasons for hope for the fruitfulness of conversations they intend to have together.

Teaching the Model of Conversation

Listening is key to conversation. If conversation is to be a genuine give-and-take of opinions, appeals, information, and feelings, listening to what is said is as important as saying it; responding

appropriately to what someone tells you depends upon your first hearing what they say. And if you want people to hear the ideas you express, you want them to hear you accurately.

For that reason, it is important to work on hearing what others tell us.

- Review the material from Section 44 on "Empathetic Listening" and do the exercise in the text box on empathetic listening.
- Introduce the model of conversation you will be working with from the resource in which it appears. Section 14 offers some guidance for using the resources listed in Section 8. These resources for conversation have adequate explanations of the models they use; follow the explanations they offer.

Cultural Difference in How People Talk

Two differences in the way people talk together publicly are relevant here; cultural differences and gender differences. To some extent, these differences overlap and interact in complex ways. But gender differences in conversation are distinct enough to treat them separately; some gender differences seem common to a variety of cultures.

- Review the material from Sections 21-40 about the different ways people carry on conversation for the cultural groups represented in the training session. (You do not need to cover the material on other cultural groups that are not represented.)

  The point of this is to make participants aware that there are important differences in cultural styles of talking publicly together, each with its own expectations or rules by which people of that cultural group carry on conversation. Ask your participants to discuss these differences. To what extent are they representative of conversation in their communities? Which ones are more important?
- Review some of the key differences in gender styles in conversation in Section 41. The point of this, again, is to alert participants to these gender differences so that when they lead conversation they might find ways to encourage men to listen and women to speak. It is important to note that linguists have found these gender differences in conversational styles in several cultures. But detailed studies of gender styles in some of the cultures addressed in this field guide may still need to be done. So, how widely the differences noted in section 41 apply is unclear.
- Because they are experienced in their own cultures, discuss with your participants how these gender differences work in their cultures. You might also discuss with them some of their ideas for appropriate strategies to ensure that women participate equitably in conversation. This will be more helpful to the extent that there are women leaders participating in the training session who can offer their insights.
- Discuss the ground rules for conversation in the model you are using; the resource usually will have an explicit statement of these ground rules. Decide how these ground rules may have to be modified in light of your discussions of cultural differences in the way people talk. List any new or changed ground rules on an easel pad or chalkboard so they are visible to everyone.

Dealing with Similarities and Differences

- Review the material on active listening from Section 6. Using your ground rules for conversation, practice the exercise for listening for what you have in common from this section by sharing stories from the participants' congregations or communities.[2] After sharing, discuss the conversation by using the questions under "Responding to What We Hear" from Section 6.

- Next, from the same exchange of stories, ask the participants if they noticed any differences from what has happened in their own congregation's or community's stories. Use the process for "Double Vision" in Section 5 and these practical suggestions:

  —Ask participants first to describe as accurately as they can what they heard in the stories others told

  —On an easel pad or chalkboard, list the differences they noticed from their own stories. Ask them why these differences seem important to them.

  —What elements from the storytellers' lives do they think influenced how people told these stories? Here, the storytellers should also tell what they think their own influences are.

  —What social, economic, or historical circumstances or community settings influenced these stories? Again, the storytellers themselves should respond to this question as well as the hearers of the stories.

  —Talk together about the extent to which what happened in these stories seems appropriate or inappropriate from various cultural points of view represented by people in the training session.

  —Note that this is an exercise, and that if it had been a real conversation, they could also explore what possibilities there might be for future relationships or action together.

The point of these exercises is to become aware of how to explore similarities and differences between cultural groups' perspectives. If these exercises have not given an opportunity to practice using all the features of the basic process for conversation you are using, have a "practice" conversation using the whole process.

Practicing Cross-cultural Conversation

- Hold a practice cross-cultural conversation. The topic of the conversation can either be a scenario your team develops for this purpose, or one that is suggested by the training workshop participants. It can be either a purely imaginary situation, or one that is drawn from real life.

  The conversation should allow the training group not only to have a conversation using the ground rules and the model, but also to discuss what went well in the conversation and what problems people had. Talk together about how to deal with the problems that arose.

Reviewing Steps to Organize and Lead Conversation

- Review the material in Section 14, and similar material in the other resource you are using.
- Begin to help participants work together as a team on these steps. Ask them to begin to plan together how they are going

to practice the model and to organize conversations their congregations or groups want to have together.

Follow-up Support for Leaders of Conversation

- Review for the participants how you will give follow-up support to leaders of conversation whom you have trained.
- Continue to stay in touch with these teams as they lead conversation. Offer encouragement, advice, and coach when requested. Your job is not to tell them what to do or to do their work for them; rather you want to nurture the teams in their use of the assets and skills that they have acquired.

1 Through prior consultation with the congregations, you can choose a passage appropriate to their situation or work with lectionary texts for the week. If you use *Growing Healthier Congregations* as your companion resource, you can use Fredrickson's Bible study on Philippians 1 and 2, B-19–B-28.
2 Until the teams that are set to work together have developed a working relationship, they may be reluctant to share personal stories. However, if they are willing to do so, feel free to include this in the exercise.

Leading Conversation as a Synod Team 14

Preparing Your Leadership Team

Synod teams should experience leading conversation themselves. This is partly because your training conversation leaders from congregations will benefit from being able to draw on that experience. But, secondly, you may decide that leading conversations for congregations or other ministries in certain circumstances may also be part of your team's mission. Your leadership team will need to prepare to organize and lead conversation. Of course, it will also help to practice these things before you actually do them "for real." Here are some basic things you can do to prepare.

Advance Work with the Ministry Setting

Reasons, Goals, and Context: Consult with leaders in the ministry setting where you are requested to lead conversation about:

1. why they want to have conversation.
2. what the topic of conversation would be.
3. what they hope it will accomplish.

Clarify these three things as much as possible. Work to understand the context and situation that gives rise to the call for conversation as well as you can. Because you are almost certainly "outsiders" in the situation, help the local ministry and others involved to take responsibility for gathering the relevant information about the situation in a way that all consider to be fair and balanced.[1] This may involve helping them to map their gifts and assets for such a task.

When There is Conflict: If the leaders want to have conversation because there is a conflict, explore with them the nature of the conflict and whether it involves differences about a fundamental issue of ministry, or whether it is primarily about personality conflicts among individuals involved.[2] (Making this distinction is not always easy because of the temptation by those involved to downplay the importance of underlying issues and to "reduce all conflict to interpersonal conflict."[3]) Some of the companion resources in Section 6 have processes which are appropriate for helping to discuss conflict over ministry issues; they tend to be inappropriate, however, for conflict that is primarily centered on personalities. Especially in situations involving personality conflicts, it will be more appropriate for the leaders of the ministry to call in individuals who are skilled in techniques of conflict resolution from the synod or elsewhere, than it will be for you to become involved.

If the conflict involves underlying ministry issues, discuss with the local ministry leaders the following questions suggested by *Growing Healthier Congregations*[4]:

- *"How deep and wide is the pain, dissatisfaction, and anger on the topic?"*
- *"Are there enough key leaders in the congregation willing to face the conflict?"*
- *"Is this process for conversation likely to create the safe and collaborative space for healthy resolution of our conflict?"*

Your team will need to judge whether you have the skills yet to lead conversation about such a conflict. The more conversations you have led, the more ready you are to lead conversations where there is significant conflict.

Who Should Talk? Whether the situation involves conflict or not, explore with local leaders

who all the people are who have a stake in the conversation or who are affected by the issue they want to discuss. Explore the willingness of all parties to participate in such a conversation.

Moving Ahead: If everyone agrees to move ahead with a conversation, begin to plan for the conversation with the local leadership. Use Section 13 to help you. The local leadership should probably take the lead in issuing invitations to participate in the conversation, although you should evaluate this on a case-by-case basis.

Skills for Leading Conversation

Become familiar with the particular skills and behavior which are called for by the discussion process you have chosen to use. Your assets may already include some, if not most, of these skills. Work on those you do not already have to build your assets for leading conversation. If possible, practice your skills with each other before leading others in conversation. If your own home congregations are willing, practice leading conversation with them.

- & If you use *Called to Deal with Difficult Issues*, see the section, "Using this resource," pp. 5–7.
- & If you use *Growing Healthier Congregations,* see the section "Conversation Leader's Self-Help Slide Show," pp. B-83–B-88.
- & If you use *See—Judge—Act,* see the section, "Some Ideas and Suggestions for Facilitating a See—Judge—Act Group, pp. 40–44.
- & If you use either *Study Circles in Paired Congregations*, see the section "The key ingredients of effective discussion in paired congregations," pp. 3–4, in *Study Circles in Paired Congregations*. For additional help, see *Guidelines for Organizing and Leading a Study Circle*,[5] pp. 7–15. If you use *End Racism, Improve Race Relations and Begin Racial Healing,* similar help is online at www.studycircles.org/pdf/training.pdf in *A Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators*, pp. 28–30.
- & If you use *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues* see pp. 12–14 (sections on "Leaders Serve the Conversation" and "Getting Started"); for corresponding material in *Dialogando en Conjunto como Cristianos*, see pp. 23–25.

Evaluate. After each "real" conversation, evaluate together the conversation itself as well as how well both your leadership team and the local leadership performed their tasks. What worked well? What particular challenges did you face? Where could you improve? How will you work on improving these areas for future conversations? As a leadership team, use these learnings for the next conversation you lead.

If one of the outcomes of the conversation is that the participants decide to have further conversations, consider whether it may be appropriate to train a local team of conversation leaders for this work and explore with the local ministry putting together such a team.

1 *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-81.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid, B-81–B-82
4 Ibid, B-81 See this page also for additional questions to consider.
5 Available from Study Circles Resource Center, Pomfret, CT, 06258, Ph: 203-928-2616, or see their Web site at *www.study-circles.org* for order information.

Your Congregation's Human Assets for Talking Together

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We have had a glimpse of what conversation is like as we listen for what we share in common and attend to how we differ in Sections 3-5. You can have these conversations in your own ministry. Congregations and other ministries have experiences and people with gifts that they can put into action in talking together. These same gifts and experiences are helpful when talking with people of a different cultural background.

The Gift of Grace

The greatest gift we have is God's grace. God calls us to faith in Jesus Christ, forgives our sin, gives us a life of freedom and then calls us into Christ's Church to serve God and our neighbor. That call comes with a promise that we have what we need to do so. Some of these things we have already; others God will give when they are needed. That call gives us permission to serve. As Lutheran theologian Gerhard Forde likes to say, all this is *what you get to do*.

What does this mean? *The Great Permission* puts it this way[1]:

"God's grace carries permission. You're allowed to try things on for size, to make mistakes, to lurch forward without extensive planning, to take charge instead of waiting. You're allowed to enjoy being God's steward.

"The biggest 'permission'? You get to stand alongside the rest of us—we're called 'the church'—and work with other asset-gifted people to do together what you could never accomplish alone. In the church, you get supported and loved and encouraged. You are forgiven. You learn to forgive….

"You can believe these words that come with God's blessing: 'You have my permission!'"

Experiences

If your congregation has had a positive experience talking together about something in the past, it has something to build on for talking about other issues in the future. If you've done this before, you can do it again. This is even true if past experiences of talking together have not all been positive ones. A positive experience gives a congregation hope for talking together in the future. It also shows a congregation that it has skills and gifts for talking together.

If some of your experiences of talking together have been painful or negative, you're allowed to learn from your mistakes. A memory of a successful conversation shows you *are capable* of talking together, even if there were also some conversations that failed. Failure isn't necessarily fatal or final.

This is true even if your only experiences of talking together seem like miserable, painful failures. Of course, you'll be more shy of trying to talk again, less sure of yourselves. But, awareness of your own weaknesses is an invitation to rely more on God. The pressure to make conversations successful—whatever that means—all by yourselves is off. God gives us what we need. If that is true, then we can't be tempted to stay stuck in our sense of failure any longer. Instead, we can put our gifts into action. We can develop our abilities. God encourages us to risk more conversations. With God's help, *we can* do this! We *get to* do this!

Gifts of the Congregation

It is important to know what gifts your congregation has for talking together cross-culturally—to name them and to "map" them by gathering information about them in a helpful way.

This means starting with the positive—*what you have* instead of what you lack. What are the characteristics people have which are useful for the situation you have in mind? What are their strengths? What features of a situation are opportunities or are helpful as you begin to envision how you might move ahead in mission?[2]

There are at least a couple of approaches to start off identifying the gifts people in your congregation have. One starts with the people you have and names their gifts; the other starts with some ideas about what you might need for talking together, and names people who have the gifts you need. Both work well, either separately or together.

For the first, you can have people identify their own gifts, and have others identify their gifts also. (We may or may not always know what our own gifts are. We may also be aware of gifts we have that others don't know about yet.)

For an example of the second approach, you might want to know such things as:

- who the good listeners are.
- who's good at hospitality.
- who connects other people within the congregation or the in the community.
- who has a reputation for wisdom.
- who works well with others.
- who besides the pastor knows the Bible.
- who can lead a meeting fairly.
- who has vision for your mission, a sense of possibilities others may not see immediately.

This list is not complete; it is merely an example to give you ideas.

It helps to have a useful way of gathering information about your congregation's gifts. One helpful resource is found in *The Great Permission*, pp. 84-87.

It is important to understand how to use the gifts that you have for the situation at hand rather than waiting for the "right" gifts to be found or for the "right" time to use them.[3] This may take some talking together to figure out. But, it is important to test out your gifts in practice.

Jesus told a parable about a man who left his slaves in charge of his money. (Matthew 25:14-30) When he came back and asked for an accounting, those he was pleased with were the ones who had used what he entrusted to them to increase its value. They not only figured out ways to do that, but acted on what they believed they knew how to do.

Like all gifts of ministry, gifts for talking together as Christians are not for hoarding away. They are gifts that are given to be put into action.[4]

Your congregation not only has gifted people to lead you in cross-cultural conversation, but it has other gifts as well. It has the Scriptures and the traditions of the church and your congregation. It has the wisdom of its experience. It has the gifts of the culture or cultures of its people. And it

has some basic knowledge, attitudes and values, skills, and practices or habits that enable it to talk together about ministry issues that matter. We will discuss these other gifts later in this field guide.

But first, let's talk about how you can discover the gifts of the people in your congregation for leading conversation. Then, we will discuss how the congregation will use these gifts to lead cross-cultural conversation.

1 *The Great Permission*, 22–23.
2 Ibid., 38 and 85.
3 Ibid., 29.
4 Ibid., 35

"Mapping" Your Assets for Talking Cross-culturally

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Your congregation has the gifts of God's grace, experiences, and gifted people to help it engage in conversation cross-culturally. But how do you discover those gifts? One way to begin this discovery process is to create a "map" of the assets of your synod, congregation, and potential conversation leaders[1]. By a "map" we mean a visual picture which identifies key assets and puts them in relationship to one another in ways that point to a strategy for using those assets to have the kind of conversation you want to have.

The purpose of this section is to help you create an asset map for your congregation that wants to have cross-cultural conversation about ministry issues that matter.

What Do We Mean by "Assets"?

At its most basic, assets are things you have which can help you get done the work you want to do. The emphasis is on things in the part of the glass which is half-full, not on the part which is half-empty. Focus on things you *have—not* on things you *need*.

An asset is something that is useful for a task or purpose that can serve the work of the church—in this case the work that can be done by talking, deciding, and acting cross-culturally. Such assets can include people, their abilities, knowledge, and skills, other people they are connected to, and their experience. Assets can also include synods and their connections to congregations, congregations or organizations and their connections in a wider community,[2]as well as buildings, equipment, other physical things, or money. Culturally distinctive ways of thinking, knowing, and acting, can also be assets, as can cultural attitudes, beliefs, and values.

Gifts for Mapping Your Assets

Bring together your ministry's gifts for mapping your assets, including:

- People motivated for the task, who have a general idea of what the task is; people who know and trust each other.
- A place with plenty of space to spread out, with walls, tables, or a floor you can use to arrange ideas (the map will soon get bigger than you imagined it would).
- A general idea of the task you have in mind—without a specific outcome in view.
- Markers and Post-It™ notes or index cards (as many as 25-30 per participant).
- Tape (especially if you use index cards).

Identifying Assets for Talking Cross-culturally

(30 minutes)

Below is an activity for identifying assets. It can be used both by synodical teams which will work with congregations that want to learn how to talk cross-culturally, and also by congregational teams which will lead cross-cultural conversation in their congregation or community.

There is one common set of questions for people in both groups to help them identify *personal* assets. There are separate sets of questions for synodical teams and congregations designed to help participants in each identify *their group's* assets. Remind participants that these questions are not the only way to identify assets; they are just some of the

ways we can get at what assets we have. Encourage them to think of other ways of identifying the assets we are concerned with in this exercise.

Activity for Identifying Assets

Distribute markers and Post-It™ notes or index cards (25-30 per participant) to team members.

Explain that they are to list both their own individual and also their synod's or congregation's assets—one per note or card—that may be helpful to their task of helping congregations learn to talk across cultural boundaries. Refer to the questions below to stimulate recognition of assets, if needed.

Identify individual assets with an "I," synodical assets with an "S," or congregational assets with a "C" on the note. Also include the initials or name of the person writing the note.

Place each note at the center of the table so they are visible to others in the team.

Continue identifying assets in this way until the time for this activity is up.

Overlap is expected and welcome in the process. If three people know the same individuals, they could all list an asset that shows that relationship.

Questions to Help Identify Your Personal Assets

- What are you good at doing?
- What do you know that is useful for this work?
- What skills do you have?
- What attitudes and beliefs do you have that would be useful for this work?
- What do you like to do?
- What makes you good in a group?
- Who do you know in your synod, congregation, or community?
- Does anyone owe you a favor?

Some Questions to Help Identify Your Synod's Assets for Working with Congregations to Talk Cross-culturally

- Who is good at working in a group?
- What congregations are located where people of different cultures meet?
- What cultural groups are present in your synod?
- Who connects various cultural groups in the geographic boundaries of your synod?
- Who connects congregations of various cultural or ethnic backgrounds in your synod?

Some Questions to Help Identify Your Congregation's Assets for Talking Cross-culturally

- Who is good at working in a group?
- Who connects various groups in your congregation or community?
- What cultural groups are there within your congregation? Who leads them?
- With what cultural groups does your congregation have contact in your area?
- Who knows the leaders of those groups?
- What events, activities, or opportunities bring different groups in your congregation or community together?

- Who works well with people regardless of their backgrounds?

Asset Mapping (30-45 minutes)

The second step is for the participants to make some sense out of the large number of assets available for the work they will do.

Have each group put their asset notes or cards on an open wall, white board, or floor area. Ask them to gather around this area to look at the wealth of assets available for the task that has been identified by each group.

After a few minutes, ask each of the smaller groups to connect these assets in the following way.

1. Group assets that seem to connect in some way together in an open space on the wall or a table where everyone in the group can see them.
2. Link the assets in some way that makes sense. You may end up with more than one cluster of assets. That's okay.
3. Brainstorm together about what possible actions might arise from this small group of assets that would help the group's work related to talking cross-culturally.
4. Next find other notes or cards that might connect to the ones that have already been connected together. Group all these notes together physically.
5. The group should again brainstorm about possible actions that this larger collection of notes suggests.
6. Continue this process until the group has a specific action named.
7. Repeat this process over and over for other asset notes that are not connected to the first collection the group identified, until time for this segment runs out. The group may wind up with several "clumps" of assets, each one suggesting an action related to talking cross-culturally.
8. Tape together all of the asset notes in each category. If space permits, tape together the various groups of notes with their various relationships into a kind of "map" that the group can continue to refer to as it goes about its work later.

Summarizing Patterns

- Ask yourselves how these clusters of assets are related to each other. Look for relationships such as:
  1. What causes what?
  2. What's first, what's next?
  3. What things are alike, what things are different?
  4. What allows or supports other things?
  5. What's easy, what's harder?
  6. What keeps repeating?
  7. Which areas are stronger, which are weaker?
  8. Whose assets appear where on the map?
- Try moving the assets around to see and think about different ways they could be combined.
- Ask yourselves how these clusters of assets could help your group accomplish things related to your overall purpose, whether that is a synod team working to help congregations or a congregational team working to help the congregation talk cross-culturally.
- Talk about what you see in the pattern of assets before you.

Looking at Next Steps

- "From your strengths (your assets) decide what to do next, who will do what, and when the tasks will be completed."[3]
- Start working together to accomplish your tasks.

1 Material in this section is based upon *The Great Permission*, 84–87, "The Great Permission-Event Two Workshop Design" (by Bob Sitze, Chicago: ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries, n.d.) which uses, in part, material by permission from Luther Snow, *The Power of Asset Mapping,* and "More than Enough: An Asset-Based Planning Process," (Handout by Bob Sitze, ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries, n.d.). Material from "The Great Permission--Event Two Workshop Design and "More than Enough" are used by Sitze's permission.
2 John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*, (Evanston, Ill: Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, c. 1993 by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight), 8
3 *The Great Permission*, 85.

Leading Cross-cultural Conversation 17

Preparing Your Leadership Team

Your leadership team will need to prepare to organize and lead conversation. Here are some basic things you can do to prepare.

Become familiar with this training manual.

Choose the companion conversation guide you will be using and become fluent in its approach. (See Section 8, "Resources" in this training manual.)

Learn together the basic model of conversation which the guide you've chosen uses, and understand how the various parts or stages of the model go together.

Discuss together how to use this model with the different cultural groups that will participate in your conversations. Pay particular attention to the ground rules for conversation recommended by this model.

Decide how culturally appropriate those ground rules are for the groups which will be talking together. You can do this partly by referring to the sections in Part III (Why Should We Talk Cross-culturally as Church) which summarize the usual practices of public conversation for the cultural groups that you will lead in talking together. But you should also take your own experience with how these cultural groups talk together into account.

Modify any of the proposed ground rules for conversation from the guide for conversation you've chosen to use, based on both the information you find in Part III and your own experience in these cultures. These will become the ground rules you will propose to the participants when you hold your conversation.

When the groups meet for conversation, allow the participants to also suggest their own changes or additions to these ground rules. Be prepared to adapt the ground rules to the group's suggestions, but also to evaluate them with the group to determine how appropriate they are.

Decide who will play the various leadership roles during conversations. For example, one of you may be good at recording ideas on a blackboard or easel pad, and helping people see connections between the ideas they have expressed. Another may be good at encouraging people to speak, asking clarifying questions, and so on. Someone else may be good at discerning how the conversation is going, the direction in which it is moving, or what people may *not* be talking about. Or, some others may be good at leading conversation in a small group.

(Depending upon the number of people, have some conversations in small groups, followed by some reporting from the small groups to all participants. The leadership team may want to lead the conversation for the whole group together.)

Become familiar with the skills you must have for leading conversation. If you have mapped your group's assets, you may already have people with many of these skills. But if your leadership team does not have all of these skills now, they can be learned with practice.

Organizing a Conversation

Plan how you will help organize and publicize the conversation.

- Choose a topic or issue for the conversation. This may be done in a variety of ways. Your own insight may suggest a topic. Or, one may be decided by the formal leadership of the participating groups. Or, one may emerge from talking with the members of those groups.
- Arrange for times and a place to meet for conversation.
- Give effective invitations to participate in conversation.[1]
  - —Invite all who should be part of the conversation in a way that lets them know that their views are valuable and will be respected.
  - —Stress that this occasion will be a safe place to share their views with others even when there are wide disagreements.
  - —Target as much publicity to the intended participants as practical in order to raise awareness of the event.
  - —Be clear about the purpose of the conversation and why they are invited.
  - —Give a realistic picture about what people can expect the conversation to be like.
  - —Invite people to listen to the views and feelings of others.
  - —Extend hospitality by offering food, child care, or transportation if needed.
  - —Note that the Holy Spirit may enable participants to hear and understand things they might not on their own.
  - —Build relationships which will help the conversation happen.
  - —Anticipate problems you will need to address, along with possible ways to deal with them.
  - —Hold your leadership team accountable to one another for tasks to be done.
- Organize a format and structure for the conversation. Some basic models are suggested in the guide for the conversation process you are using, but you may adapt these to your needs—

  & If you use *Called to Deal with Difficult Issues*, see pp. 9–10.

  & If you use *Growing Healthier Congregations*, see pp. B-65–B-82. This guide leaves the number of sessions to the judgment of your leadership group.

  & If you use *See—Judge—Act*, you may choose between a single session (pp.36–39) and a multiple session format (pp. 11–36).

  & If you use a Study Circles approach, see p. 2 of *Study Circles in Paired Congregations.*

  & If you are using *End Racism, Improve Race Relations and Begin Racial Healing*, see pp. 5–17.

  & If you are using *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues* see pp. 14–18; for *Dialogando en Conjunto como Cristianos*, see pp. 21–32. These guides leave open the number of sessions to leaders' judgments.

- Plan how you will help participants become familiar with the process you will use to talk together. The discussion guide you have chosen may some tips about this.

Skills for Leading Conversation

Become familiar with the particular skills and behavior which are called for by the discussion process you have chosen to use. Your assets may already include some, if not most, of these skills. Work on those you do not already have to build your assets for leading conversation. If possible, practice your skills with each other before leading others in the conversation you plan to have. Use these skills when you lead conversation.

& If you use *Called to Deal with Difficult Issues*, see pp. 5–7.

& If you use *Growing Healthier Congregations,* see the section "Conversation Leader's Self-Help Slide Show," pp. B-83–B-88.

& If you use *See—Judge—Act,* see the section, "Some Ideas and Suggestions for Facilitating a See—Judge—Act Group, pp. 40–44.

& If you use either *Study Circles in Paired Congregations,* see the section "The key ingredients of effective discussion in paired congregations," pp. 3–4, in *Study Circles in Paired Congregations*. For additional help, see *Guidelines for Organizing and Leading a Study Circle,*[2] pp. 7–15. For *End Racism, Improve Race Relations, and Begin Racial Healing*, see *www.studycircles.org/pdf/training.pdf*, p. 36

& If you use *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues,* see pp. 12–14, or *Dialogando en Conjunto como Cristianos*, see pp. 23–25.

Establish Culturally Appropriate Ground Rules for Your Conversation. Each of the above resources recommends ground rules for conversations. In a real conversation it is also a good idea to go over these ground rules with the participants and add or modify them by mutual agreement.

When talking cross-culturally, leaders should be sensitive to different ways in which people of various cultures talk publicly as church. Sections 21–40 present some features of conversation in several cultures found in the ELCA. One way to show sensitivity about them is for conversation leaders to become familiar with these characteristics of public conversation for cultures other than their own. This will help them as they lead conversations involving those cultures. Conversation leaders may exercise their judgment about whether it is appropriate in particular cases to further explain these features to participants in the conversations.

Evaluate. After each "real" conversation, evaluate together the conversation itself as well as how well the leadership team performed its tasks. What worked well? What particular challenges did you face? Where could you improve? How will you work on improving these areas for future conversations? As a leadership team, use these learnings for the next conversation you lead.

1 *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues,* 8–9.
2 Available from Study Circles Resource Center, Pomfret, CT, 06258, Ph: 203-928-2616, or see their Web site at *www.studycircles.org* for order information.

Rituals for Talking Together 18

How We Use Rituals for Talking and Why

Here are two encounters many Lutherans will recognize.

1.

"Hello. How are you?"
"Fine. How's your family?"
"They're doing great. The kids really like their teachers, and they're getting good grades, too."

2.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all."
"And also with you."
"In peace, let us pray to the Lord."
"Lord, have mercy."
"For the peace from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord."
"Lord, have mercy…."
"Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord."
"Amen."

Many Lutherans would recognize the second encounter as the beginning of the Sunday liturgy from the *Lutheran Book of Worship*.[1] We would have no trouble describing this as "ritual." The liturgy helps us to worship God together in public, to hear God's word and reflect on what it means for us, and to receive our Lord's body and blood.

But the first encounter is also a ritual although we might not call it that. Two friends encounter each other. One asks how the other is; she replies and responds with a similar question and some general information. It's a common way in which people often start a conversation. The "small talk" takes few risks. But it allows them to explore whether and how they might take more risks in conversation with topics that make them more vulnerable, but which may be more meaningful or important for them to talk about.[2]

Rituals are standard ways we encounter each other in the particular kinds of situations in which they are used. They provide a shared structure that helps us to know what to expect in those situations, and what is expected of us. This lowers our anxiety and helps that kind of encounter to accomplish its purposes. Rituals can create opportunities to explore things at a deep level.

Rituals for Talking Together as Christians

Christians also need a ritual —a standard way for talking together about matters of ministry, community life, or social justice. These are usually not "small talk" issues. Significant things often are at stake about which people care deeply.

Christians especially need a ritual when they

are talking together cross-culturally, when the ways they have of dealing with one another may vary from culture to culture. When people from different cultures encounter each other, they may not know the ground rules the others live by, what is expected of them, or how what they say or do will be interpreted by people from another culture.

Each of the resources for helping Christians talk together which this manual complements has rituals with ground rules for conversation. Those rituals are designed to help the participants talk about what they want to discuss together. They provide ways for people to take risks which they feel comfortable taking as they talk together about things that matter.[3]

- *In Called to Deal with Difficult Issues*, the ground rules of the ritual are, first, attending, listening, observing; second, exploring and seeking perspective from others; third, reflecting and searching for theological issues at stake; and finally, considering ministry options.[4]
- In *Growing Healthier Congregations* the ground rules of the ritual are: Attend, Assert, Decide, and Act.[5] Each is an active verb involving interaction among all the participants as well as interaction with God as they try to discern together what God is up to in the situation about which they are talking.
- In *See—Judge—Ac*t, the ground rules are: See, Judge, and Act. Each one is again an active verb involving understanding what is going on and how people experience it, and discerning what God has to say about it before people respond.[6]
- In *End Racism Improve Race-Relations, and Begin Racial Healing* and *Study Circles in Paired Congregations*, the basic features of the ritual are: share experiences, perceptions, and personal connections to an issue; examine different views about its nature, causes, and the approaches to dealing with it; look at the issue from the perspective of faith; and discern where common ground lies among people and consider how to act.[7]
- In *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues* and *Dialogando en Conjunto como Cristianos*, the key features of the ritual are to share the experience of an issue, understand why it came about and what's at stake, discern how faith speaks to the situation, and consider what to do.[8]

1 *Lutheran Book of Worship*, Setting 1 (Minneapolis and Philadelphia: Augsburg Publishing House and Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978), 57–58.
2 *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B–33.
3 Ibid., B–34.
4 *Called to Deal with Difficult Issues*, 9–10.
5 *Growing Healthier Congregations,* B-35–B-36
6 *See—Judge—Act,* 8.
7 *Study Circles in Paired Congregations*, 2, and *Guidelines for Organizing and Leading a Study Circle*, 18–19.
8 *Talking Together as Christians*, 11, and *Dialogando en Conjunto como Cristianos*, 21–22.

Talking by Mutual Invitation 19

Introduction

In addition to the other ways in which our companion resources invite us to talk about our similarities and differences across cultural frontiers, Eric Law has created a process for multi-cultural conversation by mutual invitation. In this process, participants in a conversation invite other participants to speak but respect a person's desire not to speak if they so choose.

Eric H. F. Law's description of this process may be found both in his book, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), Appendix A, pp. 113-114, as well as in the printed version of this resource published by the ELCA and available through Augsburg Fortress. The ELCA does not have the publisher's permission to publish this material online. You are encouraged to read this appendix, however, for a detailed description of the process of mutual invitation. There is additional valuable material about talking by mutual invitation in the main text of Eric Law's book.

Cultural Variations in Talking Together 20

This field guide has helped you map your ministry's assets for talking cross-culturally, shown you some important ways to prepare for your own leadership of such conversations, and talked about ways in which you can help your participants discover through conversation both what they have in common and how to look from that common ground at how they differ.

Some of those differences will be cultural. In this section, we begin to address cultural variations that tend to matter when people talk together cross-culturally. We will look at dimensions of cultural styles, attitudes, and behavior. We will focus more specifically on culturally distinct practices and expectations about public conversation, as well as how cultural values affect such conversation. This will raise some issues about setting ground rules for cross-cultural conversation that we touched upon briefly in section 15. We will also reflect on the fact that while various cultures are distinctive in comparison with one another, they are seldom without their own internal diversity of thought about things that matter.

Differences in Cultural Styles, Attitudes, or Behavior

Why does culture matter when people of different backgrounds talk together? For one thing, as your own conversations proceed, you may begin to notice some differences in cultural styles, attitudes, and behavior between groups. Marcelle DuPraw and Marya Axner have identified six dimensions of the ways cultures may differ in some basic ways which affect how people within them meet various challenges.[1] When involved in our own cross-cultural conversations, you may encounter some of these possible differences in cultural styles:

- **Communication Styles:** Cultures differ in the importance of non-verbal communication such as gestures, facial expression, the physical distance between people in conversation, the sense of time; the same verbal expressions may mean different things in different cultures.
- **Attitudes toward Conflict:** Open conflict is more acceptable in some cultures than others, and there are differences in ways to express disagreements appropriately.
- **Approaches to Completing Tasks:** Some cultures may emphasize building relationships at the beginning, while others expect relationships to develop out of working on various tasks.
- **Decision-making Styles:** In some cultures, individuals may delegate decisions while in others they may not delegate them. Majority rule may be used by groups in some cultures while other cultures put more emphasis on group consensus.
- **Attitudes towards Disclosure:** Cultures differ in the degree to which it is appropriate either to openly express emotion or the reasons for conflict and misunderstanding, or to disclose personal information.
- **Approaches to Knowing:** Cultures historically rooted in Europe tend to stress knowledge based on facts obtained, say, by observing, measuring, or counting while some other cultures tend to emphasize more things known by direct experience and feelings or by being passed down through tradition. Neither approach is

entirely absent in any culture, but they differ in importance in various cultures.

DuPraw and Axner caution that "in the U.S., with all our cultural mixing and sharing, we can't apply these generalizations to whole groups of people. But we can use them to recognize that there is more than one way to look at the world and to learn…. Indeed, these different approaches to knowing could affect ways of analyzing a community problem or finding ways to resolve it."[2]

It *can* be difficult to discern and understand these differences at first. But when they are appreciated, they sometimes can be seen as *complementary*, and therefore as potential *assets* in our conversations with people from a different culture.

Diversity *within* Cultures is Easily Overlooked

While these cultural distinctions are real, DuPraw's and Anxner's caution about over-generalizing cultural distinctions to whole groups of people is also important. But their caution is even more broadly appropriate than perhaps they realize. Diversity within cultures exists not only because members of the culture live in the United States; it is also a natural feature of many cultures.

In fact, few national or ethnic cultures exist without some internal diversity—some fundamental differences of opinion on important issues or some dissent over the dominant values, perspectives, or practices of the culture. These things are important to a group, its identity, story, and way of life, as well as how members of the group deal with the world. Therefore, these matters also may be the focus of continuing and significant levels of disagreement, argument, and challenge by members of the group who share the same culture including, of course, the Christians in that culture.[3] While there may be general agreement among the members *that* certain values, attitudes, or practices are important in their culture, they may also *disagree* about what those things *mean* or about the importance they *ought to have* in their culture.

Therefore, because these kinds of internal diversity exist within most cultures, we should recognize the dominant key features of those cultures and also be aware that there may be lively arguments among the members about them as well as different approaches to practices in the culture. So, in this field guide we try to be careful when referring to cultural features. You will often see the phrase "*tends to*" used in connection with them. This means that a certain feature of, say, the way members of the culture talk as church in public is often the case. But, be aware that sometimes it may be otherwise.

Distinct Practices and Shared Expectations

Another important reason that culture matters is that cultures tend to have distinct ways of talking together. There are often culturally distinct practices or habits of talking which are governed by filters of shared expectations or commonly understood rules according to which people in the same culture talk together publicly.

These expectations and rules work well when conversation takes place within the group. But when people from different groups try to talk together, they may have different filters or expectations about how people talk together and different rules which govern conversation. It can

get very confusing and may make people feel frustrated, similar to the feelings that arise when a game is played by two different sets of rules.

Here are just a few examples from the cultures addressed by this field guide.

- *American Indian people* often give everyone a say in community discussions that consider important matters. People may be passionate advocates for their point of view, but they do not directly challenge others with whom they may disagree. They may literally go around a circle, taking turns giving their point of view while everyone else listens respectfully, searching for consensus.[4]
- *African Americans* tend to speak as advocates for positions they personally hold and argue. For them, truth is something discovered in the testing of arguments of different—perhaps opposing—points of view.[5]
- *Anglo Americans* tend to see themselves as spokespersons or representatives for a point of view which figures in a dispassionate discussion. Truth for them tends to be discovered not through argument but rather is something that emerges in discussion because of the merit of an idea someone brings up.[6]
- *Chinese Americans* tend to look for consensus from among different points of view, to find an idea they can all accept as a solution to a problem. They also tend to believe in the wisdom and experience of elders. While some mature adults may occasionally challenge the point of view of older individuals, younger adults will not do so even if they have a different perspective.[7]
- *Latinos* also search for consensus through a free and open discussion in which people express their own views by appealing both to logic and to the heart. They will freely challenge one another when they are not convinced by their arguments. But they will also keep an open mind and show respect for one another by genuinely trying to see things from the perspectives of others.[8]

Cultural Values about How to Talk Together

Culturally distinct interpretations of values may also come into play when people talk together. These values may influence not only what people are trying to achieve through their conversation—the decision they are trying to reach or the action they want to take together—but also the way they talk together. Indeed, these values and the shared expectations and rules people use when they talk are often related. Again, here are a few examples illustrating the tendencies of certain cultural groups.

Among *American Indian people* the values of mutual trust and respect are important and are reflected in how they talk together. Respect and trust are shown by a willingness to listen to everyone and to wait one's turn to speak. People tend to trust that others will give due consideration to what they say. Their discussions are sometimes marked by periods of silence in which people ponder the views of others. There is a high respect for the experience of elders.

For *African Americans*, truth is an important value. Sincere argument is the most appropriate way to discover truth about an issue. Rather than seeing it as divisive or disrespectful, they see spirited argument, that may include direct

challenges to others, as ultimately unifying in a mutual search for truth.

European Americans often see truth as an approximation reached through a compromise among differing perspectives through reasoned, dispassionate discussion. For them, it is often more important to "keep the peace" with a calm atmosphere and to keep an open mind about others' points of view than it is to win an argument.

Chinese Americans value respect for elders and their wisdom, and this value affects all discussion in the congregation. But it doesn't mean that the opinions of the elders automatically trump the views of everyone else. They value the give and take of discussion, and the importance of good reasons about the relation of ends and the means to reach them. The Chinese also value consensus; people will sometimes go along with the rest of the group even if they prefer an alternative. If they cannot reach consensus, they will put off making a decision rather than to force a decision by "majority vote."

Latinos value consensus, truth, respect, and both logic and reasons of the heart in discussion. They see truth as something that emerges by consensus after a free and open discussion. They regard the views of all individuals in the discussion as valuable. Emotionally expressive discussion is common among Latinos. In discussions, the most persuasive reasons to Latinos are often those that appeal both to logic and to the heart.

In light of these differences of expectations about how public conversation happens and about the values behind those expectations, it is easy to see how misunderstandings may occur when people of different cultures talk together. It is also easy for them to misinterpret each others' motives for behaving as they do when they talk together.

As people learn more about the expectations and values of the people they talk with, however, these misunderstandings and misinterpretations can be reduced. That's the good news. And careful listening to those with whom you are talking is an important part of this learning process.

How Cultural Tendencies May Affect Cross-cultural Conversation: Notes for Leaders

The following sections of this field guide summarize some key features of public conversation in various cultures. These features came to light largely through interviews with several ELCA congregations of different cultural backgrounds which are identified in the acknowledgments.

Remember that they describe *tendencies*, and that they may not describe people in specific ministries or communities completely accurately. Remember also that they reflect cultural norms of belief and action with which some people in those cultures may disagree, and who may choose to think or behave differently. Typically, for example, members of the second generation of any group of immigrants to the United States choose to think and act somewhat differently from the generation of their parents—even when they are among people of their own cultural group.

This example—repeated many times in American history—reveals something very important about the possibility of cross-cultural conversations as church. That is, despite real cultural differences about how various groups talk, they *can* learn to communicate with one another, even to understand the ways that people

in other cultures talk, and why they talk that way. *Ministries can do this*. And *skilled leaders can lead these conversations. You are becoming a skilled leader of conversation.*

As leaders of cross-cultural conversation, you should become familiar with the sections that concern the groups in the conversations you will be leading. We urge you to lead conversation with leaders from other cultural groups. And we urge you as leaders to review the relevant sections that follow and discuss how well they describe the people in the particular ministries or groups who will take part in those conversations.

It may be helpful to orient each group in a conversation to the patterns and expectations of other groups with whom they will be talking. In some instances, leaders may also want to propose ground rules that take these differences into account. When the differences in how groups are talking become a problem for the conversation, leaders can help overcome these difficulties either by noting what they observe and reminding participants of these various patterns, or by improvising ways to overcome these differences as the conversation continues. It may, in fact, be helpful for leaders to prepare for conversation by trying to anticipate what some of these difficulties may be, and to have prepared a strategy for dealing with them.

These various cultural patterns are rich and complex. While we cannot comment about every detail of the challenges that various combinations of cultures might create, here are some observations you may find helpful.

- **Results or goals of conversation**: People in different cultures have different expectations about what the goal or result of a conversation should be. In some cultures, the goal is to reach a consensus which is acceptable to everyone and which takes everyone's opinions and circumstances into account. In others, it may be to persuade most of the group of one or another position or course of action. Related to this are some differences in the importance of the group for which the conversation matters. Some cultures consider the importance of the outcome for the group as a whole to be the primary consideration, while others place less importance on this and more on the persuasive power of an idea or point of view itself.
- **Taking turns**: American Indian people tend to take turns going around a circle. In some other cultures, people speak whenever they have something to say. Sometimes leaders recognize people who raise their hands; in other cultures, people just speak up. To some extent this latter pattern also marks the distinction between men and women in those cultures. (See Section 24.)
- **Expressing emotions and strong feelings about subjects under discussion**: Cultures treat expression of emotions and feelings in different ways for different reasons. In Anglo American culture, public discussion tends to be characterized by *dispassionate* conversation. Anglo Americans tend to believe that emotions that are too strongly felt interfere with one's ability to reason. Other cultures are less marked by this split between facts and values, and value the place of emotion and feeling in public discussion more.[9] These cultures vary, however, in the strength of emotion they regard as proper in public discussion.

- **Discerning truth in a discussion**: Cultures vary in how they arrive at what is true in a discussion. Some, such as American Indian people, Chinese Americans, and Latinos, seek a consensus among all the participants in a discussion. African Americans tend to see truth emerging from a contest of people and ideas in which the rhetorical skill of participants plays a significant part. Anglo-Americans tend to believe that truth belongs naturally to certain ideas which can be discovered by open-minded, impartial participants through reason in a dispassionate discussion.
- **Why people change their minds**: In some cultures, people change their minds when they hear perspectives or opinions that help the group reach consensus. In others, people change their minds when they hear a perspective or idea that seems reasonable in itself or because of the persuasive argument of the speaker.
- **Respect for wisdom and reason:** In American Indian and Chinese American cultures, wisdom is respected as a quality or capacity that is found often in the elder members of the community because of their greater life's experience. Reasoning in these cultures respects that experience. Other cultures do not disrespect wisdom, but may believe that it does not necessarily reside in the older members of the community. Also, wisdom may have a less prominent importance in some cultures. While reasoning in those cultures may draw on wisdom to some extent, it may depend more on experience as such, logic, or the emotions.

Implications for Ground Rules. These cultural variations may have implications for how people of different cultures understand the ground rules for conversation, and how they participate in conversations on the basis of that understanding. These cultural variations will also affect how people from any culture may interpret the participation of people from other cultures in those conversations.

We can illustrate some of the possibilities with just a few examples in relation to the common ground rules from *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues* and *Dialogando en Conjunto como Cristianos*.[10]

First example—"Listen respectfully and carefully to others." Members of any culture expect that people will treat others in a conversation with respect. For people in those cultures that give a special degree of respect to the wisdom of elders, however, it may seem disrespectful when individuals from other cultures which do not share this cultural norm directly challenge an opinion expressed by one of their own elders. To the one who challenges, however, it may seem disrespectful *not* to challenge an idea. For, treating others respectfully and taking their ideas seriously may mean precisely challenging them regardless of who they are in order to test the validity of their ideas.

Second example—"A true conversation needs give and take." How this happens varies from culture to culture, as do their ideas about what it should be like. The process of taking turns around a circle used by American Indian people to give their views and to respond to the views of others is very different from the more spontaneous conversations one often finds among African Americans or Latinos. Similarly, the more dispassionate kinds

of conversations one often finds among Anglo Americans sometimes frustrate African Americans, who may understand discussion as a contest of people and ideas in which the use of emotion and rhetorical style is common.[11]

Third example—"Speak for yourself and not as a member of a group." Anglo Americans tend to assume that, because truth belongs naturally to certain ideas that can be discovered by reason, their discovery will be good for all. They may sometimes inaccurately assume others are thinking like them and presume to speak on their behalf. While Latinos or Chinese express their own personal opinions, they are also conscious of being a member of a community that is searching for consensus based on their knowledge of its members and what is good for the group as a whole. In other words, they may speak both for themselves as a member of the group.

These examples suggest that leaders should try to anticipate how the character of the public conversation for the groups they will be leading may interact with the ground rules. They can then prepare themselves to deal with any misunderstanding or confusion that may occur during conversation about how the ground rules should function.

1 Marcell E. DuPraw and Marya Axner, "Working on Common Cross-cultural Challenges," reprinted as an Appendix to *A Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators,* 65–69.
2 Ibid, 67.
3 Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) 56–58, 122–125, and 152–154; Celia Jaes Falicov, *Latino Families in Therapy*, 6–7, 74, 86–87, 267–268; and Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) viii–xi, 4-8, 102–104, and 115.
4 This was revealed in discussions with members of the Open Circle at Augustana Lutheran Church, Portland, Oregon, May 22–23, 2003.
5 Thomas Kochman, *Black and White: Styles in Conflict*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 18–21, and Kochman, "Black and White Cultural Styles in Pluralistic Perspective," in *Readings in Cultural Diversity*, ed. Thomas Kochman (Chicago: Kochman Communication Consultants, n.d.), 278–288. Our thanks to Thomas Kochman for access to the latter collection of articles.
6 Ibid.
7 Discussion with members of Truth Lutheran Church, Naperville, Illinois, May 18, 2003.
8 Discussion with members of Iglesia Luterana Sagarada Corazon, Waukegan, IL, March 7, 2004, Parroquia Luterana San Francisco de Asis, Aurora, IL, March 18, 2004, and Iglesia Luterana Trinidad, Chicago, IL, March 21, 2004.
9 See Kochman, *Black and White: Styles in Conflict*, 106–129, for discussion of the ways in which the expression of emotions and strong feelings differ between Anglo Americans and African Americans in conversation.
10 Pp. 10 and 19–20, respectively.
11 For an extensive discussion of the differences in public conversation between African Americans and Anglo Americans, see Kochman, *Black and White: Styles in Conflict*.

African Americans and Blacks 21

Many African Americans and Blacks are descendants of Africans who were brought to North and South America and the Caribbean against their will and forced to work as slaves. The importation of slaves continued from the early 16th through the mid-19th centuries. Slavery often meant the break-up of their families as they were bought and sold and moved to new locations to work. Although the use of their native African languages and the practice of their native religions were systematically and violently suppressed, African Americans and Blacks still preserved some basic patterns of spirituality[1] and other aspects of their culture, including some patterns of thought and speech. African Americans and Blacks have adapted these patterns to fit their new circumstances despite being deprived of a direct connection to their specific African context.

Because of its transformation in the crucibles of slavery and racism, the culture of African Americans and Blacks is distinctive in that it includes certain ways of engaging difficult and sensitive issues in public conversation.

The marks of public discussion for African Americans and Blacks tend to include the following:[2]

- **Truth emerges from testing the validity of ideas in argument within the group. Is he or she persuasive? Does the group accept his or her arguments?**
- **In discussion, people are advocates for a point of view they personally hold; only statements for which one will accept personal responsibility are permitted in discussion and debate.**
- **Discussion and debate is a contest of individuals as well as of ideas; in a church setting, the emphasis may be more on appreciating others and their views than on being adversarial. It is very important for people to keep an open mind about issues. Listening to people discuss and debate the issues helps them form their own opinions. People may, of course, disagree.**
- **A person who withholds his view from a discussion interferes with the testing of ideas that can change minds; one is obliged to contribute to a debate, especially if he or she disagrees with the views of others.**
- **The ideas people express are more important than the people who express them. Yet, things like personal credibility, their position in the group, their character, knowledge, and wisdom also matter.**
- **When one is unable to make an effective reply to the arguments of another, a person should change his views. A person should also change one's mind when they discern that they did not have the right point of view.**
- **The struggle of argument is not divisive, but instead is ultimately unifying. Although some people may leave, it is better to have free and open dialogue that leads to people dealing with important issues and resolving differences.**
- **Spontaneous expression of ideas and emotions is valued, although emotion is inappropriate and risky when it is aimed personally at another member.**

- **Expressing strong emotion in argument does not necessarily interfere with one's ability to reason.**
- **Expressing emotion shows sincerity and seriousness about the subject at hand, as well as engagement with others in the discussion; expressing emotion is important, especially when one's needs or interests matter; any expectation that emotion can be set aside is unrealistic and even illogical.**
- **Being unemotional in a discussion is insincere, possibly devious, and shows a reluctance to reveal one's true position on an issue; it also shows a refusal to engage others in discussion.**
- **Expressing anger and hostility in debate does not mean that people are out of control or that violence is imminent unless the emotions are unusually intense.**
- **Lack of emotion in discussion often indicates increased personal hostility.**
- **Turn-taking is a matter of self-assertion related to the content of the issue or point immediately at hand in the discussion; it happens when one has a relevant point one wants to make. Usually, people raise their hands when they want to speak, and are recognized.**
- **Individuals taking turns generally limit themselves to one or two points that speak to the issue at hand so that others can respond directly to those points in a point-counterpoint style,**
- **Performance in out-thinking and out-talking others is valued, as is the personal style with which one engages in discussion and debate.**
- **The opinions of elders are respected in discussion for their wisdom and experience; this may sometimes be correlated with age or length of time they have been part of a congregation.**

1 For a discussion of continuities of spirituality and moral outlook, see Peter J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995)

2 The following characteristics are based partly on the discussion in Kochman, *Black and White: Styles in Conflict*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) and also on interviews with congregations having African American and Black members.

Caribbean Islanders of the U.S. Virgin Islands

22

The U.S. Virgin Islands, like many islands in the Caribbean, has a multiracial society that includes people of both European and African descent. The U.S. Virgin Islands were settled by Danes in the 16th Century, and African slaves were used on island plantations. Slavery was eventually abolished on the islands. The culture of the islands is a hybrid of these ethnic traditions. Influences also come from more recent migration among the islands of the Caribbean.

The United States acquired the Virgin Islands from Denmark in the 19th century, and administers them as a U.S. territory. Because of their colonial history, the Virgin Islands also have a partly Lutheran heritage. Frederick Lutheran Church in Charlotte Amalie on the island of St. Thomas is one of the oldest Lutheran congregations in the Western Hemisphere.

The marks of public discussion for Caribbean Islanders in the U.S. Virgin Islands tend to include these features.

- **Truth in a discussion is determined by analyzing the positions and weighing the arguments of different points of view.**
- **Everyone who is interested can participate in a discussion. Anyone who wants to speak may do so.**
- **It is important to keep an open mind and listen to all who have opinions, even though people may have their own opinions or be influenced by their experiences.**
- **Ideas are more important than the people who express them, although some may pay more attention to ideas expressed by some people than those expressed by others. Some good ideas may come from people who don't say much.**
- **People should change their minds if they are convinced by what someone says.**
- **If the group specifically seeks consensus for a decision, people may go along with the consensus of most people even if they personally disagree.**
- **When disagreements happen and controversial issues arise, confrontation is discouraged in favor of constructive approaches, partly in order to avoid splitting the group. Churches are expected to avoid conflict. In church settings, confrontational approaches tend to lead some to leave congregations.**
- **People may express strong emotion in a discussion, but it is problematic and inappropriate beyond a certain level of intensity.**
- **Expressing strong feelings can interfere with the ability to reason, or to hear and consider critically what others are saying if the intensity is strong enough.**
- **If issues are complex or information is lacking, people are not expected to have an opinion.**
- **A group may table a discussion until a later date and not try to make a decision if the situation is complex, the facts are unclear, information is lacking, or emotions are running very high.**
- **People can challenge others in a discussion, but a confrontational style is regarded as inappropriate. People are expected to exercise discretion over**

when and how they say things. Having a difference of opinion is not by itself being antagonistic toward other people.

- **In a discussion, people are expected to seek what is best for the group or what people can live with, whether it is decided by consensus or a majority vote.**
- **Discussions are not a contest of ideas or people, although people may have strong opinions about an issue.**
- **How people take turns depends on the formality and size of a discussion. In more formal discussions or in larger groups, a leader may recognize people to speak; in smaller or more informal gatherings, people speak up spontaneously. Occasionally, a leader or other participant may ask someone for their views.**
- **People may speak for about three minutes in a discussion. Beyond that, people may get impatient. People wanting to speak longer are expected to request permission.**
- **People generally speak for themselves in a discussion. If they speak on behalf of others they may say so. Sometimes people can tell when others talk on the basis of someone else's views.**

East Africans

23

East Africans come from any of several countries in the eastern part of the continent of Africa, including Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Malawi, Madagascar, Rwanda, Somalia, northern Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, eastern Zaire, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Each of these countries has a different colonial and national history than the others. Some, such as Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Congo, Uganda, and Zimbabwe have been torn by Civil War or political unrest. In some instances, children have been used as soldiers in these conflicts. These several wars and conflicts have led to large numbers of refugees. Special mention should be made of Rwanda because of the scale and intensity of its ethnic genocide in 1994, in which Hutus killed 800,000 Tutsis and their moderate Hutu sympathizers in an organized campaign of violence. This was later dramatized in the 2004 film, *Hotel Rwanda*, based on a true story of how a hotel manager, Paul Rusesabagina, gave shelter to over 1,000 people in his hotel during the genocide and protected them with courage, wits, and bribes. The U.N.-created International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda later convicted and sentenced some prominent leaders for their parts in the genocide. In 2003, Rwandans approved a new constitution which mandated power sharing by Hutus and Tutsis so that neither can politically dominate the other.

Other countries in the region, however, have been relatively peaceful. Education, a desire for greater opportunity and freedom, war, civil unrest, becoming refugees, and famine have all led some Africans to immigrate into the U.S. in recent decades. Many East Africans became Christians through missionary activity in the 19th and 20th centuries. Others became Christians in the U.S. Some are members of indigenous African Christian churches that have congregations in the U.S.

The marks of public conversation among East African Christians tend to include the following:

- **Truth is known on the basis of the ability of speakers to give convincing reasons for a point of view or proposal which can be accepted by a majority of the group.**
- **Everyone who comes to a discussion can participate, have a say, and express their views. People who are knowledgeable about the issue may start the discussion.**
- **Formal agendas are used for business meetings. Other discussions may not use an agenda.**
- **It is important for people to keep an open mind in a discussion so that they might learn about an issue, hear what others say, and consider this information when forming their own opinions or help to make the group's decisions. This responsibility goes along with accountability, both for one's own participation in decision-making and for one's ability to hold others responsible for their conduct.**
- **Ideas are more important than the people who express them in a discussion. But in some instances, people who have more credibility with the group because of their position, character, wisdom, or knowledge may be given more weight in a discussion. Pastors tend to be among such people.**
- **People weigh others' opinions in a discussion on the basis of an over-all understanding of an issue, by which arguments that are offered are more important, by the likely outcome of various points of view, by the importance**

of the issue to oneself, and by the apparent will of the majority.

- **People should change their minds in a discussion either when the views of others make more sense than one's own and one realizes that he or she did not have the right point of view, or when one is alone or in a minority on the issue.**
- **People take turns in a discussion by raising their hands and being recognized. Sometimes the leader of the meeting will ask silent participants their views.**
- **When people speak, they should make their points briefly and in a reasonable time.**
- **The views of elders may be respected in a discussion, for their age carries wisdom; but everyone contributes to the discussion and the views of all deserve to be considered.**
- **People usually speak for themselves in a discussion; but sometimes they may speak for others.**
- **People may be silent during a discussion either because they want to listen to others or because they are more private people. Silence generally is considered as assent. A discussion leader sometimes may ask silent participants what they are thinking.**
- **People may directly and openly challenge others about the issue being discussed. It is important to be gracious about it and not to attack the person.**
- **Expressing strong disagreements about issues in a discussion is an appropriate way to deal with the issues. This helps to reveal the deep reasons behind different points of view and the depth of commitment people have to their perspectives.**
- **Disagreements in a discussion do not necessarily divide the community, although sometimes a person may leave the group rather than change his or her mind or go along with the rest.**
- **People are free to express strong emotions in discussions and this is common. At the same time, others should care for individuals who express such feelings.**
- **A consensus or decision is reached when positions and opinions are clarified and everyone accepts an alternative and there is no dissent, or when an issue is decided by a majority vote.**
- **Men and women both are equally entitled to participate in discussions and in making decisions. Some women may be reluctant to participate in English-language discussions because they don't feel ath their English is adequate.**
- **People show respect in a discussion by listening to others, waiting until they finish speaking and reacting later and respect is shown both the person and their ideas. People show disrespect by yelling, insulting others, interrupting them as they speak, and by other demonstrative behavior.**
- **American culture has influenced how East Africans discuss matters through its tradition of questioning authority publicly. This applies to both lay leaders and clergy.**

Liberians

24

Liberians come from the Republic of Liberia in West Africa which was originally founded in 1821-22 by the American Colonization Society as a place to which freed slaves from the United States could emigrate and establish themselves as free and equal people instead of being sent back to the places from which they originally came. There were, of course, already existing African tribes in this territory. In 1847, the freed slaves founded the Republic of Liberia with a system of government modeled after the national government of the United States.

In 1980, a military coup overthrew President William R. Tolbert Jr., and replaced him with the coup leader, Samuel Doe. A period of civil unrest followed leading to civil wars in 1989 and 2003, which spilled over into the neighboring countries of Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire. Over 250,000 Liberians died in these conflicts and many more were injured, maimed, or raped; many fled their homes.

Non-violent civil demonstrations by a coalition of Christian and Muslim women led by a Lutheran, Leymah Gbowee of the Women in Peace-building Network, created a political climate favorable to peace. Their movement and its accomplishments have been portrayed in the documentary film, *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*.[1] The women persistently confronted President Charles Taylor publicly and got him and leaders of all other factions in the conflict to enter peace negotiations in Ghana. And to get a peace agreement, Gbowee and the women took over the hall where the peace negotiations were going on and would not let anyone leave until a peace agreement was finalized ending the second civil war. President Taylor was forced to resign and accepted asylum in Nigeria. Nigerian and American military intervention in Liberia soon followed. Their forces were eventually replaced by a United Nations military force. Many refugees were flown to the country of Senegal. Taylor was later charged with crimes against humanity and other serious humanitarian violations and was extradited to Sierra Leone where he was arrested. His trial began in July 2009, before a United Nations Special Court for Sierra Leone. Meanwhile, in the 2005 national elections Liberians elected a woman, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, to be their new President.

About 200,000 Liberians have emigrated to the U.S. since 1980, facilitated by existing "sister" relations between American cities and Liberian counties.

The marks of public discussion among Liberians in the United States include the following:

- **Truth is discerned by focusing on a combination of congregational goals, Lutheran identity, and Scripture.**
- **Not all discussions require formal agendas or formal rules. These are important only if a formal business meeting is being held.**
- **Participation in discussions and meetings is open to all.**
- **The ideas people express in a discussion are more important than who expresses them. God is not a respecter of some people more than others; anyone's ideas may help the church to grow spiritually.**
- **Open-mindedness is essential in a discussion. People are encouraged both to speak their minds and also to accept being corrected.**

- **People weigh different people's opinions in a discussion according to the strength of their arguments.**
- **People should change their minds when they are convinced by another point of view or when there is a vote of a majority different from one's own preference. They should respect the wisdom of the majority**
- **Some people may keep silent in a discussion, listening to others. It is okay not to have an opinion. A discussion leader may ask those who are quiet what they are thinking.**
- **In a discussion, people often speak for themselves although they may sometimes speak for others.**
- **It is okay in a discussion to air differences through open and direct challenges to other people**
- **When disagreements occur in discussions, people try to talk out their differences by reasoning together. Differences about what to do may be decided by a vote.**
- **Time is important in a discussion; the length of both speeches and discussions tend to be limited.**
- **Expressing feelings in a discussion is important, although sometimes people can't distinguish between feelings about issues and those about personalities. Usually people can reason in spite of having strong feelings, especially when others help the group sort things out.**
- **Respect in a discussion is shown by giving others time to speak, addressing others properly, listening to what others say, and seeking recognition to speak. Disrespect is shown by cutting others off, speaking out of turn, addressing someone inappropriately, or making side-comments everyone can hear while someone else is speaking.**
- **Men and women have equal right to speak. Young and old also have equal rights to speak, although disrespect for elders is inappropriate.**
- **Decisions are usually reached by a vote.**

1 A Web site for the documentary is found at *www.praythedevilbacktohell.com/v3/*.

Oromos

25

Oromo people come from an ethnic group living in Ethiopia and northern Kenya where they are a largely rural, agricultural people. The Oromo are the largest of several ethnic groups in Ethiopia, making up over one-third of its population. Christian missionaries from Germany and Sweden worked among the Oromo in the 19th Century, and Oromo Lutherans in Ethiopia are part of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. Oromo people have come to the United States for four reasons. There were a series of famines in Ethiopia in the last half of the 20th century. There is also a long history of political oppression and persecution against Oromos in Ethiopia. Recent Ethiopian history is marked by secession movements, civil war, and other political unrest. Some Oromos have also come to the U.S. for greater economic opportunities than those available in their ancestral homeland. The United States began accepting Oromo refugees in the late 1970's, and immigration to the U.S. began in 1991.

The marks of public discussion among Oromo Christians tend to include:

- **Truth is discerned through open conversation and questioning when people find a convincing account that is in accord with the Bible or a course of action consistent with biblical teaching.**
- **In a discussion, people usually express their personal point of view, although they may also speak for others who are shy or not present. If the discussion is about a group, someone may speak on behalf of groups they are part of.**
- **Ideas are most important in a discussion; even difficult people may have good ideas, which should not be dismissed because of who they are.**
- **Things people say are true should be in accord with the facts, reality, and the situation as most people see it. Leaders' views may be trusted particularly in urgent and important circumstances.**
- **Conversation aims at discernment of a consensus about what is good for the whole group and the mission of the church.**
- **Consensus is achieved when new and different ideas or opinions cease to be expressed.**
- **In discussion, people try to keep an open, un-biased mind, and to be fair and impartial.**
- **Strong emotions may be expressed during a discussion and will be appropriate if the situation under discussion is an emotional one and the expressions are relevant to the issue. Expressing anger toward others may make discussion divisive.**
- **People may challenge others in a discussion, especially if they think others' views do not have a biblical basis. But personal attacks or attempts to embarrass someone are discouraged because they may create misunderstanding, rumors, or unfortunate circumstances.**
- **Strong disagreements may be expressed in discussion and are valuable if they encourage considering more information and thought or a wider perspective about an issue. Disagreement is not necessarily seen to be divisive. Consensus may not always be well-informed. If decisions**

are taken by vote without consensus, however, the majority will have to live with the consequences.

- **Wisdom. maturity, and experience are respected in discussions, and are not simply a matter of age, though elders are respected and what they say matters.**
- **It is very important to keep an open mind in discussion. It allows everyone to state their case, and helps everyone to consider all information and reach consensus about what is best for the group. Having preconceptions may divide the group.**
- **People change their minds in a discussion when they are convinced by another point of view, or when doing so seems to be good for the group or the church's mission.**
- **Discussion continues until all points are aired and a consensus is reached. Participants order time, not the reverse. But in the United States, time has more influence over the length of discussions.**
- **Everyone has the right to participate in a discussion. Most will if they know something about the topic. In more formal discussions, leaders may seek out speakers to "balance" those who have already spoken.**
- **There is more equality for women inside the church than in traditional Oromo culture, and women are more likely to participate in church discussions in the United States, where they feel they are on a more equal basis with men.**
- **In a discussion, respect is shown by listening attentively, respecting others' opinions, making eye contact, facial expression, nodding in assent of a point, and respecting democratic process. Disrespect is shown by refusing to listen to a speaker, interrupting others, protesting that what the speaker says is not true, disregarding biblical guidance, or walking away from a discussion.**

Sudanese 26

Southern Sudanese are from the southern part of the African country of Sudan, which is populated by at least nine Black African tribes. Since achieving independence from Great Britain in 1956, this region of Sudan has experienced civil war for all but 10 years of its existence. The first Sudanese Civil War, which started over southern fears of domination by the predominantly Muslim northern part of the country, lasted from 1955 to 1972 when talks sponsored by the World Council of Churches led to the Addis Ababa Agreement. This agreement granted a significant degree of autonomy to the South. In 1983, Sudanese President Gafaar Nimeri abrogated this agreement and imposed Islamic law on the whole country. Southern groups rebelled starting a second civil war that lasted until 2005, punctuated only by a six month-long cease fire negotiated by former U.S. President, Jimmy Carter. During the Second Civil War, two million southern Sudanese died from both warfare and famine. The Second Civil War ended with the signing of the Nairobi Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which granted the South autonomy for six years and provided for a referendum on independence for the southern part of the country in 2011. Supervision of the agreement is overseen by the United Nations Mission in Sudan. Southern Sudanese who immigrate to the U.S. usually were refugees from the Second Civil War.

The marks of public conversation among southern Sudanese Christians include:

- **Truth is determined by the judgment of a majority about the likely consequences of following a course of action.**
- **Anyone may participate in a discussion and speak up if interested. People take turns by raising their hands and being recognized by the meeting leader.**
- **If people do not speak up in a discussion, the leader or others may ask them what they think about the issues.**
- **Silence in a discussion may indicate either assent to the proposals being discussed, or that a participant may be reluctant to speak if they think differently from others.**
- **People should be open-minded in a discussion. It is okay to have different ideas. People should be open to different points of view.**
- **The ideas people express are more important than who expresses them.**
- **People weigh others' opinions in a discussion by the worth of their ideas and their likely results if acted upon.**
- **People should change their minds in a discussion when someone else has a better idea or alternative course of action.**
- **People usually speak for themselves when they are interested in the issue under discussion. They may speak for others if these people are not present to voice their own concerns**
- **It is okay to openly and directly challenge others if one disagrees with them**
- **It is okay to have strong disagreements in a discussion. These disagreements are discussed, and a majority decides issues by vote.**
- **Disagreements in a discussion do not necessarily divide the community; people try not to cause splits in the group.**

- **It is okay to express strong feelings. This shows one's degree of support or dissent for a position or an alternative on an issue.**
- **Sometimes expressing strong feelings may interfere with one's ability to reason if feelings are directed at another person.**
- **Elders may play a role in a discussion if the church has a serious problem; the elders will counsel the congregation and tell the truth as they see it. Elders may be either men or women.**
- **Respect is shown for those who are older.**
- **In a discussion, men and women sit separately, but both may participate in discussions. Women, however, have a harder time adapting to American ways of having discussions.**
- **Consensus or decisions are reached when all people have spoken and a majority of people have expressed a preference.**
- **Respect in a discussion is shown by not interrupting, and by following along with the agenda and process of the meeting. Disrespect is shown by talking without listening, or by interrupting.**

West Africans 27

West Africans come from a variety of countries in the northwestern part of the continent of Africa below the northern tier of countries. The region includes the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal, and Mauritania. Each West African county each has a variety of tribal or cultural groups of various indigenous or world religions—usually Christian or Muslim. Each country also has a distinctive history and a set of native languages which may be interrelated historically, culturally, and linguistically, along with national languages inherited from a colonial power—usually French or English.

Beginning in the mid-16th century, about 12 million Africans were enslaved and shipped to the Western Hemisphere to work on plantations. A majority were West Africans.

Most West African areas were colonized by European countries which made artificial political boundaries that cut across ethnic and cultural groups. (Liberia is a special case, having been colonized and governed as an independent country by freed African slaves from the United States.)

African Movements achieved political independence from the colonial powers in the late 1950s and 1960s. Since independence some countries in the region, such as Ghana and Senegal, have been politically stable. But others—Nigeria, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau—have experienced civil wars and political unrest, resulting in widespread suffering, death, and displacement of many people. People from other countries who worked and lived in these war-torn and unstable countries were often caught up in such conflicts and became refugees themselves. Those conflicts often stem from tensions among groups created by the colonial powers before independence. Nigeria has had violent civil conflict since the 1990s because some minority ethnic groups maintain they are exploited and receive inadequate economic benefit, social resources, or environmental protection from the extraction of oil in the Niger River Delta by foreign oil companies.

Christian missionaries from Europe and the United States began to evangelize in sub-Saharan Africa about the same time that the slave trade began. Converted Africans who became Christian catechists helped them. In the late 19th century, Christian missionaries became more closely related to the European colonial powers by becoming involved in colonial education, which was increasingly important for Africans to advance in colonial administrations. European or American clergy continued to maintain control of African Christian churches. This led educated African Christians to form their own independent Christian churches all over Africa. Since independence African clergy have come to lead churches started by Europeans as well. African faculties now staff theological schools and teach and discuss issues informed by African Christian perspectives.

West Africans have tended to immigrate to the U.S. for education, economic opportunities, and to escape civil unrest and political oppression.

The marks of public conversation among West African Christians tend to include:

- **Truth is known in a discussion when something is in accord with Scripture and the confessions and contributes to**

building up the church. Also important are one's experiences with other people in a discussion and the consistency of their stories, for you must know where people are coming from when they speak.

- **Everyone who has something to say may participate and express their views in a discussion. Pastors encourage everyone to participate.**
- **People take turns in a discussion by raising their hands and waiting to be recognized by the leader.**
- **Pastors usually lead discussions. They focus on the issues at hand, the meeting agenda, listening well, and attend to time. They invite people to give their views and opinions on the issues under discussion. They try to focus attention on the interest of the church as a whole, and on doing everything as a community of Christ.**
- **People are not expected to have an opinion on everything being discussed.**
- **Some people may be silent during a discussion because they are not outgoing, but they will give their views if asked. Others may be silent if they disagree with the main thrust of the discussion, and some may leave the group if they feel strongly enough about an issue.**
- **It is very important to keep an open mind in a discussion, listen to all views as long as they do not go against Scripture, and discuss them fairly and respectfully. Participants have the right as a child of God to express their views, although they should not try to impose their own views on others.**
- **The ideas participants express in a discussion are more important than the person who expresses them; but, they should also respect the word of their pastor on the matter.**
- **People should discern where the Spirit is leading the church, and change their minds in a discussion when there is a consensus or a majority favoring a different perspective or action if it is in accord with Scripture and the teachings of the church, and contributes to building up the church and the good of the community.**
- **People weigh others' opinions through prayer, particularly when there are disagreements on difficult issues.**
- **People should make their important points clearly when speaking and be mindful of the time so that others may also speak before the end of the meeting.**
- **People sometimes speak on behalf of others, but will usually speak for themselves on the basis of what they observe and what they think is in the church's best interest.**
- **It is not okay to directly and openly confront others, especially if they will be offended. A church discussion is not a court of law. But it is alright for someone who feels hurt by what others said to say so.**
- **People may have strong disagreements in a discussion so long as they are respectful and deal with issues of substance rather than with personalities. Disagreements may help achieve mutual understanding and compromise.**
- **Leaders try to handle disagreements**

in discussions by focusing on issues, trying to repair any damaged relations, emphasizing participants' identity as a Christian community, and asserting their authority if necessary.

- **Disagreements do not necessarily divide the community, especially if they are not about personalities where people may feel pressure to take sides. People may agree to disagree but should not be disagreeable.**
- **It is okay to express strong feelings about issues in a discussion because this lets others know where speakers are coming from. But expressing strong feelings that are unreasonable or about other people is discouraged.**
- **Expressing strong feelings may interfere with someone's ability to reason when it is about people rather than issues. People are more convinced by reasoning that is in accord with the word of God than by strong emotion.**
- **Although discussions seek consensus, one person may be the voice of God and evoke a sense of conviction about his or her view among others.**
- **Time limits are set on speeches and meetings so that meetings end on time.**
- **Respect in a discussion is shown by letting others talk, respecting others' opinions even if one disagrees with them, giving counter-opinions to their views, and not attacking someone personally. Disrespect is shown by not listening to others with whom one disagrees, getting too personal, not deferring to the pastor, and by talking too loud.**
- **Elders are influential and respected in discussions and other congregational affairs. They are often among the congregation's formal leaders. They set an example by sharing their ideas with each other in mutual respect. People listen to them according to the issue under discussion.**
- **Women participate in discussions along with men. People may sometimes respect the opinions of men more than those of women.**
- **Decisions are commonly reached by a majority vote. Consensus is achieved when it is clear that a majority tends to favor a particular position.**

American Indians

28

American Indian people are part of a large number of tribes of people native to North America which existed when the English and other Europeans began to establish colonies in North America in the 17th century. Each tribe had a distinct culture and language, although at a high level of generality they tended to share certain religious ideas or beliefs in common such as the belief in a "Great Spirit" or "Creator."

Indian people found themselves constantly on the defensive and in conflict with Anglo Americans as various European powers and the newly-formed United States of America claimed certain territories in the Americas and played their own kind of power politics in order to exploit the material riches of the Western Hemisphere. Anglo American people also started to migrate west from the Atlantic Coast to settle in additional territories. In two legal cases, *Cherokee v. Georgia* (1831) and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Indian tribes were not sovereign nations but "domestic dependent nations"—essentially wards of the federal government. Various tribes lost a series of wars in the 19th century, and in most cases were forced by treaties to cede vast areas of territory to the United States and to resettle on reservations that often consisted of undesirable land on which it was difficult to sustain themselves economically. In some cases, tribes were relocated involuntarily to locations far away from their homelands.

The federal government continued to exercise significant powers over Indians after the so-called Indian wars. Beginning in the 1890s, Indian children were often sent away from their families and tribes, as a result of federal laws passed on Indian education in 1891 and 1893, to boarding schools where tribal languages and traditions were not taught, and where the children were taught to speak English and to learn Anglo ways instead of traditional ones. Some American Indians were relocated away from their reservations to cities as a result of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' efforts on the Navajo and Hopi Reservations beginning in 1948 and the Federal Relocation Act of 1956. This relocation program continued until at least 1979.

Some Indian people became Christians as the result of missionary activities in various tribes by both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches.

Beginning in the 20th century, Indian people have struggled to assert legal claims to land and natural resources under various treaties and U.S. laws, and have also worked to reclaim, revitalize, and renew their cultural heritages. Indian Christians have worked to interpret their cultural traditions in light of the gospel. Indian people of various tribes have also tried to work together for mutual support and advantage in light of their common interests as Indian people and in light of those cultural understandings and traditions which they tend to share.

The marks of discussion among American Indian Christians tend to include the following:

- **Truth is determined by reaching a consensus in a discussion.**
- **During discussion, everyone has a turn to say what they think; people do not speak out of turn.**
- **Looking for consensus involves drawing upon common beliefs, values, or patterns of behavior despite differences in tribal traditions.**

- **People aim at consensus by listening carefully to others, looking for perspectives and alternatives that will help them reach common ground.**
- **The search for consensus may be marked by periods of silence while everyone considers what others have said, searching for a fresh perspective or a feasible course of action.**
- **Discussions are not so emotional that one cannot hear others clearly; yet, there is a certain freedom for passion, expressing anger, speaking one's mind to say unpleasant things, or advocating a point of view.**
- **Direct or immediate challenges to others with whom one disagrees break the trust of the group; people wait their turn and are obliged to give reasons for their point of view.**
- **People have the freedom to be wrong and to learn from it in discussion; people change their minds after listening to others and deliberating in silence about what they have said and the reasons they gave.**
- **The views of elders are respected because of their life experiences; the stories of elders deserve attention since Indian people believe things happen for a reason, even if that reason is not understood.**
- **Indian Christians deliberate about what Jesus' coming to give abundant life to all means for them; Scripture is read and interpreted in this light.**
- **Indian people use humor and funny stories to help put things in perspective and to indicate the real importance of the situation.**
- **Indians are largely an oral people; in discussion, listening is important, as are oral traditions.**
- **Women exercise a certain leadership in Indian communities, and can use their position to raise matters for public discussion whether or not they hold positions of formal leadership.**

Arabs and Middle Easterners 29

Arabs and Middle Easterners have immigrated to the United States since the late 19th century. More came in the latter part of the 20th century. They include people from territories or ethnic groups such as Palestinians and Armenians, or countries as diverse as Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Lybia, Tunisia, Turkey, Morocco, northern Sudan and Yemen. Many Middle Eastern countries were colonized by European powers after World War I when the Ottoman Empire disintegrated and those powers were expanding their empires and searching for supplies of oil which proved to be abundant in certain parts of the Middle East and North Africa.

Arabs and Middle Easterners sometimes may have a love-hate relationship to the United States. They have traditionally come to this country for economic opportunities or education. Some who have recently arrived in the United States are displaced and in exile from their homeland because of political pressures and developments or religious fundamentalism there. Our freedom and opportunity are valued by some, but are seen as morally corrupting by others. Many intensely dislike United States' close ties to Israel, and the United States is frequently perceived not to treat Israel, the Palestinians, and Middle Eastern countries fairly and justly. American. treatment of countries such as Egypt, Iran, and Iraq during the Cold War is viewed by some with disapproval. What interest the United States has shown in Middle Eastern countries is often simply viewed as a cynical, self-interested quest to control its oil resources. Arabs and Middle Easterners often bring attitudes and perceptions about the United States and Europe which are common in the Middle East with them when they come to the United States.

Although most Arabs and Middle Easterners are Muslims, some are Christians. Many Muslims appreciate American religious pluralism and take advantage of it to practice their faith. But they also have experienced some harassment, suspicion, and even violence, especially after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Too often, they have simply been identified with Al Qaeda, the terrorist organization of Osama bin Laden. Arab Christians often come from churches in the Middle East that date back as far as the first century apostles, although missionaries started some Protestant churches in the 19th century. These Middle Eastern churches have endured living in minority status for centuries in Muslim countries where they were often not allowed to evangelize openly. Christian immigrants report some religious discrimination against them in certain countries. Palestinians have immigrated here because of the particular economic and political pressures, and violence caused by the ongoing conflict between the Palestinian people and Israel, especially since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza after the 1967 war.

The marks of public discussion among Arabs and Middle Easterners tend to include the following:

- **Truth is recognized by what accords with their common experience, and by a correspondence between what a person says and does. It is also recognized if it comes from a credible source, such as the Bible, their church, or a person they trust.**
- **People test truth by concrete personal experience, or by the trustworthiness and integrity of its source.**
- **All members can participate in discussion and share their ideas.**

Some—but not all—women may be reluctant to participate because of more traditional cultural patterns. Sometimes a leader will encourage participation of reluctant women and others by asking each person to state their opinion about whatever is being discussed. People who are uncomfortable speaking up publicly may speak to others privately, such as the pastor or the pastor's spouse.

- **Speaking up spontaneously is a matter of personal interest in the discussion.**
- **Participation is expected to serve the cause for which discussion is held.**
- **It is important to keep an open mind in a discussion, to listen graciously to others, and to tolerate diverse opinions even when there is disagreement. There is a sense of duty to promote understanding of different points of view, as well as flexibility to listen and work with others.**
- **Discussions can include sharp disagreements between individuals, which sometimes may be bluntly expressed.**
- **It is sometimes acceptable to directly challenge others in a discussion. There is a growing sense that "your friend is someone who corrects you" among Arabs and Middle Easterners in the United States.**
- **Both ideas and the people who express them are important. There is a sense of extended family that encourages consideration for others and for relationships. After arguments, others mediate reconciliation with the opposing parties, if necessary, which is helped by family and community connections.**
- **Some things may not be discussed in order to avoid arguments people don't want to have. Some people may refuse to join some discussions about matters they oppose.**
- **Strong feelings, opinions, and beliefs may be expressed in a discussion; passionate discussion and disagreement is acceptable. Expressing strong feelings, opinions, or beliefs shows that the speaker cares about what he or she is talking about. Usually, this does not threaten important relationships with others or divide the community. Beyond certain levels of intensity, however, expressing strong feelings is seen to be irrational, and others may intervene.**
- **There are no limits to how long someone may speak in a discussion. However, people may criticize someone who they feel is trying to control a discussion.**
- **Discussion of issues tends to continue until a consensus emerges, or until a decision is required. Some decisions may be put off for a time if the group is unsure of what to do or if there is intense disagreement.**

Cambodians

30

Cambodians come from the Southeast Asian country of Cambodia, with approximately 8 million citizens, most of whom speak the Khmer language. Although 95 percent of Cambodians in the country are Buddhists, the rest are of other faiths, including Christians. Cambodia is a former French colony which was became independent in 1953 as the French became increasingly preoccupied with an armed rebellion in neighboring Vietnam that defeated French forces in 1954. After 1970, anti-Communist wars in Vietnam and Laos fought by the United States, Vietnamese and Laotian allies against Communist North Vietnam and its allies spilled over into Cambodia.

As American forces withdrew from Southeast Asia in defeat in 1975, the Communist Khmer Rouge defeated Cambodian armed forces and took over the country. Instituting a policy of radical socialist equality, the Khmer Rouge under leader Pol Pot ordered all residents out of cities and towns into the countryside in order to build up Cambodian agriculture in what was in reality a vast network of forced labor camps. Because of both the hard life of forced labor and the brutality of the Khmer Rouge, between one and two and a half million people either died of exhaustion or disease, or were tortured and killed by the regime. An armed conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam in 1978 resulted in mass starvation, but also freed many people from labor camps who then fled to refugee camps in Thailand. Pol Pot stepped down as leader in 1979 and disappeared from public view in Thailand.

In 1991, an international treaty brought Khmer Rouge rule to an end and provided for the U.N. supervision of democratic elections in 1993. The Khmer Rouge, meanwhile, continued to fight the government from the jungle. A Khmer Rouge military commander arrested Pol Pot in 1997 for the execution of a colleague and his family whom Pot suspected of cooperating with the government. He was tried and convicted by the Khmer Rouge, and sentenced to life in prison. He died under house arrest in 1998, never having been brought to justice by an international court for his crimes against humanity. Khmer Rouge forces were later integrated into the Cambodian armed forces. In 2003, genocide trials of Khmer Rouge members accused of crimes against humanity began in Cambodia following an agreement between the government and the United Nations.

Although most Cambodians returned to their homes after the 1991 treaty, about 137, 000 Cambodians immigrated to the United States by 2000. Some of them became Christians in Thai refugee camps or later in the U.S.

The marks of public conversation among Cambodian Christians include:

- **Truth is determined by consensus through discussion undertaken with faith in God, and informed by prior experience.**
- **It is important to keep an open mind in a discussion, to hear the views of every person, and to see where the discussion is going. Faith in God helps to keep one's mind open. But some people may adopt the opinions of respected members to continue good relations with them.**
- **Ideas are important for some, but others will follow the opinions of people with whom they have had good relations in the past. People may not trust what someone says if they have had previously bad experiences with that person.**

- **People change their minds in a discussion when it becomes clear that something else is right, and when their faith in God leads them to change.**
- **People weigh the opinions of others on the basis of their prior experience with them, their conduct, and its consequences. Where others stand in relation to the majority in the discussion also matters.**
- **Everyone who comes to a discussion may participate in it. Whether they actively participate depends upon their interest in the issue and whether they have something to contribute.**
- **Silence in a discussion may indicate a variety of things. Some people have been taught not to be assertive in public. If they disagree with the views of others, they may express that privately to those they trust. But old cultural norms are changing. Others may be silent out of respect for other participants, or because they may either agree with what is being said or have no opinion.**
- **The views of elders are respected in a discussion.**
- **People seek recognition to speak in a discussion by raising their hands.**
- **There are no expectations about how long someone should speak in a discussion. But, people should say only what is important and not waste others' time.**
- **People usually speak for themselves, although they may occasionally speak for others who are reluctant to speak in a discussion.**
- **Although people may occasionally challenge others openly and directly in a discussion, there is some fear that this may cause others to lose face in the congregation and create a personal conflict that is hard to resolve.**
- **Disagreements in a discussion are seen as divisive for the community, and tend to be avoided. People focus on what is good for the community rather than on their personal views.**
- **Majorities prevail for decisions if a consensus is not reached. Sometimes, a minority may leave the congregation if they feel strongly about their position.**
- **Expressing strong feelings is permitted in a discussion if a view is important to the community. But, if it's just a personal opinion, people may be reluctant to express such feelings since it may cause others to lose face, split the group, and be seen by others as egoistic and disrespectful. People must use good judgment about expressing feelings.**
- **"Venting" feelings is often seen as interfering with one's ability to reason.**
- **Respect in a discussion is shown by using polite speech, listening carefully, and by body language and facial expression. Disrespect is shown by speaking loudly, not listening to others, using lots of gestures, and by interrupting others.**
- **Women may defer to men in a discussion, but women are also starting to participate more. There is respect for the wisdom of age and experience, but also for those who show the ability to lead others.**
- **Consensus or decisions are reached when argument stops and people tend to agree** with each other.

Chinese 31

Chinese began coming to the United States in the mid-19th century and have come in several waves of immigration. There are, therefore, groups of Chinese with various kinds of historical experiences and different lengths of experience and familiarity with the dominant Anglo culture. Initially employed as laborers in the construction of railroads and in mining in the West, some Chinese eventually migrated all the way to the East Coast. Discrimination against the Chinese forced them to live primarily in densely packed, segregated urban neighborhoods often called "China Towns." Opportunities for assimilation into the dominant Anglo society were very limited, and elements of Chinese culture and Chinese languages helped these communities to survive and adapt to America. There are two main dialects of the Chinese language—Cantonese and Mandarin—and often those Chinese who speak one dialect neither speak nor understand the other.

Later waves of immigration came because of political turmoil, war, and revolution in China during the early and mid-20th centuries. The transfer of political sovereignty over the British colony of Hong Kong to China occurred in the late 1990s, and Chinese people who were able to do so migrated elsewhere, including Canada and the United States. Partly because of the activities of Christian missionaries and the growth of Chinese-led Christian churches in China and Hong Kong, some Chinese in the United States are Christians.

The marks of public conversation among Chinese Christians tend to include the following:

- **Truth is recognized and is determined by consensus when everyone agrees.**
- **Discussion of issues tends to continue until a consensus emerges; things are put off if people cannot reach agreement. If an initial approach to a problem does not appear to be good, the community knows it needs to try something else.**
- **In discussion, a person's arguments are more or less convincing depending on how reasonably and economically they match means to an objective need, make sense, are consistent with the experience of the listener and the community, and are argued in an articulate manner.**
- **People test opinions on the basis of past experience, by a sense of what is good for the community, and by a long-term view of a course of action.**
- **In discussion, relationships matter; people seek decisions that are good for the community and that tend to preserve or enhance its relationships.**
- **Everyone who wants to can speak in a discussion; women are equal to men, and the young are also entitled to speak.**
- **In discussion, wisdom is respected; it is understood as something learned from experience and accords with what is good for the community; the wise tend to think from various perspectives and judge on the basis of experience.**
- **Reason is respected in discussion; people look for an idea they can all accept to solve a problem.**
- **Expression of emotion is accepted in discussion as long as the issue is resolved; people try to separate personal emotions from the issue under discussion.**

- **The views of elders are respected; people do not openly or directly disagree with elders although they might disagree indirectly by saying something like, "What you say is true, but this is also true…." The young do not always express their opinions in front of the elders out of respect for them.**
- **People in congregations tend to judge people and things partly on a sense of what is pleasing to God; Chinese Christians distinguish things which are culturally Chinese, things which are culturally American, and things that are "biblical." But they also recognize that not all issues are clear in Scripture.**
- **People change their minds about an issue when they are persuaded by the rest of the group or when they approve a decision for the good of the community, even though they privately may hold a different opinion on the matter.**
- **Disagreements over an issue or a policy lead to discussion aimed at understanding the issue more clearly; the give-and-take of discussion can lead to consensus.**
- **People respect others whose opinions differ from their own and are spoken out of conviction.**
- **People avoid direct confrontation with others with whom they may disagree; the Chinese do not consider themselves skilled at handling open conflict. Those who are good at direct communication tend to be people who live in both the Chinese and Anglo worlds, although some who live primarily in a Chinese world and speak mostly Chinese can also be good at direct communication.**

The Hmong

32

The Hmong are an ethnic group living in parts of southern China and northern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar, where they are largely an agrarian society. During the 1960's, Hmong in Laos were recruited by the U.S. Government's Central Intelligence Agency to fight against Communist forces in Laos. When the war ended and U.S. forces were defeated in the mid 1970s, the Communists in Laos oppressed and persecuted the Hmong. Many Hmong fled to refugee camps in Thailand. Thousands of Hmong refugees were resettled in the United States. Over 270,000 Hmong currently live in the United States. Traditionally, the Hmong have 13 clan groups which retain importance among Hmong people in the United States.

The marks of discussion among Hmong Christians tend to include the following:

- **Hmong people judge what is true in a discussion by its relation to things they already know. The trustworthiness of the speaker also helps people judge what is true. Deliberate, careful discussion, listening, and investigation help them determine what is true. They also determine what is true by the results of trying a course of action decided in a discussion.**
- **People tend to listen to their leaders and pastors, but anyone may question them about the issue in order to understand it and the actions the leaders may decide to take. Everyone is encouraged to speak up regardless of clan. Elders play key roles in leadership on cultural matters. They sometimes may play a role in congregational discussion, and are respected.**
- **Hmong people value consistency between word and action. People respect the leadership of elders, but if there is inconsistency between anyone's word and their action, they lose respect and credibility.**
- **People's opinions are weighed according to the consistency between their word and their actions. The views of people who speak rationally and calmly are respected.**
- **People should keep an open mind in a discussion, especially on serious issues. All views and suggestions in a discussion are appreciated. If people are not open-minded the community suffers, and it cannot accomplish what the people want.**
- **People should change their minds in a discussion when someone else has more information or has a better idea than they do, or when it is apparent that a majority support another way or opinion. People should support things for the sake of the community and not stand primarily for themselves.**
- **Direct and open challenges to other people occur occasionally in discussion, but are not welcome.**
- **Open disagreement is discouraged. It is perceived as attacking the person with whom one disagrees and disrupting the community. People who disagree openly are questioned. Some young people will disagree in order to get more discussion of an issue. Disagreements that go on**

without resolution may result either in continuing a discussion at another time, or in taking a vote.

- **It is not okay to express strong feelings in a discussion. It may be seen either as a personal attack (especially if it involves anger) or as hiding something. When people express strong feelings, it may or may not be seen to interfere with the ability to reason clearly and carefully.**
- **Silence in a discussion is taken as assent. But some people who may disagree with others or with the decisions of a majority may talk to leaders privately.**
- **Respect is shown by a consistency between one's own thought and action, speaking politely, listening well, not interrupting others, and avoiding eye-contact. It is also shown by waiting for others to offer their hand. People are expected to respect the elders even when they disagree with them. Disrespect is shown by disruptive behavior, interrupting others, showing anger, smiling while speaking, moving physically closer to someone, not offering hospitality, and failing to dress appropriately for a discussion or meeting.**
- **Elders are respected in a discussion; their advice is often seen as helpful.**
- **Meetings are scheduled with starting and ending times, although these are not always respected. Meetings may be continued later to get a resolution or decision.**
- **Men tend to participate more actively in discussions than women, reflecting a traditional leadership role for men in Hmong culture. Among the young, however, this is breaking down in the U.S., and younger women may be just as likely to participate in discussions as men.**

Indonesians

33

Indonesians come from the nation of Indonesia, a vast archipelago comprised of about 17,500 islands both large and small, 6,000 of which are inhabited and 1,000 of which are permanently settled. The country stretches from Southeast Asia to northern Australia. Indonesia is the world's fourth most populous country at more than 240 million people. The country has four main ethnic groups along with several smaller ones. Eighty-six percent of its population is Muslim; about nine percent is Christian.

Europeans imported spices from this region, which they called the "East Indies," during the Middle Ages. When Eastern trade routes to Venice through the Mediterranean were closed off by the Turks, it was one of the reasons Europeans began to explore other possible routes beginning with the westward voyages of Columbus from Spain in 1492. Spices were again imported to Europe in quantity by the Portuguese beginning in the 16th century. The Dutch arrived in the early 17th century and formed the Dutch East India Company which controlled the spice trade until 1800, when the government of the Netherlands dissolved the company and created a colonial government. Dutch administration was interrupted by the Japanese occupation during World War II, but resumed after the war.

Independence was granted to the new country of Indonesia in 1949, and K. S. Sukarno became its founding President. Beginning in 1958, the country was shaken by a series of political crises. There were unsuccessful rebellions on Sumatra, Sulawesi, West Java, and other islands. The national constituent assembly also failed to develop a constitution. In 1959, President Sukarno dealt with these situations by instituting authoritarian rule. A coup was attempted in 1965, and was opposed by the Army; instability and violence ensued during the following year, which included a violent purge of the Communist Party of Indonesia. About a half-million people were killed during this time. In 1966, power was transferred from President Sukarno to an Army leader, General Suharto, who won a series of elections to the presidency from 1973 to 1998. An Asian financial crisis in 1997-1998 seriously affected the Indonesian economy; its Gross Domestic Product actually fell more than 13 percent, and unemployment rose to nearly 20 percent. Its economy recovered until the international financial crisis of 2008.

European missionaries, both Protestants and Catholics, evangelized in the East Indies beginning from the arrival of the Dutch. These missionaries included German Lutherans, and today there are a dozen Lutheran denominations in Indonesia. Indonesians come to the United States primarily for economic or educational purposes, although some Christians may come to escape occasional religious persecution against Christians in Indonesia.

The marks of public discussion among Indonesian Christians tend to include:

- **Truth is discerned by a thorough discussion, by assessing what is good for the congregation and has majority support.**
- **Everyone is entitled and encouraged to participate in a discussion, speaking to their concerns. People express their own opinions in a discussion.**
- **People often express their opinions in discussion, but it is okay not to have an opinion on an issue. Some may be**

uncomfortable speaking in public. Others may not care about or understand the issue being discussed, and may keep silent.

- **In a discussion, the ideas someone expresses are usually more important than who is speaking.**
- **People's opinions are weighed by listening carefully to them and deciding whether they know what they are talking about or not, and judging whether what they advocate is good for the congregation.**
- **People seek consensus in a discussion focused on what is best for the congregation or the group. They may postpone making a decision until consensus is reached. Consensus is usually established when no one wants to discuss a matter further, or by a vote.**
- **It is important to keep an open mind in a discussion, although this doesn't always happen and may harm the congregation when it doesn't.**
- **It is okay to have strong disagreements in a discussion, although they should be expressed politely and accepted by others. It is the discussion leader's job to mediate disagreements. Such challenge is a normal part of the discussion process. It is not seen as something that necessarily divides the community.**
- **It is okay to openly or directly challenge others in a discussion. It is part of the culture for people to express their opinions. But, open and direct challenges to others can also create difficulty for relationships in the church.**
- **It can sometimes be okay to express strong feelings in a discussion. This sometimes interferes with the ability to reason clearly and carefully. However, with time people calm down. This may also, however, affect others significantly.**
- **People should change their minds in a discussion when there is a consensus in another direction about what is best for the group, and little support for one's own positions.**
- **People generally speak for three minutes or less, and make about two points in a turn. This helps make discussions manageable.**
- **Elders are generally leaders of the community, and people respect their opinions. But everyone has the same rights as elders in a discussion. Sometimes committees are formed for certain tasks which elders may chair, but which may include others.**
- **Young and old, and men and women have the same rights to participate in discussions, although women may be more reluctant to speak up.**
- **Respect is shown in a discussion by trying to understand others as long as it is clear that their ideas for the church are aimed for the betterment of all. Respect is also shown by not interrupting, keeping a calm tone, not attacking others personally, and not taking disagreements outside the meeting.**

Japanese

34

Many Japanese Americans have ancestors who came to this country in the early 20th century and settled on the West Coast and in other places. During World War II, the U.S. Government doubted the loyalty of Japanese Americans and rounded them up and imprisoned them in detention camps. Their personal property and businesses were also confiscated. They were released from detention after the war and allowed to piece their lives back together. In 2000, there were about 800,000 Japanese Americans. Also after World War II, many Japanese companies began to do a lot of business in the United States. Some of these companies send employees who are Japanese citizens to the U.S. to live and work here for varying lengths of time. In Japan, some Japanese were converted to Christianity by American Protestant missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The marks of public discussion among Japanese Christians tend to include:

- **Truth is determined by how much common sense people make in a discussion. Generally, people are trusted to say things they feel or know are true. Sometimes it is difficult to determine truth. Complex judgments are made according to how claims are related to the Bible, to events, to the content of the ideas, and to people's known commitments to the church.**
- **Both the ideas expresses and the person speaking are important in a discussion. Contributions of ideas are always good. Women like to build bonds in the group.**
- **People take turns in a discussion; if they have thoughtful opinions, they speak up and others do not interrupt. If people are making sense, people listen; if not, they are interrupted.**
- **Most people participate in a discussion depending upon the issue; people are encouraged to speak up. People appreciate hearing as many ideas as possible, even when they themselves have no opinions.**
- **People usually express their own opinions in a discussion, rather than speak for others.**
- **People weigh others' opinions by how much sense they make in light of the common good.**
- **It is very important to keep an open mind in a discussion. An open mind does not get too emotional. Members of the group help others to keep an open mind.**
- **Discussion aims at consensus. Reaching consensus sometimes is hard. So long as there is no vigorous dissent, the group will go ahead.**
- **People should change their minds when a majority is apparent. But dissent is still respected.**
- **People may express strong disagreements in a discussion, but these usually are not directed at the individual but against opinions they express. The group or its leaders try to resolve any personal conflicts that occur to keep things calm and keep the group together.**
- **It is okay to directly and openly challenge others in a discussion. Diversity of opinions is good. Direct challenges may**

expose people's hidden agendas, which can then be dealt with more directly.

- **To handle disagreements, people listen carefully, and focus on the result and benefit to the group from different courses of action. Disagreements do not necessarily divide the community.**
- **It is okay to express strong emotions and opinions in a discussion among Japanese in American culture. But it was not acceptable in traditional Japanese culture, especially among men.**
- **Expressing strong feelings may interfere with a person's ability to reason in a discussion because they may no longer be focusing on the issue but rather getting personal. Strong language may create social chaos. Such disruption is rare, however.**
- **Respect in a discussion is shown by listening to others, watching one's own language. Sometimes use of the Japanese language helps to show degrees of respect. Disrespect is shown by ignoring others, quitting and not coming to meetings of the group.**

Koreans

35

Koreans are a cultural group which is believed to have migrated to the Korean Peninsula, next to China, from Central Asia in waves beginning in about 8000 B.C. Korean independence was compromised in 1905 when it was made a protectorate by Japan, which then annexed Korea in 1910. An organized Korean resistance movement against Japan began in 1919. After Japan was defeated in World War II, Korea was divided between the Communist North and the democratic and capitalist South in 1948. Unresolved political issues and tensions erupted into war in 1950 when North Korea invaded South Korea. The U.N. and the U.S. intervened in the conflict on behalf of South Korea, while China intervened on behalf of North Korea. An armistice halting hostilities signed in 1953 remains in effect; there is still no permanent peace treaty.

Since the Korean War, South Korea has developed a strong industrial and consumer economy and is adept at international trade. Koreans began to emigrate to other parts of the world for economic reasons, however, as early as the 1860s. Korean immigration into the U.S. began about 1903, but increased significantly after the U.S. Congress passed the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. In 2000, there were more than 1.2 million Koreans in the U.S.

Catholic missionaries began to evangelize in Korea in the 18th century; Protestant missionaries began to evangelize Koreans in the 19th century. Today, South Korea has indigenous Christian churches and institutions. According to the 2005 South Korean census, about 30 percent of South Koreans are Christians, of which two-thirds are Protestants and one-third are Roman Catholic. About 23 percent of South Koreans are Buddhists.

The marks of public discussion among Korean Christians tend to include:

- **Truth is known by discerning the most convincing arguments in a discussion, and by considering what is best for the group, by listening to the wisdom and experience of elders, and discerning a consensus when possible.**
- **It is very important to keep an open mind in a discussion, and to listen to the views of all participants. Diverse opinions are valued.**
- **People should change their minds in a discussion when the group has analyzed an issue, they hear reasonable arguments for a different course of action, and it has become clear to many what would be best for the group. If there is no agreement, discussion may be continued later.**
- **Both ideas and the people who express them are important in a discussion. How people feel about an issue is important to the group, and sometimes that is more important than an idea if someone feels strongly about something.**
- **Elders are important to a discussion, and tend to set its direction. How they conduct themselves in discussions and elsewhere is an important example. Where young people predominate in a group, however, the young have more influence in discussions.**
- **Everyone may participate in a discussion and should have a chance to speak to the issues. Anyone who is responsible for dealing with an issue or who has an interest in it should speak up. Some**

people who are inexperienced with public discussion or formal ways of dealing with issues may need to learn to trust others and the discussion process in order to say what they think. Responsible leaders should encourage such people. For some, a Confucian attitude that people should not talk too much or dominate a discussion may limit—but not eliminate—their participation.

- **It is okay not to have an opinion about issues in a discussion. In rare instances, people may be reluctant to express their views or feelings. Others may keep silent if they disagree with where the discussion is going.**
- **The pastor initiates discussion, but people speak up when they have a view to express. A group may go through all the participants in a regular order in order to hear everyone's opinion if the leader wants to do that.**
- **People should speak for five minutes or less, or else the discussion tends to lose focus. But not all groups enforce this rule. Yet, people who don't express some substance may get cut short by the leader.**
- **Meetings and discussions have starting and ending times.**
- **People usually speak for themselves in a discussion, although sometimes they may speak for those not present.**
- **Because people are both sensitive to feelings and emotional themselves, they may be reluctant to express feelings in a discussion and usually try not to hurt others' feelings. The expression of strong feelings in a discussion makes others uncomfortable. Hurting others' feelings may cause them to leave the congregation.**
- **Expressing strong feelings in a discussion does not necessarily interfere with someone's ability to reason. How much emotion people express depends upon how much they are concerned about the issue. Persuading others of one's views in a discussion may be more effective if one gets emotional about one's ideas. But if someone doesn't express those ideas clearly, people will question what logic gave rise to the feelings.**
- **People are hesitant to directly challenge others in a discussion if their opinion may hurt others. They will do so, however, in certain settings, and disagree with others' ideas without attacking the person.**
- **It is sometimes okay to have strong disagreements in a discussion, but participants must accept the responsibility of dealing with others' hurt feelings if they occur. The danger is that some may leave the church. Sometimes, strong disagreements may be discussed privately with third parties rather than publicly in a discussion.**
- **Disagreements in a discussion are dealt with by having more discussion, where people try to understand different points of view better, and proponents try to persuade others of their point of view. Discussion may continue until there either is a resolution, other options present themselves, the original positions are dropped, or a better idea emerges.**
- **Disagreement does not necessarily divide the community. It depends on the issue**

and how people handle it. Some issues are more critical to the life of the community or some people in it. Some small issues may be more divisive than big ones.

- **Issues in discussions are often decided by votes.**
- **Respect in a discussion is shown by using polite forms of conversation, affirming others' ideas and referring to them tactfully, listening attentively, disagreeing respectfully, and praying together. Disrespect is shown by using a loud voice, by one's body language and facial expression, avoiding eye contact, directly challenging the person with whom one disagrees rather than their ideas, and by leaving the discussion or the church.**
- **Men and women participate equally in discussions. Elders are respected, but they may feel neglected if most of the participants are young. Good ideas in discussions can come from anyone.**
- **Decisions are reached when a consensus is recognized through verbal agreement and affirming gestures. Votes are used to decide issues in formal meetings, and may affirm an already understood consensus.**

Laotians 36

The Lao people come from the Southeast Asian country of Laos. Originally descendent from the Tai people of southern China and Vietnam beginning thousands of years ago, they settled in Laos and were a largely rural people. Originally Buddhist, some Lao people have become Christians. After the Communist takeover of the country in the 1970s as result of the war in Southeast Asia, Lao people were oppressed and thousands of them began migrating to the United States through refugee camps in Thailand, looking for freedom. There were nearly 170,000 Laotians in the U.S. in 2000, settled primarily in urban areas.

The marks of discussion among Laotians tend to include the following:

- **Laotians know what is true in a discussion by discernment of the Spirit. They listen for God in others' experiences. True opinions are met with enthusiasm. Opinions which tend to get things out of proportion are met with skepticism.**
- **Everyone has an opportunity to say what they think about an issue. Speakers take turns as they are interested to speak. They are encouraged to keep their comments positive.**
- **Discussion seeks the consensus of the group, which is shown by common assent to courses of action and their implementation.**
- **There is respect not only for ideas but also for people and their experiences. Some deference is shown for community leaders.**
- **People consider the perspectives of others open-mindedly. All come from different backgrounds and experiences. They respect others' experiences and opinions. They may sometimes object that someone's experiences have been overlooked.**
- **Opinions in a discussion are judged by how they accord with Scripture. Comments that focus on unity and church growth are valued more than self-centered expressions or more personal issues.**
- **People should change their minds in a discussion when an opinion is in accord with Scripture, and when the Spirit leads a person to change one's mind.**
- **In a discussion, people often give their own opinions, but may sometimes speak for others when they are not present. These two cases are explicitly distinguished in a discussion.**
- **Challenging others is okay in order to clarify facts.**
- **It is okay to disagree about what the community should do. Disagreements do not necessarily divide the community. Others try to understand the differing perspectives of disagreeing parties, seek reasons for the disagreements, and find the common ground. They also attend to the disagreeing individuals and their relationships.**
- **Expression of emotion is acceptable in a discussion and seen as human. Anger, however, interferes with reasoning and is not seen as benefiting others or as a**

constructive emotion leading toward solutions to problems.

- **Lao culture respects older people and their leadership. This sometimes inhibits the participation of the young if older people are present. But older people then encourage the younger to participate. Elders' wives often participate in discussions.**
- **Respect is shown by agreeing with others because one is convinced of their views, and by asking questions to clarify what someone said. Disrespect is shown by interrupting others, walking away from discussion, or by not showing up for a discussion.**
- **People seldom speak for more than a few minutes, although there are no time restrictions to how long they should speak. The Lao sense of time also puts no limits on the length of a discussion.**

South Asians

37

South Asians come from a region that includes the countries of India, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives. This is a region of ancient civilizations with long histories, including a period in which Muslim Mughal rulers controlled large parts of the Indian sub-continent. More recently most of the region was a colony of the British Empire up until 1947, when India and Pakistan gained independence. The British were largely responsible for creating the identity of Indians as Indians through unified governance of the region using the English language in what had been a variety of smaller territories speaking a number of native languages, but sharing a cultural background rooted in the Hindu religion as well as in Buddhism.

Muslim encounter with India has helped shape Indian history and society in recent centuries. The 16th century Mughal ruler, Akbar, was interested in bringing religious unity to the plurality of religions in his empire, which included Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians, and Christians. He created both a climate of tolerance and mutual exchange among people in the different religions which eventually broke down. Later, the British created and exploited tensions between Muslims and Hindus which fostered distrust and division within the independence movement of the Indian National Congress Party led by Hindu leaders Gandhi and Nehru and the Muslim leader, Jinnah. Jinnah pressed Gandhi, Nehru and the British for partition of the country, and a late attempt by the British to negotiate unity failed. The day of independence in 1947 brought into existence two countries—India and Pakistan—and gave rise to disorderly migration and a period of significant civil unrest. Today, India is often called "the world's largest democracy." Muslim Pakistan, whose two territories were separated by 2000 miles, eventually divided when Bangladesh in the east became independent. Dispute over the territory of Kashmir impedes Indian-Pakistani relations and feeds mutual distrust.

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan are now beset with civil war and international terrorism by fundamentalist Muslims of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Western powers led by the U.S. have intervened militarily in Afghanistan. Pakistan fears Indian influence over post-war Afghanistan.

Sri Lanka gained independence from England in 1948. Civil war between minority Tamils in the North and majority Sinhalese in the South began in 1983. The forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were decisively defeated by the government in 2009. The conflict caused tens of thousands of deaths and created hundreds of thousands of refugees; 200,000 people alone have sought refuge in the West.

Christians are a small minority in India. India's 25 million Christians are only 3 percent of the population. But Christians have been in India since the First century, when the Apostle Thomas, thought to have arrived in A.D. 52, is said to have evangelized in Kerala in the southwestern part of India. Other missionaries arrived with European powers who colonized parts of India, beginning with the Portuguese in the 16th century (Jesuits took part in Akbar's inter-religious dialogues) and later with the British. Today, India has numerous Christian churches which govern their own affairs, including a Lutheran church and theological college. Lutheran presence began when Bartholomaeus Ziegenbal arrived from Germany in 1706 to evangelize among Tamil people. Christians and other religious minorities

occasionally are subjected to persecution by fundamentalist Hindus.

South Asians commonly come to the U.S. for economic opportunities and education, but some also flee war, civil unrest, and occasional religious persecution, and some have been refugees.

The marks of discussion among South Asians tend to include the following:

- **South Asians know what is true in a discussion by whether something is in accord with both practical experience and Scripture. Contrasting opinions help the community discern the truth, and some of them may lead people to change their minds.**
- **People's opinions are weighed by how they contribute to a discussion and by their consistency with Scripture. Participants may respect others' opinions, but may also respectfully disagree.**
- **People should change their minds in a discussion when they are convinced by another perspective.**
- **People should keep an open mind in a discussion. It is very important to get a broad perspective and see things from others' point of view.**
- **Members may raise an issue and urge people to get together to decide what must be done about it. This happens either at formal meetings or informal meetings such as Bible studies or house gatherings. Informal discussions may occur in a context of Bible study and prayer.**
- **Leadership of discussion varies with the situation. Formal leaders, ordinary lay people, or pastors may all lead discussions, and frequently do so at the Pastor's invitation. Each leader has a personal style.**
- **All people participate in discussion, including children and young people. People speak up if they have something to say, reflecting on the issue in light of the Bible and social reality.**
- **It is okay not to have an opinion about something.**
- **Some people may be silent during discussion because they are reflecting on what is being said. Others may be silent in the discussion but might talk privately later.**
- **Generally, the thought is more important than the thinker who says it. But the views of elders tend to get more respect, and some people may listen more closely to certain others.**
- **Elders are respected and valued for their education, experience, profession, and wisdom, as well as their age. Their views are given additional weight in discussions.**
- **Time is unimportant in determining either the length of individual speeches or of the whole discussion.**
- **It is okay to openly and directly challenge others in a discussion, although people shouldn't do so arrogantly. They may challenge a point of view.**
- **It is okay to have strong disagreements in a discussion; people have personal opinions even about Scripture.**

- **Leaders try not to impose their own view on others in a discussion so that a variety of contrasting or disagreeing opinions can be brought out for consideration. Everyone is free to have their own views.**
- **Disagreements do not necessarily divide the community, although some may walk out of a meeting if they disagree with others.**
- **Numbers of people do not matter much in a discussion; people search for consensus.**
- **People may express strong emotions in a discussion. People will think about this; they are concerned about others' feelings.**
- **In a discussion, relational factors among the participants matter more than talking, deciding, or acting for their own sakes.**
- **Expressing strong feelings in a discussion does not interfere with a person's ability to reason clearly or carefully.**
- **People show respect in a discussion by staying silent while others are talking, and by valuing others' opinions. People show disrespect by talking while others have the floor or carrying on side conversations, ignoring a speaker and taking discussion elsewhere than on topics earlier speakers were discussing.**
- **Both men and women lead and participate in discussions, although older people lead more often.**
- **Consensus is reached or decisions are made based on people's responses, body language, and the leaders' summary of his or her sense of the meeting. At formal meetings, people vote on decisions.**

Thai 38

Thai people come from the Southeast Asian nation of Thailand, a country of about 65 million people with a history of toleration toward people of different cultural and national origins. That Thailand is the only country in the region that was never colonized by Western powers has been attributed in part to the diplomatic skills of its political leadership. (Thailand was, however, occupied by Japan during World War II.) Thai are proud of being a free people. Thailand became an ally of the United States during the wars in Southeast Asia in the 1960s and 1970s, and also gave refuge to hundreds of thousands of refugees from Laos and Cambodia. In the 1970s Thailand began a two-decade long process to change its form of government from a monarchy to a democracy with the King as head of state, and experienced political turbulence during this time. Religiously, nearly 95 percent of Thai are Buddhist, while less than one percent are Christians despite the evangelism of Christian missionaries beginning in the 19th century. There were about 150,000 Thai in the United States in the year 2000, most of whom immigrated after 1965 for economic opportunities, for education, or for family-related reasons. Some Thai have become Christians in the United States.

The marks of public discussion among Thai Christians tend to include:

- **Truth is determined through the discussion and exchange of ideas considered on their merits. But the views of trusted and respected members also help people understand what is true.**
- **Everyone can participate in a discussion. People feel responsible for the church's affairs, especially on important issues. People speak up when they have something to say.**
- **Pastoral leaders lead discussions confidently, diplomatically, and politely.**
- **It is important to keep an open mind in a discussion, and to hear what the issue involves and listen to the different perspectives of other participants. People will keep an open mind until they are convinced otherwise.**
- **Both ideas and the people who express them are important in a discussion. The ideas of a respected person are given more weight in a discussion than those who are less respected. But anyone who speaks up shows they care about the community and the issue.**
- **People weigh others' opinions by what they think is right, by what is practical, and by whether they respect the person speaking.**
- **People change their minds in a discussion when they hear a different perspective that seems reasonable. When they have a minority viewpoint, they may also go along with the majority.**
- **People speak up when they are concerned and have something to say. In some settings the leader may have everyone speak in order that those who may be reluctant to talk will have a turn to speak.**
- **There are no customs about how long a person should speak in a discussion.**
- **The views of elders are respected in a discussion because of their wisdom, knowledge, experience, and their good Christian example.**
- **People often speak for themselves,**

although sometimes they may speak for others who are reluctant to speak publicly.

- **In some congregations it is okay for someone to openly and directly challenge other people; on others this is rarely done.**
- **It is not okay to have strong disagreements in a discussion that are openly expressed, as this may split the congregation. Pastoral leaders may stop the discussion and ask people to think and pray about why they are arguing. Leaders will try to keep the congregation together.**
- **Leaders try to handle disagreements in a discussion "like a family," by hearing everyone's point of view and everyone's voice.**
- **Strong disagreements in a discussion do not necessarily divide the community, but some people may leave the community if they feel strongly about an issue or alternative.**
- **In discussions there is a search for broad areas of agreement. It is more important to hear everyone's opinion and to find consensus than to have a majority simply prevail on an issue or a decision. There may be additional conversation and study of an issue at later discussions or meetings in order to seek wider agreement if an issue is not resolved.**
- **It is okay to express strong feelings in a discussion.**
- **Expressing strong feelings in a discussion does not interfere with one's ability to reason.**
- **Although both men and women, and young and old participate in discussions, in some settings the old are respected for their wisdom, experience, and knowledge, and some precedence may be given to the views of men.**
- **A consensus is reached when people talk supportively about the direction they want to go, and people are demonstrably pleased. Silence may indicate a lack of consensus.**
- **Respect in a discussion is shown by participating and contributing one's ideas, giving others the first opportunity to speak, being courteous, and one's gestures. Disrespect is shown by interrupting or not participating in a discussion.**

European Americans

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European Americans currently are the dominant cultural group in the United States. Their culture reflects the influence of the Europeans who colonized the American East Coast in the 17th and 18th centuries. Although the cultures of many European and other groups have all influenced American culture, the most important European cultural influence has been English until now.

European Americans are a mixture of several groups of Europeans who came to America over several centuries for a variety of reasons. The original English settlers came either for religious freedom or for economic gain. Other Europeans have come here for political or economic reasons, or because of war, famine, or religious or ethnic persecution in their homelands.

European American culture is as internally diverse as most other cultures. Being the dominant group, ongoing European American debates over several issues are important to Christians in an American multicultural church. One of these issues concerns the **proper place of ethnic and cultural diversity in national life**. The national motto of the United States, "one out of many,"[1] raises the question, "In what does the unity of the American people consist?" Some use the image of America as a "melting pot" in which different elements are melted down to create one substance in order to argue that immigrants should adopt European American culture and completely forsake the cultures of their ancestors. Others argue that the American people are really a mosaic of different cultures—a vision of unity in cultural diversity. (Without aiming directly to settle this debate, the ELCA addressed issues of immigration for the church in its Message, *Immigration* in 1998.[2])

This issue is related to the issue of **"race"** in the United States and how particular groups, such as African Americans and Blacks, have been treated. African Americans and Blacks were legally enslaved to European Americans for over two centuries until 1863, when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation giving many of them freedom. While European American Christians were divided about whether slavery was right, some persistently argued and worked to abolish slavery before 1863 along with free African Americans and Blacks like Frederick Douglass.[3] Others worked with a former slave named Sojourner Truth to help slaves to escape their masters. The outcome of the American Civil War of 1861—1865 ended the legal practice of slavery in the United States.

But a century of legal segregation and practical discrimination against African Americans and Blacks followed. These people not only differed from European Americans culturally, many European Americans also wrongly believed that there were essential biological differences between themselves and African Americans that both prevented their assimilation and justified their unequal treatment. It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that these practices of segregation and discrimination were legally ended by court rulings, leadership from Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, and congressional legislation. These changes resulted largely from a national campaign by African American and Black Christians led by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., aided by some European American Christians and Jews. Today, racist attitudes, behavior, and practices persist among many European Americans, and continue to affect many people of color in the United States. Some of these are manifested in the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of "White privilege" (see

Section 48). The ELCA spoke to the reality of race in America in its 1993 social statement, *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*,[4] and continues to address racism within this church.[5]

The religiously based movement for the civil rights of African Americans and Blacks is one example of another debated issue—**religion in civil society and national life**. European Americans value a person's freedom to believe and practice a religion to which their conscience calls them. But the Constitution of the United States requires some distance between government and all particular religions so that government avoids imposing upon anyone the requirements of any specific religion. Both how government policies affect religious organizations or individuals, and how religious organizations may legitimately try to influence public policies, are matters of ongoing cultural and political debate as well as legal interpretation by the courts.

Debates over **the purpose or calling of the American people** also are related to the role of religion in national life. While many people believe that the basic purpose of American society is to enable and protect individual freedom, since colonial times some European American Christians have argued that the United States is and ought to be "a city built on a hill" (Matthew 5:14)—an example on earth of God's coming kingdom. For them, this requires the United States to be a society of exceptional personal virtue and a just common life that embodies God's will as revealed in Scripture for the whole world to see. Some who take this view believe that these practices as they understand them should be written into law and strictly enforced.

European Americans have a distinctive culture with its own ways of engaging in public discussion about issues. The marks of public discussion for European Americans tend to include:[6]

- **Reality is divided between a relatively small area of facts and a relatively large area of values, which are seen to be in separate realms:**
  - **—Facts are seen as objective, a public matter, established by reason and logic, proven by science or verified by expert opinion;**
  - **—Values are seen as relative and subjective, a private matter, derived from personal experience or feelings, and supported by religion, tradition, and culture.**
- **Truth belongs naturally to certain ideas, and can be discovered by reason.**
- **No one has all the answers; people should keep an open mind.**
- **Ideas are tested by impartial reasoning that is not based on emotion; such reasoning considers all facts, ideas, reasons and other factors.**
- **Emotions interfere with the discovery of truth and should be minimized in discussion, although they convey the intensity of the speaker's feelings about what they say.**
- **Participants focus more on the ideas expressed than on the individuals who express them.**
- **No one is required to have a personal opinion on the topic discussed.**
- **Expressing a personal view is voluntary in discussion, and cannot be demanded.**
- **A participant in a discussion need not**

personally favor and argue for a point of view, but often acts as a spokesperson for that view or for others they know who hold it.

- **Obvious struggle in discussion is seen as divisive.**
- **Challenging others in discussion is avoided; it leads to a refusal to see another side of an issue.**

1 A translation of the Latin phrase, "E pluribus unum."
2 The Message on Immigration is found online at: *www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Messages/Immigration.aspx* (accessed 11/09/09).
3 For part of the story of Lutheran involvement in the issue of slavery by some African Americans and Anglo Americans alike, see Richard J. Perry, Jr., "African American Ethical Action: The Will to Build," in *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme, eds., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) 75–96.
4 The social statement is posted online at: *www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Race-Ethnicity-Culture.aspx* (accessed 11/09/09).
5 The ELCA has encouraged anti-racism training, and also introduced a new resource for congregations, *Troubling the Waters for Healing of the Church: A journey for White Christians from privilege to partnership*, (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2004). In 2008, a new study and discussion guide to the social statement, *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*, was posted on the ELCA's Web site at: *www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Race-Ethnicity-Culture/study-guide.aspx* (accessed 11/09/09).
6 This section is based partly on material in Thomas Kochman, *Black and White Styles in Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 1–73 and 89–96; discussion of facts and values is based on Patrick R. Keifert, Patricia Taylor Ellison, and Ronald W. Duty, *Growing Healthier Congregations*, (St. Paul: Church Innovations, 1997), B-29–B-31. Another accessible discussion of the fact/value split is found in Wayne C. Booth, *The Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 13–21.

Latinos

40

Latinos trace their ancestral and cultural heritage to Latin America—Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. In 2007, there were 45.5 million Latinos in the United States, making them the country's largest minority group at slightly over 15 percent of the population. Latinos live in virtually every county in all 50 states.

There is significant cultural and historical diversity among Latinos, although they tend to share more than the relatively common Spanish language. (Some Latino Americans may not even speak Spanish.) Latinos from the Caribbean—Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic—have cultural and religious influences from Africa, Spain, and island native tribes. These influences are reflected in music, diet, religious expression, and language. In Mexico, Central, and South America, however, the predominant cultural and religious influences are from Spain and the native Maya, Aztec, and Inca civilizations that flourished when Europeans arrived. Popular religious piety, although greatly shaped by the European Christian heritage, often also reflects influences of regional native religious practices. In some Atlantic and Caribbean coastal areas, African cultural and religious influences are again evident. Christian piety among Latinos can also reflect either traditional forms of Roman Catholicism, Protestant evangelicals, or older Protestant traditions like the Methodists or Lutherans. Latinos bring all this diversity with them when they come to the U.S.

Many Latinos are conscious of being a people of mixed genetic and cultural ancestry called *mestizo*. There continue to be, however, separate indigenous groups in various countries as well as small groups of people in the economic or political elites of various countries who claim a distinctly Spanish ancestry. In some Latin American countries, there are also groups who have roots in other countries in Europe and or in Asia. Latinos also include a group of people descendant from individuals who became U.S. citizens when the United States took control of territories from Mexico which are now part of the southwestern United States.

The island of Puerto Rico has a unique status because the island was acquired by the United States in a war with Spain. It is a commonwealth with some powers of self-rule, and is neither a U.S. territory nor one of the 50 states. Puerto Ricans have the right to travel to and from the island and to work freely in the United States. Many Puerto Ricans have settled on the U.S. mainland and maintain ties with family members on the island. There have been Lutheran congregations in Puerto Rico for over a century. Lutheran congregations may be found wherever Puerto Ricans have settled in the U.S. in large numbers.

Latinos immigrate to the United States for basically the same reasons other people do: because of political repression, persecution, civil and political conflict, or poverty and lack of economic opportunities in the countries from which they came.

The marks of public discussion among Latinos in the U.S. and Puerto Rico tend to include:

- **Truth emerges as the group reaches a consensus after open and free discussion.**
- **In discussion, people express their personal point of view.**
- **Discussion involves the expression of**

individuals and their ideas, which are understood to be a unity rather than distinct and separate.

- **Things people claim are true in discussion should be checked out independently.**
- **All individuals in the community are expected and encouraged to participate actively in discussions to contribute to the community consensus; some do so by listening and consenting to the consensus at which the community arrives rather than contributing independently.**
- **People change their minds when they are persuaded by another's argument, when something is seen to be in the interest of their community or church, or when several people tell them they are wrong.**
- **People are free to challenge each other in discussion when one is not convinced by what another person says so long as the challenge is made with respect to the person.**
- **Respect for others is shown by listening and trying to understand another's point of view, and by talking without selfishness and hatred.**
- **In discussion arguments are made with both the mind and the heart, and they appeal to both logic and the emotions; it is assumed that people feel strongly about the ideas they express. The expression of emotion must be kept within certain bounds, however, and people should not scream, get angry, or hurt others during discussion.**
- **People are expected to be open-minded during discussion, and leaders often work to encourage open-mindedness in order to arrive at a consensus.**
- **A minority that feels strongly about something may still press its case respectfully in the face of a majority that thinks otherwise.**
- **Fanaticism in both style and substance is discouraged because it is seen to contribute to disagreement that makes achieving consensus impossible. Such disagreement tends to split a community.**
- **People tend to believe that it is better to leave the community than to fight.**
- **People speak if they have something to say; everyone who wants to speak gets a turn to speak.**
- **People make a small number of points each time they speak; some points are made in some detail because discussion should include time for someone to explain a point they make. A turn to speak generally lasts about three to four minutes.**
- **There is a certain freedom to "change the subject" in a discussion to matters not related to what the discussion is primarily about. This is usually not welcome but generally tolerated to recognize and affirm the person's membership in the community. After a polite hearing, their points are often deferred for another discussion.**

Gender Matters in Conversation 41

Men and Women Talk and Hear Differently

While the focus of this field guide is on the way people in different cultures talk in public, men and women also tend to talk and hear somewhat differently in most cultures. This is clear when they are in separate groups. Common knowledge tells us there is a difference between "men's talk" and "women's talk" when they talk separately. These differences in style of conversation are easy to deal with when the genders talk in separate groups. But these differences tend to continue when groups of men and women talk together. It can sometimes be confusing and frustrating to people of both genders.

Why This Matters to the Church

If we are talking together as Christians cross-culturally, it is important to learn what we can about how both men and women talk in public. If we are to hear what all members of the body of Christ have to say and to discern where the Holy Spirit is leading the churches, we need to understand how to hear what both men and women are saying. And if we want to be heard, we also need to learn how to talk to people of the other gender in the way that they hear what we mean to say. (See 1 Corinthians 12:3-27) Part of that involves understanding how the other gender hears.

Avoid Over-generalizing

Much of what we know about how men and women talk with and hear each other has been shown in studies of a variety of cultures, although not all cultures have been studied. So, we need to be a little cautious. It is easy to over-generalize about all groups from existing knowledge gleaned largely from several of them. But there seem to be some common things that are *more or less true* for men and women of a number of cultural groups. Keep in mind that while these tendencies tend to be true for a variety of cultures, *there still may be variations between cultures within some range*.

Tendencies—Not Absolute Differences

Also keep in mind that these differences between men and women are *tendencies, not absolute distinctions*. The things which follow are *more or less* true for most men and most women, but *not all the time*. There are some women who talk in a style more like that of most men—at least in some situations. And there are some men who talk in a style more like that of most women—at least in some situations. In addition, men and women are both concerned about similar things in conversation, but often to *different degrees*. To take only one example, although men tend to focus more on relative status in a conversation than on their connection to their conversation partners, most men are also concerned with connection to some extent. Similarly, although women tend to focus more on connection with others than status in a conversation, most women are also concerned with status to some extent.

A Note to Conversation Leaders

Because there tend to be these kinds of differences, a team of leaders of public conversation should include both men and women. Having leaders of both genders will help keep them alert to these differences in actual conversations. Leaders can both point out what they observe, and help

participants to clarify what they were trying to say or what they were hearing when it would be helpful to do so. Use your judgment about this.

What are Some Key Differences?

Linguist Deborah Tannen has summarized a number of studies of the way men and women talk in both private situations and in public ones. The following chart (Fig. 1) summarizes what she has gleaned from those studies as it affects largely the way men and women talk in *public* situations like those that may take place in congregations or when congregations talk together cross-culturally.

Fig. 1 Men's & Women's Styles in Conversation

(Based on Analysis by Deborah Tannen) [1]

Men's Styles	Women's Styles
Worldview: See themselves as individuals in a hierarchical order	Worldview: See themselves as persons in a network of connections
Independence & Self-reliance are Key; Establish status Tell others what to do Make decisions autonomously	Intimacy is Key: Minimize difference Work for consensus Avoid superiority, appearance of difference Make decisions by consultation, discussion See independence as symmetrical rather than hierarchical
Talk as a means to: Preserve independence Negotiate & maintain status in hierarchy Get & keep attention	Talk as a means to: Establish connections and similarities Negotiate relationships
This is done through: Exhibition of knowledge & skill Holding center-stage via verbal performance Imparting information	This is done through: Showing similarities with others Matching experiences with others Exchanging Information and support
	Comfortable speaking in private Tend to approach public conversation as if it were private

Men's Styles (continued)	Women's Styles (continued)
In public situations, men tend to:	In public situations, women tend to:
Claim the floor and hold forth; Assume anyone has the right to do so Tend not to recognize that some do not feel free to do so Give information State opinions Speak with authority Talk at length, loudly, and in a relatively low pitch	Keep silent, wait for recognition, be reluctant to claim attention Be uncomfortable giving lots of information Ask questions, restrain giving opinions Be unaccustomed to authoritative speech Play down their expertise Self-conscious about errors Speak relatively briefly, softly, and in a relatively high pitch
May interrupt a speaker to lead conversation in a different direction they can control; may expect resistance to such tactics from other speakers	Are annoyed by men who interrupt to seize the floor or change the topic; may see such behavior as a violation of the rules of conversation
Tend to see listening at length as putting them in a subordinate position	Expect listening to be reciprocated, but to show active interest by give-and-take
Less likely to interact with women who assert themselves in conversation the way men do than they are to interact with men who behave the same way; also more likely to ignore what these women say	Tend to adjust to "men's rules" of conversation in mixed-gender company Feel "onstage" & on display—must watch behavior more closely
Prone to take credit for a woman's idea that they like or agree with	
May be annoyed by interruptions by women with overlapping expressions of agreement, support, or attempts to complete a thought	May "overlap" another's talk with words of support, agreement, or by anticipating how speaker's thoughts will be completed
May rather engage in verbal sparring than mutual support	Feel comfortable in supporting others

1 *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1990)

Diverse Leadership of Conversation is Important

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Cultural Diversity is an Asset

Culture and cultural diversity, we have said, are gifts and assets for talking together as Christians cross-culturally. Our unity in the body of Christ—marked by our common baptism—does not require uniformity in all things.

The gifts of different cultures include different ways of being human in community, different ways of relating to the world, and different ways of seeing and carrying out the mission of congregations—to proclaim the good news of God in Jesus Christ and to serve the neighbor and seek justice on their behalf, whoever our neighbor is.

Diverse Leadership of Conversation is an Asset

When congregations or other ministries map the assets of people and discover those who have gifts for leading conversation (see Section 15), they are likely to find those gifts spread around regardless of their cultural, gender, and economic backgrounds, or whether they are lay people, pastors, or other church professionals. This diversity, too, is a gift of the Spirit you can receive and use for the sake of the conversations you want to have.

There are several reasons why diverse leadership of conversation is important. Using the gifts of this diverse leadership:

- **Models the diversity of participants in conversation.** This sends a message that everyone's opinions and points of view are important and that we need to talk this matter through together.
- **Is sensitive to the cultural and gender dynamics of participants.** When leaders of conversation reflect the diversity of the participants, they are more likely to understand the various ways people in your conversation are used to talking together in public. This helps them to include everyone in the conversation, and to deal with different ways their cultures have of talking together.
- **Models the presence of gifts and assets among all groups of participants.** It shows that the gifts of working together and of discerning what God is calling these Christian congregations to be and to do are spread around; God gives all people and communities of faith gifts for ministry.
- **Models sharing of tasks and power among people of different cultures and genders.** Just as God gives all people gifts for ministry, so the work of discernment in ministry and of leadership utilizing those gifts should be shared among people of all cultures and genders.

Culturally Diverse Leadership for Conversation

Within the Congregation or Ministries: When conversation takes place within the congregation or ministry, leadership that reflects the diversity of the congregation is encouraged.

Among Congregations or Ministries: When conversation takes place between congregations or ministries of different cultural backgrounds, leaders from both congregations or ministries

should be called forth whenever possible that reflect their diversity. They need to plan and prepare to work together on their common task. As the congregations themselves work to create a spirit of hospitality, they can reduce the temptation to be jealous about "turf" where they meet.

Between Congregation or Ministries and Community: When conversation takes place between a congregation or ministry and its surrounding community, the ideal situation is to call forth leadership from both to plan and prepare to work together in the conversation. Again, a spirit of hospitality and generosity helps both congregation or ministry and community to explore common interests and hopes together, and prepare to share assets in common or complementary efforts.

Because it may be difficult at first to determine who speaks for a local community about which issues, help the congregation or ministry to develop relationships with as many groups of people in the community as you can. This in itself will take some time and patient effort. Some of these groups may be formally organized, but others may not be. But, this work of developing relationships with groups in the community will help you discern who your appropriate conversation partners may be.

Using Scripture and Religious Traditions 43

Source and Norm of the Church's Faith and Life

Scripture is one of God's great gifts to the Church. Scripture is the primary source from which Christians talk, decide, and act together about ministry issues that matter. It is also the main point of reference when they judge what is true, right and just.[1] That's why the ELCA says in its constitution that "This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life."[2]

What does this mean? Christians understand the Scriptures to testify about Jesus Christ. This testimony about Jesus is the Church's primary source for hearing and understanding the Gospel about God's Word made flesh. That testimony also is its main authority for how to live as Christians in the world. "For at its briefest, the gospel is a discourse about Christ," Luther wrote, "that he is the Son of God and became man for us, that he died and was raised, that he is established as a Lord over all things."[3] He also added, "Now when you have Christ as the foundation and chief blessing of your salvation, then the other part follows: that you take him as your example, giving yourself in service to your neighbor just as you see that Christ has given himself for you."[4]

As the source and norm of the Church's proclamation, faith, and life, the Scriptures are a gift and an asset for the Church to think with about ministry issues that matter. When Christians read the Bible for guidance and reflection about how to live as Christians in congregations with one another or in society, they have to interpret *whether* and *how* what it says applies to them. Hear what Luther wrote about this:

> One must deal cleanly with the Scriptures. From the very beginning the word has come to us in various ways. It is not enough simply to look and see whether this is God's word, whether God has said it; rather we must look and see to whom it has been spoken, whether it fits us.[5]

The Bible as a Source of Faith for People in Different Cultures

The Bible is the *source* of the Church's proclamation, faith, and life often in the sense that it tells the gospel story in ways that speak to Christians and their own particular stories and circumstances. People interpret *how* it fits them through their own stories, circumstances and experience. This means that it is both a gift that helps interpret their story and experience and an asset to use to think about their own life as members of the body of Christ. Groups of Christians with similar histories, experiences, and circumstances tend to hear Scripture with different accents than do other Christians with different stories and experiences and other circumstances.

No group of Christians are all alike, however; not everyone thinks the same way or reads Scripture exactly like others in their group. Culturally distinct groups may include diverse opinions and ways of thinking. Some people in a group think in ways that cross the boundaries of two or more cultures.[6] The ways cultural groups tend to think or interpret Scripture also tend to evolve and change over time. Yet, there are tendencies in any group. And so, when congregations talk cross-culturally, they may hear and interpret the Scriptures differently. We can illustrate

this with three examples, which also point out the complexity *within* ethnic religious traditions.

The ancestors of African American Christians were brought to the Americas against their will as slaves to Europeans and their descendants. After their emancipation by President Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War, African Americans endured periods of violence, repression, and legal segregation until the mid-1960s. Many could not vote until President Lyndon Johnson signed the Federal Voting Rights Act in 1964. They continue to suffer high rates of poverty and the effects of racism. African American Christians tend to understand how the Bible applies to them through the lens of the promises of God for liberation from the racism they suffer individually and as a people as those promises have been realized in Jesus.[7] A focus on the biblical story from the Exodus to Jesus often gives rise to this understanding.

Latinos, to take another example, have experienced conquest by Europeans and were forced to become marginal people in their own homelands. Many Latinos suffered political and economic oppression, and often endured severe poverty. In the process, they became *mestizos*, a new people of diverse origins. Many Latinos with Indian or African ancestry have also suffered discrimination and racism at the hands of wealthier and more powerful people.[8]

Since Vatican II and the appearance of Latin American liberation theology, many Latinos tend to read the Bible through the lens of their collective experience as a story of personal and communal liberation from sin, marginalization, poverty and oppression by a Jesus who takes the side of *mestizos* and invites them into his fellowship for empowerment in a new community.[9] A key cultural experience for this reading of Scripture for many Latinos is the figure of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the sixteenth century appearance of the Virgin Mary to a poor man in Mexico. Lutheran theologian Jose David Rodriguez argues that the story of this event evokes the confession in Mary's "Magnificat" of a God who "has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts…, brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." (Luke 1:51–53)[10]

Other Latinos read Scripture through Protestant lenses. Some have responded to Protestant Evangelical or Pentecostal evangelists. They tend to read the Bible as the story of Jesus Christ as their personal savior, who empowers them to free themselves from bondage to poverty as well as from personal failings and vices, and to minister to others in similar circumstances. Other Latinos read Scripture in ways more characteristic of so-called "mainline" Protestant—say Methodist or Lutheran—traditions.

While European American Christians may commonly believe that Jesus frees them from sin, death, and the power of the devil, as Luther puts it, they tend to see this in rather individualized terms. They understand how God's grace frees them for service to the neighbor in need. European Americans are culturally accustomed to thinking of religion in a personal, private realm of value separated from the experience of the objective facts of historical reality.[11] In fact, one of the reasons Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson has worked to emphasize the ELCA's self-understanding as a "public church" is because European Americans generally—including many Lutherans—have often tended to think of religion in an American context as personal and private in just this way.

At the same time, however, some European

Americans have been influenced by biblical traditions which emphasize themes of righteousness and justice in society as a whole and which have, for example, contributed to the movements to abolish slavery, improve conditions for the poor, and end racial discrimination. Both the tendencies to think of religion as personal and private, on the one hand, and to think of it as involved publicly in social justice for the sake of the neighbor, on the other, are found within most Protestant churches to some extent, including the ELCA[12].

Discerning Scripture Together Cross-culturally

Cultural groups have always tended to use Scripture as a gift to help interpret how their own stories are caught up in God's story with humanity. They also have used Scripture as a gift to discern where God is leading that group of people and to think with about how it should get there.

Appreciating Communal Stories in Light of Scripture. So, when Scripture enters the conversation among Christians who are talking together cross-culturally, it may first of all be an opportunity to hear the personal or communal stories of their conversation partners in light of their readings of Scripture. Those stories and readings may reflect one another in important ways that help them appreciate and understand one another.

The fact that cultural groups may tend to read Scripture through different lenses or filters does not necessarily mean that the ways they interpret the Bible are entirely different from the ways other groups of people do. One of the first things to look for is what the different cultural groups in the conversation have *in common* in their readings of Scripture. Appreciating what they have in common with others who read the same Bible as they do is as important as learning where and how they might understand the Bible differently.

They can also look from this common ground at *where* and *how* the groups involved in talking together *differ* in the ways they are using the Bible in their conversation. One way to begin is simply to list for all to see—on an easel pad or chalk board, for example—the different passages people are citing. They can then explore together both *why* these various passages are cited, and *how* they are understood as applying to what they are talking about together. How they understand their stories as cultural groups of people may play a key role.

Discerning Scripture for Cross-cultural Ministry. Because Scripture is the *source* and *norm* of the Church's proclamation, faith and life, Luther's recommendation to "deal cleanly with the Scriptures" is an invitation to scriptural discernment for congregations and other ministries in cross-cultural conversation.

- **Imagining a Future**: They can use Scripture as a gift or asset to discern how their stories as cultural groups within the Church are now caught up together for the future of God's story in that place. They may read Scripture to *discern together some common understanding of how Scripture applies to the situation they are facing together, imagine their common future, and discern what they may be called to do*.[13] So, for example, in discussing Scripture they can imagine how they might reach out together in evangelism, how they might follow Jesus' example of self-giving service to the neighbor together, or how they might work with other community groups through community organizing for the sake of justice for the people of their area.

- **Being Critical of the Present**: Sometimes, however, this use of Scripture as norm challenges Christians to change their ways, and also challenges how they interpret their own stories in light of Scripture. Some European and European American Christians, for instance, discerned through their own study of Scripture that, even though the apostle Paul may have condoned the practice of slavery in the Roman Empire,[14] slavery as they knew it was not compatible with God's will. They discerned that the Church should no longer condone or justify slavery, and that it should be abolished. The Franckean Synod of American Lutherans, to take one example, was formed as an antislavery synod in 1837. The synod consistently advocated abolition of slavery and also called on others to act to abolish it as well.[15]
- **Renewing Our Minds in the Scriptures**: Using Scripture in cross-cultural conversation both to imagine a new future and to be critical of how things are at present may involve a deeper exploration of our ways of reading the Bible. In doing so, we may discover a way of including some important features of each tradition in a new understanding of how Scripture addresses our situation. But, each group may also discover that some of their traditional ways of understanding Scripture may need to be changed in light of their understanding of the situation they are addressing as they talk and discern Scripture together. This new common understanding may move everyone beyond where they were before in understanding how Scripture applies to them.[16]

Regardless of what changes occur and how they happen, the lives of congregations and ministries may be transformed and their members' minds may be renewed to discern the will of God. (Romans 12:2) Such was the case for European American Christians in the cases of both slavery and racial segregation of African Americans and Blacks. The Spirit may indeed lead everyone into a deeper appreciation of what God is calling them all to be and do together through the Scriptures.

1 The Lutheran Reformers talked of the Scriptures as "the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged…." *Formula of Concord*, I:1, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Theodore G. Tappert, tr. and ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 464. The Scriptures have more recently also been seen to be central to processes of moral deliberation and faith-based organizing. See *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-38; *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues*, 15–16; and David L. Ostendorf and Paul R. Peters, *Revitalizing Church and Community*, (Oak Park, Ill. And Cleveland: Center for New Community and The United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, 1998), 3 and 11–12.

2 Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Chicago: ELCA, rev. 2001), 2.03.

3 Martin Luther, "A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, Timothy F. Lull, ed., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) 105.

4 Ibid., 107.

5 Martin Luther, "How Christians Should Regard Moses," in Lull, ed., *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989),144, emphasis added.

6 Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, 56–58, 122-125, and 152–154; Celia Jaes Falicov, *Latino Families in Therapy*, 6–7, 74, 86–87, 267–268; and Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*, viii–xi, 4–8, 102–104, and 115.

7 For discussions of African American Christian interpretations of Scripture, see, for example, J. Deotis Roberts, *Africen-*

tric Christianity: A Theological Appraisal for Ministry, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 45ff.; Vincent Wimbush, "The Bible and African Americans: An Outline of an Interpretive History," in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, Cain Hope Felder, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 81–97; and *The Bible and African Americans: A Brief History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); and Richard J. Perry, "What Sort of Claim Does the Bible Have Today?" presentation at the ELCA Convocation of Teaching Theologians, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 16–19, 2003. Perry's particular concern is with African American Lutherans.

8 See, for example, Victor M. Rodriguez, "The Racialization of Puerto Rican Identity in the United States," in *Ethnicity, Race and Nationality in the Caribbean*, Juan Manuel Carrion, ed., (San Juan: Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico, 1997), 233–273. People of mixed cultural ancestry—called *Mestizos*—are sometimes looked down upon by others claiming a more "pure" Spanish heritage. At the same time, the *mestizo* is a concept of a people of almost mythical positive qualities in some expressions of Mexican culture in particular. For two discussions of the significance of *Mestizos*, see Virgilio Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet*, rev. ed., (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000), and *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*, rev. and expanded ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2000).

9 See, for example, Jose David Rodriguez, "Confessing Our Faith in Spanish"; Pablo A. Jiminez, "The Bible: A Hispanic Perspective," in *Theolgia en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology*, Jose David Rodriguez and Loida I. Martell-Otero, eds., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 70; Teresa Chavez Sauceda, "Love in the Crossroads: Stepping-Stones to a Doctrine of God in Hispanic/Latino Theology," in *Theolgia en Conjunto*, 30. Eliseo Perez Alvarez, "In Memory of Me: Hispanic/Latino Christology beyond Boarders," in *Theologia en Conjunto*, 39;

10 Rodgriguez, "Confessing our Faith in Spanish," 357n.

11 See *Growing Healthier Congregations,* B-29–B-31 for a discussion of this in the context of talking together as Christians.

12 Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson's focus on the ELCA as a public church builds on a tradition within American Lutheranism. See, for example, Christa Klein with Christian D. Von Dehsen, *Politics and Policy: The Genesis and Theology of Social Statements in the Lutheran Church in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), Charles P. Lutz, *Public Voice: Social Policy Development in the American Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: The American Lutheran Church, 1987); and Richard J. Perry, Jr., "African American Lutheran Action: The Will to Build," 75-96. Perry discusses the responses of both African American Lutherans and the Franckean Synod to slavery in the 19th century.

13 Ann O'Hara Graff describes spiritual discernment as "the very effort to recognize the presence or guidance of God in the midst of human affairs…." In her Roman Catholic tradition, discernment has been practiced as a conversational process in the context of a community of faith in which individuals try to recognize God's guidance for them. See her essay, "Notes on Discernment: Learning for the Church" unpublished paper given to the Congregational Studies Research Team of Church Innovations, St. Paul, Minnesota, February 18, 1995, 126–128 of the manuscript. The approach taken in this Field Guide is to extend this understanding to whole communities of faith in conversation with one another in which corporate reflection upon Scripture plays a critical role. See Duty, "Scripture, Christian Imagination, and the Testimony of Experience in Moral Conversation, in Congregational Deliberation and Discernment: The Play of Scripture and Experience," in *Testing the Sprits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations*, Patrick R. Keifert., ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 132–158 for an exploration of this theme.

14 See Ephesians 6:5 and Colossians 3:22 and 4:1. Modern biblical scholars are divided over whether Paul actually wrote these two letters even though they are traditionally attributed to him.

15 Perry, "African American Action: The Will to Build," 90–92.

16 In her study of American congregations, sociologist Nancy Tatom Ammerman notes that when social change challenges congregations, "more important than where the congregation *started* theologically was its willingness to use its theological tradition to help it interpret the situation. Adapting congregations actively worked at using their symbols and stories in new ways." Elsewhere she observes, "What matters is not *which* ideas congregations draw on, but whether they engage in reshaping those ideas for their new situation." Of course, the notion of theological traditions she uses can certainly include characteristic ways of interpreting and using Scripture. "Congregations in the midst of change: An interview with Nancy Ammerman," *The Christian Century*, January 15, 1997, 50, and Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 343.

The Experience of Faithful Christians 44

We have been discussing how to lead congregations in cross-cultural conversations about ministry issues that matter. We have learned how to map our congregation's assets for leading conversation. And we have begun to discuss some of the key gifts and assets congregations have besides gifted people to help them talk about these ministry issues. We have talked about Scripture and religious traditions in Section 28 as one kind of gift or asset. In this section, we will talk about the value of our experience as a gift or asset to help us talk together.

Experience

When Christians talk together about things that matter to faith and life, their experience naturally becomes part of the conversation. The experience of faithful Christians is an asset in the life of the Church. Much wisdom about living the Christian life personally and in community comes partly from the experience of the faithful. Testimony about how God is active in the lives of individuals and congregations also is based on their experience.

The experience of the faithful is an asset when talking together about mission, social situations, or ethical dilemmas many Christians face. That experience helps them address the reality "on the ground" and often saves their discussions from becoming too far away from the concrete reality we face in mission and service to the neighbor.

Talking together about experience also is a way of honoring and acknowledging the experience of others. As we talk about our experience together, we acknowledge each other's humanity as children of God who are members of particular ethnic or racial groups. At the same time we claim our own particular cultural identity[1]. When talking together about our experiences, we are able to be the neighbor for each other in all our uniqueness, rather than simply "the other," an abstract person who is not particularly like either me or them—or worse, as a stereotype. We can take seriously both the concrete features of daily life we deal with and our histories with their tragedies and strengths. When searching for some approaches to mission or service together, we can take account of the personal, concrete, and pragmatic considerations that need to be addressed[2].

Our own experience is what we know best. It gives us knowledge first hand; it is vivid in ways that other avenues of knowing often are not. "To put it another way," writes Craig Storti, "what we have actually experienced, what we know to be real, will always have more truth for us—more hold over our actions—than what we've only read or heard about. Moreover, what we've experienced repeatedly will affect us much more than what we've experienced only once or twice."[3]

Our experiences are part of our personal and communal stories, including the ethnic and racial groups or national communities we identify with. Our faith experience is likewise part of our personal stories which are bound up with the stories of the congregations we have known and the Christian churches of which those congregations are members[4]. The groups, communities, and congregations of which we have been a part have helped to make us the people we are.

Experience and Culture

Because we listen to our neighbor through the lens of our experience, we tend to expect others to

be like us. After all, Storti reminds us, we learned how to behave, think, feel, and talk by watching and imitating others in the families, groups, congregations, and communities in which we have lived. But we have not lived in groups and communities that are all alike. Sometimes, they are very different. "What our world teaches us about how to behave," says Storti, "is not what the world of the Thai teaches them."[5]

Lutheran theologians Richard Perry and Jose David Rodriguez identify one of the implications of this. "We learn through our encounters with each other that our culture and worldview is limited and contains partial truth. For some groups in society, that may be a startling discovery."[6]

Because our experience happens in particular ethnic communities and congregations, our experience is shaped and edited by those cultures in distinct ways.[7] People who identify with those communities make a commitment to them and the cultures they live in. The communal stories of those groups become part of their personal stories, including the stories of how those groups have changed and developed over time. And people tend to adopt their distinctive ways—their ways of thinking, practice, customs, values and seeing the world.[8]

While discovering that our cultures are limited and partial may seem disheartening or threatening, still the wisdom and truth they do have is significant. Each culture shapes a way of life for a group of people. Each one informs a way of seeing the world and of seeing how God is at work in it. Each culture has assets important for approaching situations and problems common to people of different cultures. Discerning what these gifts and assets are and how they can be offered, received, and shared is one purpose of talking together.

Listening to Experience Cross-culturally

So far, we have said that the experience of faithful Christians often is an asset to our talking together, but that ethnic and congregational cultures have shaped how we experience things so that we may experience the world, each other, and our faith differently. How, then, can we listen to each other's experience across boundaries of cultures? How can we stop expecting others to be just like ourselves, and not feel threatened by it? How can we receive the gifts that lie within each other's experience?

Begin with Baptism—Our Primary Identity. Our primary identity is that we are all baptized into Christ. This makes the community of Christ we all belong to the first and most important reference point in our talking together. Whatever our personal name and our ethnic or racial identity, "baptism confers a different name, 'child of God,'" writes Lutheran theologian Martha Ellen Stortz, "and that name signifies membership in a dangerous community. As children of God we are incorporated into the body of another of God's children, Jesus Christ, the Son of God."[9]

But baptism is a rite of repentance, Stortz points out, as well as a rite of initiation into the body of Christ. "All that threatens to displace our primary identity as members of the body of Christ must be put to death," she continues. "Identification with a nation, an ethnic group, a career, a family, an orientation: all that vies with our primary identity within the Christian must die to allow for resurrection in Christ, the ultimate loyalty…. In the new life these attachments will be ordered and reoriented to Christ."[10]

Notice that this does not mean that ethnic or

racial identity disappears, but that it is put in its proper place beneath our primary identity in Christ. That identity in Christ allows us to listen to the experience of others, both the experience of fellow Christians whose culture or ethnicity may differ from ours and those who are not Christians but are still creatures of God and fellow participants in the world for which Christ died.

Practice Empathetic Listening. "When one listens empathetically, one seeks to 'tune in' to the inner experience of another person."[11] If they have risked inviting you to hear their personal story, try to understand that story in their terms and from their perspective. Accept the invitation to enter their world and imagine what it is like to experience their world as they tell about it. Listen not only to what they describe and how they describe it, but also for how they feel about it and what value it has for them. (See the practice exercise in the text box that follows.)

If you are talking with people from another congregation about its ministry in a certain community, listen to their experience and imagine what it is like to minister in that community from their perspective. Again, listen not only to their description, but also for how they feel about it and for what value it has for them.

For the time being, keep your impulse to look at and judge their experience from your own point of view in check.

Some Experience is Hard to Share. There are various reasons for this. Sometimes it is because people have had highly charged racial or ethnically-

Practice Exercise

A common exercise to get ready for empathetic listening is to practice it in your own congregation.

1. In twos and threes, have one person tell about an experience they have had (it could be in the congregation or elsewhere) while another person listens.
2. When they have finished telling about the experience, the listener summarizes what they heard, including any feelings that they heard in the telling.
3. The accuracy of what they heard is then checked with the person who told about the experience, and the third person can also give feedback about what they observed as the experience was told and heard.
4. What the listener imagines it was like to have this experience can also be discussed and checked with the teller.

This exercise should be repeated for each of the people in the group, and may be practiced until everyone is comfortable that they are hearing others accurately. Although it will not necessarily be the same as listening to someone from a different cultural background, this exercise still helps to develop empathetic listening skills that can help in cross-cultural conversation.

based experiences. Difficult experiences of humiliation, hate, discrimination, lack of respect, or conflict may make them reluctant to trust someone from another cultural background—even a brother or sister in Christ—to listen empathetically and to treat them and their experience with respect and without judgment. This reluctance to share certain kinds of experience should be respected as everyone works to increase levels of trust that make sharing experience easier.

Others may believe that some experiences are so personal and private that they would be difficult to share in conversation. They may have conflicting experiences which are difficult to sort out. Some experiences may be so bound up with our values that we are reluctant to make them public. Of course, such private experiences may still influence our conversation together; it's just that none of us may realize that it's happening, or why.

Congregations may not know how to handle experience in a public setting like a conversation among congregations. "Our congregations aren't used to thinking and acting as community," says Lutheran theologian, Patrick Keifert. "One of the great challenges of our time is taking seriously the unique experiences of Christian people as they wrestle with moral questions and actions together."[12]

Talking About Experience Together

To the extent that we can listen empathetically to others, we can enter imaginatively into their world as they experience it and begin to understand it from their point of view. And of course they can enter imaginatively into our world as we understand it from our point of view. We can have a fruitful conversation about our experiences in light of the reason why we are talking or the situation we are facing together.

Developing Relationships: One aim of sharing experience is to develop relationships among individuals, congregations or communities. Sharing personal and communal stories helps to do this. It also works to develop trust that encourages people to take a few more risks sharing other things.

Discerning What God is Doing: Part of that conversation would be about what God is up to in that situation. To discern together what God is doing we need to engage in empathetic listening for God and to God. We can do this by studying Scripture together, by listening for God in the experience of faithful Christians, and by praying together.

Critical Listening: But listening with empathy for God in our experience means that we also need to listen critically to both our experience and the experience of others after we have listened to it empathetically.

Critical listening tends to probe the experience of others respectfully for reasons or causes, for what's beneath the surface, for what is true or right, for what goals are really important, for what actions will work effectively, or for what ultimately matters in what we're talking about. When we listen critically, we have an ear for questions such as: How true is this for everyone concerned? Why do they think that way? How do things like this happen? Would doing things this way be good for us or them? What other ways can we think about that? (This list is not complete; it does not have all the critical questions that there might be.)

When we take our repentance in baptism seriously, we realize that both our cultures and our

experience are beset with sin as well as goodness, injustice as well as justice, indifference or hostility toward the neighbor as well as hospitality or generosity. We sometimes have a tendency to give our own culture and our experience too much importance. Just as we are prone to think that others experience the world in the same way we do, we have a tendency to believe that how we understand our experience is how God understands it. We also have a tendency to put our own thoughts and actions in the kindest light, whether that is true or not. And we too seldom experience ourselves the way others do. Usually, we do not think that this is important.

As Lutherans, we understand that God governs in the world through both the law and the gospel. With the law, God restrains human sin and injustice, compels us to serve our neighbor, and drives us to Christ for mercy. With the gospel, God forgives our sin through faith in Jesus Christ and empowers the Church to spread this good news to all people, "to strive for justice and peace in all the earth," and to serve others.

For Christians to listen critically for God, they must discern both the law and the gospel in the experience of faithful Christians and others with whom they talk. Here, our reading and knowledge of Scripture is vitally important. Here also, it helps to follow Jesus' command to remove the log from our own eye before we try to help our neighbor remove the speck from his or her own (Matthew 7:1-5). Does our neighbor experience humiliation, hate, discrimination, or lack of respect? How do behavior and attitudes like ours contribute to what they experience? How do we unthinkingly follow and benefit from cultural patterns or social arrangements that cause what they experience? If we realize that we contribute to our neighbor's plight, we can hear God accusing us with the law.

Conversations with another congregation or community of a different culture about their experience may also show some opportunities for ministry or areas of need which may be discerned as a call from God to respond with the gospel. This might be a response of evangelical outreach, addressing their experience of humiliation, hate, discrimination or lack of respect with the unconditional love of God in Christ. Or, it might be a response to human need, say, of serving human health needs through a congregational ministry or a social ministry organization, or of organizing a community to address injustices, to take a few examples.

Here, too, some critical listening to the experience of others will be helpful. We might ask such questions as: What do people here yearn for the most? What are their hopes? How would approaching people in this area be most appropriate? What is the best way to nurture faith here and build up the body of Christ? What assets of people in the community could be brought together, and how? How could we address that situation most effectively together? Is this the best way people could be empowered here?

Remember that the point of listening critically to people's experience is not to put it—or them—down. Instead, it is to take others seriously enough to ask questions, or even to explore possible differences in experience or differences about what those experiences might mean so that we learn from each other, deepen relationships of trust, begin to understand how their story and our story are caught up in the story of God's relationship with the world. It is also to take their experience seriously enough to explore its significance for our common ministry and our common life together in society.

1 James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-cultural Strategies*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 7 and 29.
2 Ibid., 38 and 68.
3 Craig Storti, *The Art of Crossing Cultures*, (Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, 1990), 53.
4 *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B–40.
5 *The Art of Crossing Cultures*, 52-53.
6 Richard J. Perry, Jr. and Jose David Rodriguez, "We Hear in Our Own Language: Culture, Theology, and Ethics," in *Faithful Conversation: Christian Perspectives on Homosexuality*, James M. Childs, ed., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 53.
7 Martha Ellen Stortz, "Rethinking Christian Sexuality: Baptized into the Body of Christ," in *Faithful Conversation*, 69 and 71.
8 *Preaching to Every Pew*, 25–26.
9 Stortz, "Rethinking Christian Sexuality: Baptized into the Body of Christ," 63.
10 Ibid.
11 Daniel L. Olson, "Talking about Sexual Orientation: Experience, Science, and the Mission of the Church," in *Faithful Conversation*, 97.
12 *Growing Healthier Congregations*, videotape.

The Assets of Culture

45

In the past two sections, we have looked at some of the congregation's gifts and assets that can be used to think and talk with each other about ministry, including the Scriptures and the experience of the congregation or ministry and its members. In this section we look at the cultures of the members, which also can be gifts and assets used to think and talk about ministry.

Cultural Assets

Both the aspects of culture that are visible and those that are not visible can be assets in talking together cross-culturally. The practices and values of Chinese congregations and families allow the expression of individual views, and also encourage their accommodation to the discernment of the group, for example. These can serve their congregations well in looking for areas of agreement or accommodation with groups that are not Chinese.

Or, to take another example, the people of Salam Arabic Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, New York, have both an Arabic cultural heritage and the historical experience of being part of a vulnerable religious minority in the Middle East. These became assets for Salam after September 11, 2001, as it reached out to both the frightened Muslim community of Brooklyn as well as to others who were traumatized and felt painfully vulnerable after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center.[1] It used these assets of culture and experience to address concerns shared in common with others and to be a bridge between cultural groups.

Ways for Dialog and Conflict: As the previous Chinese example indicates, every culture has constructive ways of having dialog and engaging in conflict about things that matter to the community or about different interpretations of what its culture requires or permits. Cultures are not monoliths in which all important questions are finally answered.[2] These culturally characteristic ways of dialog and disagreement involve practices and skills that can help a congregation to engage in dialog with others who may be culturally different.

The challenge comes when differences between groups in their ways of having dialog and conflict become apparent. Groups must work not only to understand the characteristic ways their conversation partners do this but sometimes also work to make their own ways of conversation understood by others. We have presented some important profiles of practices and habits of dialog for several cultures in Sections 21–40. Each is somewhat distinct. Each has its own gifts for public conversation. Each also has its own challenges for groups with different practices and expectations for conversation.

It is a basic assumption of this field guide that cross-cultural conversation and mutual understanding is possible despite these differences. They do not present overwhelming difficulties to cross-cultural conversation, nor do they seal cultural groups within self-contained cultural worlds of practices and habits of conversation. With hospitality, good will, an effort to understand others, and a desire to be understood, congregations and ministries can have fruitful conversation with others from a different cultural background.

Not all habits of dialog and conflict are constructive or healthy, of course. So some care should be taken to discern which of them are truly

assets that *serve the conversation* or help clarify or resolve differences, and which are actually liabilities that do more harm than good.

Cultural Values. The values a group holds or the ways it sees the world can also be an asset in talking cross-culturally. The European American sense of fairness and its regard for democratic discussion may lead it to listen to concerns of another group. Or, if a group's value or a way of seeing life can be communicated with others, their effort to make sense of it and the challenge it may pose to themselves can result in its being received as a gift.

Internal Diversity. The experience within a cultural group of multiple or conflicting understandings of things in its common life can be an asset in its own right. It alerts the members of the group to questions in its own culture that are not settled. This permits the group to enter into conversation with other cultural groups with a sense of its own internal diversity[3] as well as a curiosity about other ways of being human and Christian.[4]

Stories. The personal and communal stories of cultural groups also enhance conversation between groups.[5] These draw upon the personal and communal experience of faithful people.[6] They can help to overcome indifference to the needs or suffering of others, enrich mutual understanding, and open opportunities for common ministry, service, and efforts to achieve a greater measure of justice.

Mapping Your Cultural Assets. Within a group, culture is often in the background rather than the foreground. It is part of the framework people tend to unconsciously accept and assume in life. When talking to people from another culture, however, what was background tends to move to the foreground. Cultural assumptions and differences are noticed. Be aware of those aspects of your culture that can be your assets in conversation with people from another culture. Have some idea of why these things can be assets, and how you might use them as such.

1 This example surfaced in a conversation between this writer and Salaam's pastor, Khader El-Yateem.
2 This point is made in various ways by Tanner, *Theories of Culture*; Falicov, *Latino Families in Therapy*, 6–7, 74, 86–87, and 267–268; and Benhabib in *The Claims of Culture,* viii–ix, 4–8, 25–26, 36, 60 and 102.
3 Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*, 41–42.
4 Martin E. Marty, *The One and the Many: America's Struggle for the Common Good*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 117. We trust that this extension to other ways of being Christian does not violate the basic spirit of Marty's point. See also Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*, 31.
5 Marty, *The One and the Many*, 143–163.
6 *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-40.

Congregational Gifts and Assets for Talking Together

46

By now, you have identified many gifts to help you talk with others across the boundaries of culture. You know who the gifted people are to lead you. You understand how Scripture and your religious traditions, your experience, and the cultural background of your members are gifts and assets for thinking and talking about ministry matters in your setting. Now we turn to some key characteristics of congregations and their corporate life that help them talk together.

Congregations and ministries which have some key characteristics or assets can talk fruitfully with others across cultural boundaries. These include some *basic knowledge, attitudes and beliefs*, *skills,* and *practices or habits* which have empowered congregations to talk together about sensitive or difficult issues in ministry. Patricia Taylor Ellison has identified these gifts in research with Lutheran congregations.[1]

These basic kinds of knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, skills, and practices or habits, are not necessarily limited to one cultural group. They may be expressed in particular ways in European American congregations, but might be expressed in other ways appropriate to other cultural settings. We invite you to consider how they might be expressed in your particular cultural setting.

We also invite congregations of various cultures to add to our knowledge by some self-study which maps those attitudes and beliefs, things you know, skills, and behaviors that help *them* talk together in their settings. You may identify other assets in addition to those discussed here. You are also encouraged to convey their findings to Dr. Ellison or to the writer of this resource.[2]

Basic Knowledge

Congregations that want to talk together have key leaders (clergy or lay) who *know how to handle conflict*. Knowing that the issues are important and that people may not all agree, such knowledge about handling conflict is important. In addition, they understand that *some conflict is healthy*. They know that conflict and disagreement are not necessarily destructive forces that should always be suppressed. Rather, when handled respectfully and openly, conflict can enhance a congregation's life and mission. Finally, such congregations know and understand their *biblical and theological calling* to be in conversation about ministry issues that matter. It is part of the "mutual conversation and consolation of the brothers [and sisters] in Christ"[3] about the gospel, and is consistent with the tradition of the whole Christian Church.

Attitudes and Beliefs

Congregations that want to talk about ministry issues are *ready* to tackle the difficult ministry issues they face. Even though they know that such issues may cause difficulties or disagreements within the congregation, they are *hope-filled*. They believe that God is at the center of their conversation and that their hope will not be disappointed. They also are *active*, preferring to take initiative in dealing with difficult things rather than waiting to see how they will work out. They have a *longing to engage in spiritual discernment* together about the future of their ministry. They believe that *God is active in their midst*, even within situations that are new and uncomfortable or that may lead them into some conflict. They believe that *they don't necessarily all agree* about the issues being dealt with.

Skills

These congregations are often *adaptive and inventive*. "They are unafraid to alter not only their old habits and behaviors," Ellison writes, "but also the conversation process itself so that it works for their congregation and responds to their particular dilemma."[4]

They practice *good listening and speaking skills*. They know how to hear others in a public setting, including the messages that are behind or between the words. And they know how to communicate their own thoughts, feelings, or proposals for action to others.

Practices and Habits

Congregations that want to talk together about their ministry *practice hospitality* to all who want to participate in the conversation, whether they all agree or not. And they *practice a kind of servanthood that frees people to participate in conversation* regardless of their point of view. It goes beyond mere tolerance of others to looking for ways to help them have their say and make their own contribution to the conversation.

Summary

The following figure summarizes these congregational assets:

Fig. 2 Congregational Assets for Talking Together

Basic Knowledge • Ways to handle conflict and disagreement constructively • Understand conflict as sometimes God's gift • Have calling to participate together in the body of Christ	**Attitudes and Beliefs** • God-centered hope • Preference for action • Longing for discernment • We don't necessarily all agree
Skills • Adaptation and invention • Listening and speaking skills	**Practices and Habits** • Hospitality • Free people to speak and participate in conversation

1 Patricia Taylor Ellison, "Doing Faith-based Conversation: metaphors for congregations and their leaders," in *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations*, Patrick R. Keifert, ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 159–166.
2 Patricia Taylor Ellison may be contacted through Church Innovations, PO Box 390207, Minneapolis, MN 55439, Ph: 651-644-3653.
3 Luther, *The Smalcald Articles*, Part III, Article IV, ("The Gospel") *Book of Concord* , Theodore G. Tappert, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).
4 Ellison, "Doing Faith-based Conversation," 235.

Leader Assets

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Congregational leaders of conversation also have assets which help them lead. Whether these leaders are lay people or clergy, they personally have attitudes and beliefs, skills, behaviors, and basic knowledge that they use to help their congregations talk together.

These leaders often employ different combinations of personal assets to help them lead conversation. This is good news to people whom congregations might call upon to help them talk about ministry issues together. It means that different kinds of personal gifts can help do this work. Leaders don't all have to be exactly alike to lead conversation.

Kinds of Leaders and Their Assets

Pat Taylor Ellison has identified three kinds of leaders of conversation so far in her research with congregations. They can be described by such figures of speech as pioneers, prophets, and servant-leaders.[1]

Ellison points out that the assets of these three kinds of leaders are not mutually exclusive. Each kind of leader uses some of the assets which the others use. But each kind of leader tends to use or emphasize certain groups of assets more than the others do. So the names given to each kind of leader tend to describe the way they provide that leadership for congregations as they talk together about ministry.

Pioneers. "Pioneers move beyond the status quo," says Patricia Taylor Ellison, "to create a new and/or alternative future for those who matter most to them…. They recognize the need for a change and discover a way to make it happen for the benefit of the community."[2]

Who does this?

- The Letter to the Hebrews describes Jesus as "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." (Hebrews 12:10). He created a new community of faith in God based on trust in Jesus and his message of God's grace, focused on his death on the cross and his resurrection
- Caucasian settlers who came to the New World or who settled the American West and are called pioneers
- All kinds of immigrants to this country (who come north from Latin America, east from Asia, or west from the Middle East and Africa) who find new opportunities for themselves and their families and create new ethnic communities
- African slaves who rode the underground railroad to escape slavery in the nineteenth century, freedmen who founded African American churches, and African Americans from those churches who struggled for justice and civil rights and against racism, and changed the character of American society
- American Indians who strive to create and expand opportunities for their people wherever they live, and to preserve their cultures as well as adapt them to current realities
- Women of all backgrounds who struggle to expand opportunities and rights for women in civil life, churches, workplaces, and communities

When leading conversation in congregations, a Pioneer *rejects* conventional ways of thinking that:

1. Strictly separate facts (considered to be objective, reasonable, and provable—therefore fit for public discussion) from values (thought to be subjective, personal, emotional, and irrational—therefore fit only for private discussion).
2. Think in terms of simple answers, clear choices, and either/or distinctions.
3. Prefer hierarchical leadership by experts who know what should be done.

Instead, Pioneers take a different approach that:

1. Makes the discussion of how facts and values are related on important issues a matter for public discussion by the community.
2. Encourages people to look at the whole issue. All views are honored if they help the community to understand the issue.
3. Frees people to participate and help the community with its spiritual discernment so that it can make better decisions and take wiser actions.
4. Is comfortable with the group's freedom of thought and lets the conversation "float" where it will.
5. Knows that values run deeper than opinions, and looks for underlying common values when there are differences of opinion.
6. Provides enough structure and a safe space for conversation.
7. Encourages people to listen carefully to others but also to speak their own minds.
8. Does not try to dominate the group or control where the conversation leads; does not presume to know what the group should decide or do; withholds own views so the group can discuss issues freely.

Fig. 3 Assets of Leaders as Pioneers[3]

Basic Knowledge • Both facts and values matter; they can't be separate • Values run deeper than positions or opinions • How to provide enough structure for free conversation	**Attitudes & Beliefs** • Look at the whole issue; both/and not either/or • Open to change • Comfortable with group's experimenting
Skills • Creates safe space for participants and leader • Sets new expectations for leaders • Disciplined to set aside own position for sake of free conversation by group	**Practices and Habits** • Refuses to lead directively • Provides a structure for free conversation • Helps people listen carefully and speak freely

Prophets. "Prophets," Ellison reminds us, "spoke truly about the past, present, and future, inspired by and in conversation with God."[4] They strive to get God's people oriented toward where God wants to lead them. They see God as both present and active in our world.

When leading conversation in today's community of faith, Prophets:

1. Know that God is neither completely understandable nor controllable by human beings.
2. Know that God is present in the midst of life, on the loose, and up to something; that Presence can be felt.
3. Believe that God is in conversation with humans through prayer.
4. Believe that God calls the church into being.
5. Understand that God both calls and gives gifts to accomplish specific work in the community.
6. Focus their own and our attention on God.
7. Are confident teachers because of their Godgiven talent.
8. Are able to lead the community in prayer, and also have an active personal prayer life.
9. Encourage others to talk about God.

Fig. 4 Assets of Prophets[5]

Basic Knowledge • God is beyond human power • God is present in life and in conversation with humans	**Attitudes & Beliefs** • The church is a body called by God • People's talents are God-given
Skills • Teaching • Public and private prayer	**Practices and Habits** • Focus attention on God • Encourage talk about God

Servant-leaders. Servant-leaders lead by helping others grow to become servants of others themselves. Ellison reminds us that "Of course, for Christians, Jesus is the primary model of servant-leader and demands that very behavior of his disciples."[6]

Rejecting a dominating or hierarchical model of leadership, servant-leaders:

1. Help others have opportunities to speak, lead, hear, and grow.
2. Lead by getting out of the way; embrace humility; reject the role of expert.
3. Foster active involvement by others.
4. Are honest about people's fears and hopes and their own.
5. Believe that every congregation has the necessary gifts to do the work to which God calls it.
6. Understand that God is engaged with congregations to create a trustworthy world.
7. Help to foster community conversation and spiritual discernment in order to help the community live out its faith.
8. Know the church is an active, called community determining its future by speaking with God and one another.
9. Foster equal participation in conversation by as many people as possible.
10. Know how to lead participatory conversation.
11. Avoid having to be perfect but strive to be helpful.
12. Engage in many serving acts during conversation.
13. Work to build trust and freedom for all to engage in conversation.

Fig. 5 Assets of Servant-leaders[7]

Basic Knowledge	**Attitudes & Beliefs**
• God is engaged with congregations to create a trustworthy world • Church is an active community called by God to discern and work for the future	• Self as servant • Have real fears and real hopes • Congregations have gifts for work God gives it • Don't need to be perfect, just helpful
Skills	**Practices and Habits**
• Helping skills • Fostering participation by others in conversation • Leading conversation	• Many acts of serving • Build trust and freedom for others to participate in conversation • Do whatever helps a meaningful exchange of ideas

Are There Other Kinds of Leaders? It is quite possible that other kinds of leaders may exist. These are the ones we know about so far.

This knowledge is also based on the experience of leaders in Caucasian congregations. Servant-leaders in, say, African American congregations might exercise their leadership somewhat differently. It is also possible that leaders in other cultures may exercise other kinds of leadership than these three.

If congregational leaders in other cultural communities do use different models of leadership with different sets of assets, we would like to add that to our knowledge.[8] This would help to improve leadership training and present a better picture of the kinds of assets leaders in various cultural groups within the church actually have and use.

We invite you to help broaden our understanding!

1 For a more detailed treatment of these three types of leaders, see Patricia Taylor Ellison's essay, "Doing Faithbased Conversation: metaphors for congregations and their leaders," *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of* Congregations (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 166–179. Thanks to Ellison for her permission to use the results of her research in this section.
2 Ibid., 166.
3 Based on figure in Ibid, 170 but revised here.
4 Ibid., 171.
5 Ibid., 174.
6 Ibid., 175.
7 Based on Ibid., 178. The language has been modified to reflect Ellison's original manuscript and this field guide's vocabulary.
8 Patricia Taylor Ellison may be contacted at Church Innovations, 1563 Como Avenue, Suite #103, St. Paul, MN 55108; Ph. 651-644-3653, or 888-223-7909.

White Privilege and Ally Responsibilities for European Americans in Cross-cultural Conversation 48

Introduction

When European American Christians are in conversation with people of other cultures they not only bring a very significant privilege of whiteness with them into the conversation, but they also need to bring an awareness of the meaning and effect of that privilege into it. In becoming aware of one's own conscious and unconscious privilege, a person of European heritage can enter a cross-cultural conversation with greater insight and become responsible for checking one's own thoughts and statements. Without such checks we may easily dominate the conversation, perpetuating a relationship built on dominance and subordinance. It is the unconsciousness of privilege and its meaning that destroys many cross-cultural conversations before they have a chance to really get started. European Americans often don't understand what happened to a conversation when they simply acted as they always do. Often, they do not understand the cultural dynamics and the undercurrents of White privilege that prompt a European American to jump into a conversation, to respond often, to become defensive, and to attempt to discount what a person of color is saying. For mutually effective cross-cultural conversation, European Americans need to become aware of the dynamics of privilege and become responsible to speak and act in new ways. If they develop this awareness and take up this responsibility, they will become able to truly free those from other cultural backgrounds to participate as equals in cross-cultural conversation. This section aims to equip them to do these things.

European American Christians need to understand both their privilege and responsibilities for how they use that privilege for the sake of the conversation they are having with those from different cultures. Because this privilege arises out of their membership in a group with predominant social power[2] in American society, ethical responsibilities fall upon them to use this power to serve as allies of those with whom they are talking. Both their own interests and the interests of others in the conversation can be served by fulfilling these responsibilities.

In this section, we will explore the privilege European Americans have in relations with other cultural groups. We will also see how European American Christians can help both to free others to speak and to enter into conversation from a place of selfunderstanding and desire for personal growth so that they can live in authentic community as allies of others. Because many European Americans are not always aware of the privilege they have, it takes some effort on their part to understand and acknowledge their privileged position and its significance. The point of developing this understanding is *not* to shame European Americans or to create guilty consciences over the privilege they have. Rather *the point is to raise their awareness of their privilege so that they can recognize and seize opportunities to use their privilege as an asset to act as allies of their conversation partners of other cultural groups*. The *long-term vision* for using their privilege in this way is to develop ways of relating to people of other cultures in which the working of this privilege is *greatly reduced or eliminated*.

Until now, this resource has looked at conversation among different groups largely through the lens of culture. We have seen how cultural similarities and differences in the

expectations and practices for how people talk together affect cross-cultural conversation.

In this section, we add another level of complexity to our understanding of cross-cultural conversation by looking at it through the lenses of social power and race—two important realities which affect possibilities for cross-cultural conversation for the United States, its territories, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. For, the social power from which stems the privilege of European Americans is tied not only to the social reality of their economic, political, and cultural power, but also in part to the reality of race and the prejudices associated with it.[3] We will be guided by the work of Frances Kendall and an important new ELCA resource for European American Christians, *Troubling the Waters for the Healing of the Church: A Journey for White Christians from Privilege to Partnership*.[4]

The Privilege European Americans Have

European Americans have privilege in social relations in the United States because of the influence they have had historically and still have over the social, economic, political and cultural life of this country. European Americans tend to set the terms by which members of other groups participate in American life—including those churches and congregations where their influence predominates. In setting these terms European Americans exercise a social power in which they act *as if* it is their natural privilege to do so without having to obtain the consent of others, and without either having to think about it or justify it to anyone.

Frances Kendall has called this privilege "White privilege" because of its historical connection to race relations in the United States. It emerged in connection with relations between Americans with roots in the British Isles and Northern Europe, on the one hand, and African slaves and their freed descendants, on the other. Northern Europeans also extended this sense of privilege over other groups of people—Southern and Eastern Europeans, Jews, American Indians, Alaskan Natives and Hawaiians, Latinos, Caribbean Islanders, Arabs and Middle Easterners, and Asians—based on their location in the racial and cultural "space" between Northern Europeans and African Americans.[5]

European Americans tend to set the terms by which other groups participate in American life—including churches. They act as if it is their natural privilege to do so without the consent of others, and without either having to think about it or justify it to anyone.

The Marks of Privilege. What are some of the marks of White privilege that affect cross-cultural conversation? These marks are made up of certain attitudes and beliefs, skills, and behaviors in which European Americans tend to:

- think of themselves as "normal" and of their experience as the standard for everyone
- see themselves as central to anything important, never as marginal, but also tend to see non-European Americans as marginal
- "define the parameters of 'appropriate' conversation and communication, keeping

[their] culture, manners, and language central"[6]

- decide whether or not they will listen to others or hear what they have to say
- "think [they] have an automatic right to be heard when [they] speak because most leaders in most organizations look like them"[7]
- set up informal rules for communicating in an organization but fail to share these rules with those who are not European Americans
- not take issues of racism seriously, and to talk about—or not talk about—matters related to race whenever they choose or to change the subject to matters of personal character or social class, etc., whenever talk about race makes them uncomfortable. European Americans tend "not to see race in [themselves] and to be angry at those who do"[8]
- see themselves as *not* members of a particular group over which they have no choice to join, but to see others as members of involuntary groups.
- see themselves as unique individuals who are members of the human race, not as members of the white race
- have greater access to power and resources than members of other groups, but think that all groups of people essentially have the same power and resources they do
- have the power to include or exclude themselves and others from any group or activity
- discount the worth or contributions of people of other groups
- set up institutions run by their culture's rules but act as if those rules are natural and universal for all groups
- "make decisions for everyone without taking others into account"[9]
- determine how, when, or whether particular historical events or individuals will be remembered or will inform a discussion or decision

A Social Reality for Ill and for Good. This privilege is a social reality for ill and for good. "White people's privileges are bestowed prenatally," argues Frances Kendall. "We can't not get them and we cannot give them away, no matter how much we do not want them."[10] Because a very high percentage of European Americans act according to this privilege, those who use it have a lot of power in relationships between themselves and members of other cultural groups.

Simply by acting *as if* using this privilege were natural and ethically justified they can, as noted above, set the terms by which members of other groups participate in church and secular life. They can use this privilege either to exclude others, discount their gifts, abilities, and assets, treat them unjustly, and thwart their rights, aspirations, and hopes. This tends to diminish the mission of the church and the common good of society. Or, they can use this privilege in meaningful ways to walk alongside others in ways that acknowledge and accept their gifts, abilities, and assets, treat them justly, and support their freedom to exercise their rights and to pursue their aspirations and hopes. This tends to enhance the mission of the church and the common good of society.

It is important for European American Christians to understand how European American culture and

this ethos of White privilege shapes their personal lives and the corporate lives of their churches and congregations, and to look for the signs of White privilege in their own attitudes, values, behavior, and corporate lives.[11] "White privilege needs to be addressed because as Christians we have 'missed the mark' and fallen short of God's intention for humanity. The church has fallen short of God's intent for us to be one in Christ (Galatians 3:28), and missed the mark of 'loving your neighbor as yourself' (Matthew 22:39)."[12]

Why Understanding White Privilege is Important for Cross-cultural Conversation. First, this privilege can often be harmful to the conversations European American Christians have with people from other cultures because it gets in the way of the kind of deep listening and discerning response these conversations require. And when that happens, the chances for better understanding between people of different cultures are harmed.

Second, however, this privilege can become an *asset* to those European Americans who understand it and want to use it as a tactic to *improve* the chances for good cross-cultural conversation, understanding, and cooperation.[13] …[A]s disciples of Christ we need to move from privilege to partnership. We need to know and understand privilege in order to work in new ways toward partnership, in which we intentionally appreciate, respect, learn from, and equally share power with our neighbor whose cultural identity is different from ours."[14] Although this privilege is neither as natural as they suppose nor necessarily ethically justified, European American Christians have both a responsibility and an interest to use it on behalf of others to enhance the mission of the Church and the good of society so that the harmful effects of this privilege on others may decrease over time.

European American Christians have both a responsibility and an interest to use this privilege on behalf of others to enhance the mission of the Church and the good of society.

Using Privilege to Act as Allies

What does it mean to be an ally? "To 'ally' oneself to someone," according to Frances Kendall, "means to bind to or unite with that person—to support with or to stand with that person or group."[15] This can take different forms. "For some, it means building a relationship of love and trust with another; for others, it means intentionally putting oneself in harm's way so that another person remains safe. Each type of alliance has its own parameters, responsibilities, and degrees of risk."[16]

Our Christian Responsibility. To act as an ally by either building relationships of love and trust with others or by intentionally putting oneself in harm's way on behalf of others if necessary is part of what Martin Luther understood to be a Christian's duty to fulfill the Ten Commandments. To see how this is so, let's look at Luther's explanation of some of the commandments of the Second Table. In Figure 6 below, we highlight both those parts of the explanations that spell out what we *ought not do* and those that tell us what we *ought to do*.

First, Luther's explanations *prohibit us from doing things that harm our neighbors* and may contribute to their oppression. The things we are prohibited from doing include injuring our neighbors physically, stealing their possessions or

defrauding them, betraying them or harming their reputation and credibility with others, desiring their possessions or acting as if they belong to us, and destroying their personal and working relationships with people in the community. Fulfilling this part of the explanation will require not only our acknowledgement of how we do these things but also require that we make real changes in how we deal with others, especially those who are members of other social and cultural groups.

Second, we should *actively be our neighbors' allies by helping them in appropriate ways* with all their physical needs, possessions and property, reputation and credibility in the community, and working or other relationships in the community. It also means that we should actively oppose the oppression of our neighbors whenever others act to oppress them.

Fig. 6 Acting as Allies and the Ten Commandments[17]

Commandment	Explanation
5. You shall not kill.	We are to fear and love God **so that we do not hurt our neighbor in any way, *but help them in all their physical needs.***
7. You shall not steal.	We are to fear and love God **so that we do not take our neighbor's money or property, or get them in any dishonest way, *but help them to improve and protect their property and means of making a living.***
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	We are to fear and love God **so that we do not betray, slander, or lie about our neighbor, *but defend them, speak well of them, and explain their actions in the kindest way.***
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's house.	We are to fear and love God **so that we do not desire to get our neighbor's possessions by scheming, or by pretending to have a right to them, *but always help them to keep what is theirs.***
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his cattle, or anything that is your neighbor's.	We are to fear and love God **so that we do not tempt or coax away from our neighbor their wife or their workers, *but encourage them to remain loyal.***

How to Be an Ally. In the rest of this section, we rely on the work of Frances Kendall to describe aspects of how European Americans can be allies of people of other cultures, including ways to build trust as well as ways to grow and learn in order to walk together in new ways. Much of what we say here applies to individuals in congregations and other organizations who are involved in cross-cultural conversation. Some of what we say here also applies to the congregations and organizations as a whole. There are circumstances in which they can act as allies of individuals, organizations, or whole communities of color.

Being an ally involves several different actions.

- **Developing Understanding.** Working continually by careful observation and reflection to understand the personal and institutional experiences of those with whom they are aligning themselves.

  –**Observation:** noticing "how they are listened to, talked about, promoted, and expected to do additional jobs."[18]

  Reflection: Asking yourself, "How would I be experienced if I were a person of color? Would I be listened to? Would I be getting the support I am getting now? How would my life in this organization be different if I were not" a European American. (Such reflection also gives one further insight into the privilege one already has by being a European American.)

- **Allying Publicly and Privately** with members, organizations, or communities of other cultural groups and responding to their needs. "This may mean breaking assumed allegiances with those who have the same privileges as you. It is important not to underestimate the consequences of breaking these agreements, and to break them in ways that will be most useful to the person or group with whom you are aligning yourself.

  "What this might look like:

  - Stepping into a situation in which a person of color is being overrun by someone who looks like you….
  - Speaking out about a situation in which you don't appear to have any vested interest….
  - Interrupting a comment or joke that is insensitive or stereotypic toward a target group, whether or not a member of that group is present….

  "…While we may choose to take this risk ourselves, it is important to work strategically so as not to put the person [organization or community] with whom we have aligned ourselves in greater jeopardy."[19]

  What are some other ways that you could ally both publicly and privately?

- **Taking Responsibility for Change** on your side of an alliance regardless of the response from the other side. Do this for the sake of your own congregation or organization rather than just to "take care of others."

  "What this might look like:

  - Examining continually the institutional and personal benefits of hearing a wide diversity of perspectives, articulating those benefits, and building different points of view into the work we do.
  - Interrupting less-than-helpful comments

and pushing for an inclusive… environment. We do it because we, as well as others, will benefit. We do not step forward because we think we should or because the people of color can't speak for themselves or because we want to look good to the people of color around us. We are allies because we know that it is in our interest."[20]

How else could you take responsibility for change?

- **Initiating Change.** "Allies know that, in the most empowered and genuine ally relationships, the persons with privilege initiate the change toward personal, institutional, and societal justice and equality.

  What this might look like:

  - Assessing who will be at least risk when stepping into a situation to initiate change, conferring with others who are at greater risk about the best strategies, and moving forward. Being an ally is like performing in a ballet. Our moves should be carefully designed to have the greatest effect.
  - Understanding that this is not another opportunity to take charge, to ride in to fix everything. Ally relationships are just that: relationships. Together with the people who are not privileged we choreograph who makes which moves and when they will be made…. [I] t is not their job to educate [European Americans]…because of my privilege, I am less likely to suffer from speaking straightforwardly than they would."[21]

  In what other ways might you initiate change?

- **Promoting Inclusiveness and Justice** by creating a hospitable environment for all and becoming an advocate for inclusiveness and justice.

  "What this might look like:

  - …becoming the point person for organizational change [despite the expectation that only minority individuals would be their own advocates]….
  - Paying attention to the days and times meetings are scheduled so that no one group bears the brunt of exclusion…."[22]
  - Consistently emphasizing to your white brothers and sisters how inclusiveness and justice are in their own long-term interests as well as in the interests of your group, congregation, organization, or community.
  - Advocating for inclusiveness and justice when they are at stake in important matters and supporting people of color when they raise issues where inclusiveness and justice are at stake.

  In what other specific ways might you promote inclusiveness and justice?

- **Sharing the Lead and Seeing Things Through** by working in genuine alignment and partnership with people of other cultures to change the organization and recognize the greater responsibility to see things through to their conclusion.

  "What this might look like:

  - Working to build a strategic diversity plan for the organization, tying it to the organization's business plan, and placing our personal credibility on the implementation of the plan….

- Assessing current policies and procedures in the organization and working to change them so that they don't impact various groups of people differently.
- Intentionally using our access to power, resources, and influence to push those who are in positions to be able to bring about change."[23]

How else might you share the lead and see things through?

- **Not Using Mistakes as an Excuse.** "Allies expect to make some mistakes but do not use that as an excuse for inaction. As a person with privilege, it is important to study and to talk about how your privilege acts as both a shield and as blinders for you. Of necessity, those without privileges in a certain area know more about the specific examples of privilege than those who are privileged.

  "What this might look like:

  - Knowing that each of us, no matter how careful or conscious we are or how long we have been working on issues of social justice, is going to say or do something dumb or insensitive. It isn't possible not to hurt or offend someone at some point. Our best bet is to openly acknowledge our mistakes and learn from them.
  - Questioning how your perceptions might be different if you were not a member of a privileged group….
  - [Remembering that p]eople with privilege can never really know what it is like to be a member of [a] target group. While I can sympathize with those who are of color, it is not possible for me truly to understand the[ir] experience… because I am never going to be treated as they are. The goal is to show someone you are listening, you care, and you understand that being white causes you to be treated differently in the world."[24]
- **Working in Our Interest.** Realize that it is in your own and your congregation's interest to be allies and be able to give good reasons why this is necessary. "Talking clearly about the responsibility of privilege in being able to step in when necessary is an important educational tool for others with the same privileges.

  "What this might look like:

  - Regularly prefacing what I am about to say with, 'As a white person, I [think/feel/understand/am not able to understand…]' By identifying one of my primary lenses on the world I let others know that I am clear that being white has an impact on how I perceive everything.
  - Choosing to make an issue of a situation, acknowledging that our whiteness gives us the privilege to speak with impunity.…"[25]

  How else might you be able to talk about why being an ally is in your own or your congregation's interest?
- **Articulating Oppression.** Show how you or your congregation has benefited from patterns of oppression and how others have been harmed.

  "What this might look like:

  - Seeing…how my whiteness opened doors to institutions that most probably would not have opened so easily otherwise.

- Understanding that as white [individuals] we are given access to power and resources because of racial similarities to and our relationships with [other] white [individuals]. In fact, we often receive those privileges at the expense of people of color, both male and female."[26]

What are some other ways in which you can talk about how you may have benefited from these patterns of oppression?

- **Committing to Personal Growth** in order to be genuinely supportive to others. "If I am privileged, uprooting long-held beliefs about the way that the world works will probably be necessary."

  "What this might look like:…

  - "Facing in an on-going way the intentionality of white people's treatment of people of color, both historically and currently. In order to be an ally, I must hold in my consciousness what my racial group has done to keep us in positions of power and authority. This is not about blaming myself or feeling guilty…. Staying conscious of our behavior as a group moves me to take responsibility for making changes. It also gives me greater insight into the experiences of those with whom I align myself."[27]

    What are some other ways you can grow for the sake of building trust and enter into authentic relationships with persons of other cultures?

- **Being Clear about the Experience of Being Other.** Some of the consequences of not being clear about this are:
  - lack of trust
  - lack of authentic relationships
  - lack of foundation for coalition

  "For allies with privilege, the consequences of being unclear are even greater. Because our behaviors are rooted in privilege, those who are in our group give greater credence to our actions than they might if we were members of groups without privilege. Part of our task is to be models and educators for those *like us*.

  "What this might look like:

  - Understanding that because we don't see a colleague of color being mistreated doesn't mean that daily race-related experiences aren't occurring….
  - "Comments [by us discounting such experiences] alert a person of color to the fact that we don't have those experiences, we can't imagine other people having them, and therefore put little credence in the stories that people of color share. If we are to be genuine allies to people of color, we must constantly observe the subtleties and nuances of other white people's comments and behaviors just as we observe our own. And we must take the risk of asking, "What if I am wrong about how I think people of color are being treated in my institution? What can I do to seek out the reality of their experiences? How will I feel if I discover that people I know, love, and trust are among the worst offenders? And what will I do?'"
  - "…[A]s white people we simply can't know what it is like to be of color. We will never be treated as if we were. While

not everything is about race, there is always the possibility that it is an element in any situation. To deny that reality signals people of color and other white people that we can't be trusted as allies or members of a coalition."[28]

How else might you become more aware about what the experiences of people of color are in a society where European Americans set and enforce the terms of living in American society?

- **Understanding that Emotional Security is Not Realistic for an Alliance.** "For those with privilege, the goal is…to 'become comfortable with the uncomfortable, and uncomfortable with the too comfortable' and to act to alter the too comfortable.

  "What this might look like:

  - Being alert to our desire to create a 'safe' environment for an interracial conversation…. [W]hen white people ask for safety they [often] mean they don't want to be held accountable for what they say. They want to be able to make mistakes and not have people of color take them personally, and they don't want to be yelled at by people of color. Those of us who are white are almost always safer, freer from institutional retribution, than people of color. That knowledge should help us remain in uncomfortable situations as we work for change.
  - Identifying committees, decision-making teams, and departments that are 'too white' and working to bring a critical mass of people of color and white allies into the group. We do this not because it will look good but because the current composition is less able to make wise decisions due to its narrow vision. While discomfort is certain to follow, the benefits of inclusiveness far outweigh the discomfort."[29]

- **Laughing to Survive.** "Allies are able to laugh at themselves as they make mistakes and at the real, but absurd, systems of supremacy in which we all live. As many oppressed people know, humor is a method of survival. Those with privilege must be very careful not to assume that we can join in the humor of those in a target group with whom we are in alliance."[30]

The Assets of Allies

We have now looked at Kendall's picture of what allies do. But earlier we said that allies should use their privilege as assets for the sake of cross-cultural conversation. Let's see what Kendall's picture tells us about what the assets of allies are. Just as we saw Patricia Taylor Ellison's models of the assets of three types of leaders of public conversation in Section 47 above described in terms of basic knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, skills, and practices, so we can also describe the assets of allies in the same way.

The basic assets of allies in cross-cultural conversation—their basic knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, skills, and practices—are summarized in Figure 7 below.

Fig. 7 Assets of European-American Allies of People of Color

Knowledge Base

- Awareness of how white privilege works and a working knowledge of how it can affect cross-cultural conversation and cooperation
- Awareness of how people of color are generally treated by Whites, how they are/are not regarded
- Awareness of what White people generally expect of people of color
- Know that European Americans cannot know from their own experience what being a person of color is like
- Know that being White means being treated better than people of color in important ways that can be identified

Attitudes and Beliefs

- Basic trust in others despite potential for mistrust
- Take experience of people of color seriously
- Take responsibility for initiatives for change
- Motivated to work for inclusiveness and justice
- Desire authentic relationships with people and in organizations
- Committed to personal growth in relations with people of color
- Willing to be vulnerable to rejection and conflict in working for change toward a multicultural future
- Willing to take risks and make mistakes rather than settle for safety and inaction
- Believe it is in their own and their congregation's interest to work for multicultural community

Skills

- Close observation of the experiences of people of color
- Ability to imagine and reflect on the experiences of people of color
- Work cooperatively with people of color
- Think and work strategically
- Use good judgment about the relative risks of courses of action for various members of multicultural alliances
- Model appropriate attitudes, beliefs, and ally behavior
- Articulate how patterns of oppression harm people of color and benefits people like themselves
- Able to laugh at themselves and the absurdity of situations
- Able to cooperate with people of color to lead cross-cultural conversation

Behaviors

- Are allies with people of color both publicly and privately
- Stand with people of color
- Work in strategic alliances with people of color and others for a multicultural future
- Take initiative to change practices in congregations and communities
- Work for more hospitable environments for people of color
- Work for inclusive participation and power-sharing with people of color
- Name and confront acts which exclude people or which perpetuate the privilege of some at the expense of others
- Work with people of color to have public conversation about ministry and other issues among people of all cultural backgrounds in congregations

What Acting as Allies Might Look Like in Cross-cultural Conversation

A few examples might be:

- Synodical leaders might encourage congregations in specific situations to engage in cross-cultural conversation and show them why it is in their interest to do so.
- Congregational leaders of conversation can include people of color in their team, or model sharing leadership for conversation with people of another culture from a group in the community that the congregation is talking with.
- Congregational leaders of conversation can help to ensure that the experiences of people of another culture get a hearing by European Americans in conversation so that they increase their awareness of others.
- European American participants in cross-cultural conversation can step into an episode in which people from another culture are not being listened to by fellow European Americans.
- European American participants in conversation could take the lead in their congregation to initiate changes that would help further constructive contact and cooperation with people of color in the community.
- A congregation of European Americans could join with groups of people from other cultures in a community—perhaps in a faith-based community organization—and use its knowledge, contacts, and influence to broker relationships or help to seek changes desired by many in the coalition.

What might acting as an ally be like in your situation? How could you begin to act as allies?

1 The writer wishes to express thanks to Paul Benz, Joyce Caldwell, Christine May, and Marilyn Olson for their comments on an earlier draft of this section. Responsibility for the content, however, is solely that of the writer.

2 "Social power" is a general term that, for the purposes of this section, refers to the power that people have as members of an identifiable group in social relationships, the economy, politics, and cultural affairs because of the significant positions they occupy in important institutions that control or influence our national and local life in economic, political, social, and cultural matters, including the establishment and support of important values. To say that European Americans are powerful as a group because some members of this group tend to occupy most of these positions is not to claim, however, that all European Americans are equally powerful, or that most of them occupy these positions, or that they are always "more powerful" than some members of other cultural groups. But membership in this group tends to carry the *presumption* that one has a measure of the privilege of the group as a whole regardless of one's position in society.

3 The ELCA Social Statement *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*, (Chicago: ELCA, 1993) describes racism as "a mix of power, privilege, and prejudice." Significantly, in connection with the focus of this section the social statement says, "All people hold prejudices, but only the dominant group has the power to enforce laws, establish institutions, and set cultural standards that are used to dominate those who are the subject of their prejudice." (p. 4)

4 This section is based on material in the ELCA resource *Troubling the Waters for the Healing of the Church: A journey for White Christians from privilege to partnership* Leaders Guide and Participants Handouts written by Joyce Caldwell and Paul Benz (Chicago: ELCA, 2004) ISBN 6-0002-2031-6, and on two essays in that resource by Frances E. Kendall, "Understanding White Privilege," and "How to Be an Ally if You are a Person with Privilege." Our thanks to Frances Kendall for granting permission to use material from these two essays, which have been published in different form in her book, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Thanks also to Christine May of ELCA Multicultural Ministries for her cooperation and permission to use the ideas and material from *Troubling the Waters*. *Troubling the Waters* is an 18-week curriculum intended for congregational use from the liturgical seasons of Advent into Pentecost. Copies are available from Augsburg Fortress. European American congregations that are—or intend to be—engaged in long-term multicultural ministry are encouraged to use *Troubling the Waters* in depth. Responsibility for the way this material is presented here is solely the responsibility of the present writer, and not of Caldwell and Benz. The selective summary of parts of that material is presented in this section because of its importance to cross-cultural conversation about a variety of ministry matters. When summarizing material from this resource, page numbers will not ordinarily be cited. When quoting from this material, however, page numbers will be cited. "P" before the page number indicates that it is from the Participant section of the resource cited.

5 See Victor M. Rodriguez's article, "The Racialization of Puerto Rican Identity in the United States," in *Ethnicity, Race, and Nationality in the Caribbean*, Joan Manuel Carrion, ed., (San Juan: Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico, 1997) 233--273, for a discussion of this reality in the case of Puerto Ricans.

6 Frances E. Kendall, "Understanding White Privilege," in *Troubling the Waters for the Healing of the Church*, P51.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid. P49.

9 Ibid. P48.

10 Ibid. P47.

11 *Troubling the Waters for the Healing of the Church*, 79

12 Ibid. 6.

13 To address the negative effects of White privilege in the church, *Troubling the Waters for the Healing of the Church* distinguishes six stages in the transition of European American congregations and church institutions to multicultural organizations (see P89), and describes in detail a ten-step process based on a reading of the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10–11 to help these congregations and institutions on their journey through these six stages. (See P85–P87 and P94–P102) This process is recommended for those congregations and institutions that want to start this journey.

The six stages of organizational change are: 1) wholly European American in norms, values, and practices, 2) tolerant of differences but maintaining traditional norms, 3) acceptance of people who are different, 4) awareness of cultural differences and seeks to eliminate discriminatory and exclusionary practices, 5) understands systemic cultural norms, biases, and values, respects differences and affirms the value of diversity, encourages dialog, and seeks to change structures, 6) lives in a new diverse community in which all fully participate in decisions and respect one another.

The ten-step process for initiating change involves 1) prayer, 2) envisioning what God is calling them to do, 3) giving up old messages about cultural practices and distinctions, 4) committing to take risks to break out of cultural traditions and ways of life, 5) gathering a community to move forward, 6) retelling the stories of their visioning, 7) taking action steps, 8) receiving the hospitality of the Other, 9) reporting back and reflecting on what has happened, and 10) experiencing change, celebrating it, and undertaking new action. Thus, the process can involve a series of cycles in these steps over time as congregations and organizations move through the stages of becoming multicultural.

14 *Troubling the Waters for the Healing of the Church*, 7.

15 Frances E. Kendall, "How to Be an Ally If You Are a Person with Privilege," in *Troubling the Waters for the Healing of the Church,* P87.

16 Ibid. P81.
17 Source: Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism in Contemporary English with Lutheran Book of Worship Texts*, (Minneapolis and Philadelphia: Augsburg Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1979) 5–7. Third person singular pronouns have been changed to plural pronouns to minimize gender-based language in the original.
18 Kendall, "How to be an Ally If You Are a Person with Privilege," P81.
19 Kendall, Ibid. P81–82.
20 Ibid. P84.
21 Ibid. P84–85
22 Ibid. P85.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid. P83–84.
25 Ibid. P82.
26 Ibid. P83.
27 Ibid. P82–83.
28 Ibid. P86–87. Emphasis added.
29 Ibid. P86.
30 Ibid. P85

Glossary of Key Words

Assets: Gifts that you and others have for mission, such as abilities and talents, relationships, capacities, resources, positions of influence or authority, possessions, money, valuable intangibles such as experience, etc.[1]

Asset Mapping: The activity of connecting the gifts or assets of your congregation or ministry and its people in ways that suggest actions that serve your mission.[2]

Christian Imagination: The ability to connect specific events and circumstances in the lives of individuals and congregations with the images, stories, and ideas of Jesus, the Christian gospel, and the experience of Christian communities. Also refers to the habit of doing so. Christian imaginations are usually formed in Christian communities partly through frequent engagement with the Scriptures and the traditions of the Church through the practice of worship, regular reading of Scripture, and reflective struggle with biblical texts. It is also formed through the personal and corporate experience of faithful Christians in congregational and other settings. The Christian imagination tends to shape faith-based conversation in a distinctive way that somehow conforms to those images. [3]

Culture: The values, attitudes, knowledge, skills, practices, ways of seeing the world and interacting with it and other people, and ways of understanding oneself in that world that are characteristic of a group of people. For the purposes of this field guide, culture focuses on ethnic or nationality groups.

Discernment: The effort "to recognize the presence or guidance of God in human affairs,"[4] especially in the lives of believers and in Christian communities through practices such as mutual conversation and deliberation, prayer, reflection and meditation, observation, and reading Scripture.

Double Vision: The activity of seeing the perspective of each person in a conversation—one's own and the others'—from one's own standpoint.

Filters:[5] The assumptions, expectations, and ways of "seeing" what we experience. These are "filters" in the sense that they "filter out" some information from reality and "pass through" other information to us. We use these filters—often without being conscious or deliberate about it—to *interpret* and *understand* the things that happen to us, the people and situations we encounter, our relationships, and society, and to *act* on our interpretations and understandings. We use these filters not only to interpret and understand the way things *are* and how we should *act*, but also to envision the way things *should be*. So, our use of filters affects our behavior and has real consequences. Some of these filters come to us from the culture of the particular ethnic communities of which we are a part. Others come to us from the larger society. Still others come to us from our faith and shape our Christian imagination. So, we usually have more than one set of filters we use, and which one we use at a particular time may depend upon the context in which we find ourselves. As Celia Falicov suggests, we may find ourselves in the "borderlands" where different sets of filters meet.[6] We may feel we that are being forced to choose between them. On the other

hand, we may consciously select from various filters to create a way of understanding and viewing the world that combines parts of various cultures in which we participate.

Ministry Matters: Includes things such as the following: matters involving public worship and evangelism; Christian education and nurture in Christian faith; service to the neighbor through such things as social ministry, faith-based organizing, and public policy advocacy; matters of justice.

Public Conversation: In the context of the church, public conversation involves groups of people talking about ministry or about ethical and social issues that matter in which the conversations are open to any in the group who wish to participate.

White Privilege: The social power which White people presently have in the United States to set the terms by which members of other social and cultural groups participate in social and public life, including churches, by acting as if it is their natural privilege to do so without having to obtain the consent of others, or without either having to think about it or justify that privilege to anyone.[7]

1 *The Great Permission*, 134.
2 *The Great Permission*, 82.
3 Patrick R. Keifert, "The Return of the Congregation to Theological Conversation," *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations*, Keifert, ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 20–21; Ronald W. Duty, "Words for Faith-based Moral Conversation, " unpublished glossary, for a meeting of the Congregational Studies Research Team of Church Innovations, August 30-31, 1995; and Don Juel, "The Use of Scriptures in Congregational Research," in *Testing the Spirits*, 201–204.
4 Ann O'Hara Graff, "Notes on Discernment: Learning for the Church," unpublished paper given to the Congregational Studies Research Team of Church Innovations, St. Paul, Minnesota, February 18, 1995, 1.
5 We borrow the concept of "filters" from social psychologist Julio A. Fonseca as presented in his Multicultural Workshop for ELCA Seminarians, June 30–July 2, 2002, in St. Paul, Minnesota.
6 Falicov, *Latino Families in Therapy: A Guide to Multicultural Practice,* 6-7.
7 Frances E. Kendall, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 61–78. A version of this essay is also printed in *Troubling the Waters for the Healing of the Church: A Journey for White Christians from Privilege to Partnership* (Chicago: ELCA, 2004).

Other Resources

Christian Conversation on Difficult Issues and Change

Church Innovations offers one-day training workshops in a process of deep listening, theological reflection, and spiritual discernment that form a set of habits for faith-based conversation around difficult issues for congregations including change and mission. The workshops go by the name of "Growing Healthier Congregations." See its Web site at *www.churchinnovations.org*, e-mail them at *consulting @ churchinnovations.org,* or call 888-223-7631 for more information. Its resource, *Growing Healthier Congregations*, is also available.

Asset-based Congregational Life

This field guide uses an asset-based approach to having and leading cross-cultural conversation. Here are three resources for those who want to explore this approach in more detail.

The Great Permission: An Asset-Based Field Guide for Congregations, written by Bob Sitze, edited by Laurel Hensel, Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2002. $6.00. ISBN: 6-0001-6960-4. Available from Augsburg Fortress. An easy-to-read guide that includes theological background, case studies and how-tos for congregational leaders—all directed toward an asset-based approach to congregational life.

Dones de Gracia: Guie de Acción para Congregaciones, Francisco Javier Goitia, tr., written by Bob Sitze, Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2002. $4.50 ISBN: 6-0001-6748-2. Available from Augsburg Fortress. Un librito para congregaciones que desean establecer un énfasis ministerial enfocado en los dones de sus miembros. Esta guía presenta una introducción, trasfondo y sugerencias para desarrollar este énfasis.

Luther K. Snow, *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts*, Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2004. $18.00. ISBN 1-56699-294-X. Shows congregational leaders how to help a group recognize its assets and the abundance of God's gifts and to act on them in ministry and mission. Congregations will find the book easy to read and immediately useful. Tips, techniques, stories, and lessons drawn from the experience of diverse congregations will help readers discover *how* asset mapping works and *why* asset mapping strengthens faith and community. Luther Snow also leads workshops in congregational and community asset mapping. See his Web site, *home.earthlink.net/~lutherksnow/id10.html*, e-mail him at *lutherksnow*@earthlink.net, or write to him at 409 Upper Broadway, Decorah, IA, 52101.

White Privilege

In the United States discussions of culture take place in a context of the reality of race and social class. Here are resources that help European Americans explore the very real phenomenon of White privilege which they enjoy, and gives them tools to deal with it constructively.

Troubling the Waters for Healing of the Church: A Journey for White Christians from Privilege to Partnership, Chicago: ELCA, 2004. $35.00. ISBN: 6-0002-2031-6, Available from Augsburg Fortress. *Troubling the Waters for Healing of the Church* is a resource developed specifically for European American congregational members to help them understand the role that White privilege and internalized White superiority has had in shaping their own attitudes, belief systems, cultures and those of the church at large. This resource has been designed by European American people for other people like themselves to equip them with tools that will aid then in addressing and breaking the cycle of socialization that perpetuates racism and sustains an exclusive church. The resource will help European American congregational members or groups to embark on a journey of learning from one another as well as from people of color who may enter the river of conversations with them as time goes on. The resource is presented in 18 sessions starting with the season of Lent and ending with Advent.

Frances E. Kendall also offers consulting and workshops on personal and organizational change about issues of diversity and social justice, including White privilege and race, through her group, Kendall and Associates. Details are available at her Web site which is found at *www.franceskendall.com* (accessed 10/30/09). She has also published an updated version of her essay, "How to Be an Ally If You Are a Person with Privilege" along with her essay, "Understanding White Privilege," in her book, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race,* (New York: Routledge, 2006) $20.00. ISBN 0-415-95180-1 (for the softcover edition). Her writing is down-to-earth and practical and, at the same time, profoundly insightful.

Multicultural Outreach

Agora Ministries offers training for congregational leaders and support to congregations wanting to engage in multicultural outreach. It has experience going back nearly three decades of working with European American congregations to successfully welcome people from other cultures and to integrate them into the ministry of their congregations in various ways. Training sessions typically include background about the role of cultures in the spread and growth of global Christianity, and how to grow local congregations by welcoming diverse cultures. A variety of methods of learning are used. For information, contact Agora Ministries at 9815 Portland Avenue, S., Minneapolis, MN 55420. Ph: 952-888-5197; *www.agoraministry.org*.

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