



**Talking
Together**
as Christians
Cross Culturally



Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally
written by Ronald W. Duty

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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 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 that first example is a mission failure marked by fear of people who are culturally different, the other 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.

The Church 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 the Church live into that imagined 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 us how these congregations engage in public conversation in their own cultural contexts. These conversations inform material in Sections 19-25 of this field guide.

Those congregations and pastors include: The Church of the Abiding Savior, Durham, NC, Rev. Gordon Myers; Angelica Lutheran Church, Los Angeles, CA, Rev. Carlos Paiva; Iglesia Luterana Ascención, Dorado, PR, Rev. Vivian Davila; Augustana Lutheran Church, Portland Oregon,

Revs. Ramona Soto Rank and Walter Knutson; Chinese Life Lutheran Church, Alhambra, CA, Rev. Timothy Fong; Iglesia Luterana Epifanía, Bayamon, PR, Sr. Carmen Ramirez; Frederick Lutheran Church, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, V.I., Revs. Stephan Kienberger and Rochelle Lewis; Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Fredericksted, St. Croix, VI, Rev. Robert Wakefield; Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Inglewood, CA, Revs. James Lobdell and Carol Scott; Kingshill Lutheran Church, Kingshill, St. Croix, VI, Ms. Thelma Youngblood; Living Waters Lutheran Church, Cherokee, NC., Rev. Mary Louise Frenchman; Lord God of Sabaoth Lutheran Church, Christiansted, St. Croix, VI, Rev. Lester White; Messiah Lutheran Church, Los Angeles, CA, Rev. Vivian Martin and Ms. Marie Gunigale; Salam Arabic Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, NY, Rev. Khader El-Yateem; Parroquia Luterana Sagrado Corazón, Waukegan, IL, Rev. Heriberto Prudencia; Parroquia Luterana San Francisco de Asís, Aurora, IL, Rev. Hector Garfias Toledo; Iglesia Evangelica Luterana San Marcos, Guaynabo, PR,

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This project owes a significant intellectual debt to two scholars and practitioners of cross-cultural conversation. We owe to 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 also grateful to her for her comments on Sections 31 and 32 of this field guide which summarize some of her work. We also owe a significant debt to Thomas Kochman for his pioneering research on public conversation between African Americans and European Americans. His work has illuminated aspects of public conversation that are important in this field guide and helps to inform Sections 18 and 23 of this field guide. We also thank him for his personal generosity with materials he uses in his consulting.

As you will see as you use this field guide, it also 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 Patrick R. Keifert, Patricia Taylor Ellison, and Ronald W. Duty; the InterReligious Council of Central New York's *End Racism, Improve Race Relations, and Begin Racial Healing*, written by 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 Karen L. Bloomquist and Ronald W. Duty; the United Church of Christ's *See—Judge—Act*, written and compiled by Robin Peterson and Lou Ann Parsons; *Finding Common Ground in the Abortion Conflict*, by Mary Jacksteit and Adrienne Kaufmann, and the Women of the ELCA's *Called to Deal with Difficult Issues*, written by Faith Fretheim and Joan Pope.

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Women; and Marilyn Campbell, Division for Church in Society.

Others have also contributed to the development of this field guide, to whom we would like to express gratitude. John Stumme gave steadfast guidance and support throughout this project. Bob Sitze was generous with his knowledge of asset-based congregational life, as well as with unpublished material he wrote and shared with me. Thanks are due likewise to Bishop Margarita Martinez, Lily Wu, Maria Paiva, José Garcia, Pongsak Limthongviratn, Marilyn Sorenson-Bush, and José Diaz-Rodriguez for their assistance in identifying congregations with whom we consulted, and for helping to facilitate our visits to San Juan and the Virgin Islands, Brooklyn, Los Angeles, Southwestern Texas, Portland, North Carolina, and Chicago. Michael Hauck of the Division for Church in Society did the layout and formatting of the manuscript and its web edition, and Lisa Ludvicek-Bowe and Connie Sletto of Augsburg Fortress assisted in the production and publication of this field guide.

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Ronald W. Duty
Project Director
Chicago, Illinois
September 12, 2004

Welcoming Strangers for Cross-cultural Conversation: An Invitation

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 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 that first example is a mission failure marked by fear of people who are culturally different, the other 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 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

- Help ministries talk cross-culturally

- Enable synods to equip ministries that want or need to talk cross-culturally to have those conversations
- 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 questions³
- 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 some—but not all—of the cultural groups currently present in the ELCA. These include

- African Americans and Blacks
- American Indian People
- European Americans
- Arab Americans and Middle Easterners
- Caribbean Islanders of the U.S. Virgin Islands
- Chinese Americans
- Latinos

It does not yet address the cultures of South and Southeast Asia, Korea and Japan, the native cultures of Sub-Saharan Africa, or the cultures of Eastern Europe from all of which immigrants have recently come. Nor does it address the cultures of Alaskan Natives. These are left for later work at an opportune time. It is hoped that a future revision of this guide will include them.

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 17 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.

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 multi-cultural 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 sixteenth 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 focuses on what talking together as Christians cross-culturally is and 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 Two deals with how we talk

cross-culturally as church. Sections 7-12 are addressed to synod teams that will work directly with congregations to train them for having cross-cultural conversation. Sections 13-34 focus on how congregational leaders can prepare to lead cross-cultural conversation. Synod teams will also want to study this part of the field guide. Part Three addresses the issue, why talk cross-culturally as church? It will give good reasons for cross-cultural conversation in ministry.

This Project and ELCA Commitments

Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally helps to support both the commitments and the general direction the ELCA has more recently charted for itself in a churchwide planning process. The 2003 ELCA Churchwide Assembly approved five strategic directions for the future of the ELCA¹¹ 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 talks 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.

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 training 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) B35—B-44; Keifert, "The Return of the Congregation: Theological Method," in *Testing the Spirits*, Keifert, ed., (forthcoming) 158-159 of the unpublished manuscript.
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 U.S. or with differences between urban and rural cultures.
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. *The Great Permission: an Asset-Based Field Guide for Congregations*, (written by Bob Sitze) (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), p.4. (also online at www.elca.org/socialstatements/freedinchrist) 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 multi-racial, multi-cultural society since the seventeenth century. Yet, I was told by a native 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 U.S. The common phrase, "people of color" testifies to the power of race-based attitudes and behavior in the U.S. 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/planning/directions (April 27, 2004).
12. *Ibid.*
13. See its social statement, "The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective" (1991), also online at www.elca.org/socialstatements/churchinsociety (April 27, 2004).
14. "Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns," (1997), p. 8, also online at www.elca.org/socialstatements/procedures.
15. See www.elca.org/co/decade.html for background on the ELCA's involvement in the Decade (April 27, 2004).

Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally is a “field guide.” It is a resource for “field work” by synods and congregations 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 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.
2. Part Two focuses on how to prepare and lead cross-cultural conversation.

Sections 7-12 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 13-34 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.

3. Part Three focuses on the question: Why talk cross-culturally as church?

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 book 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 6 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*¹⁶ and Luther Snow's *The Power of Asset Mapping*.¹⁷ 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*.¹⁸

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.”¹⁹

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

16. ELCA, *The Great Permission: An Asset-Based Field Guide for Congregations*, written by Bob Sitze and edited by Laurel Hensel, (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2002).

17. Luther K. Snow, *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts*, (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2004).

18. 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), pp. B-33—B-36.

19. *Growing Healthier Congregations*, p. B. 36.

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.²⁰ (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.

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.²² 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.²³

(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.)

1. Follow the Golden Rule; in conversation, do unto others as you would have them do unto you—even if you disagree with them.
2. Listen carefully and respectfully to others
3. Speak honestly about your thoughts and feelings
4. Speak for yourself rather than as a member of a group
5. 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
6. A true conversation needs give and take (all people and their views should be heard)
7. Maintain confidentiality about what is said in the conversation when requested
8. Keep an open mind and heart
9. Exercise care for group members who become upset over anything that is said
10. 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.²⁴

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.

²⁰ *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).

²¹ If we were to use one of the other guides in Section 6, 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.

²² 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 "'Worthily of the Gospel of Christ (Philippians 1:27)': The Ecclesiastical Significance of Christ's Political Agency," in *Testing the Spirits*, Patrick R. Keifert, ed., (forthcoming). 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.

²³ *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.

²⁴ Ronald W. Duty, "Christian Imagination in Congregational Deliberation and Discernment: The Play of Scripture and Experience," in *Testing the Spirits*, Patrick R. Keifert, ed., (forthcoming).

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.²⁵

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.²⁶
- 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."²⁷
- 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.

"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)

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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.²⁸ 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.

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

“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.) 15

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*²⁹: 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.”³⁰

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.³¹
- 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

- 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?³²
- What are the strengths of their views?³³
- 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.”³⁴ It also encourages thinking that finds connections with others, and makes it possible to take risks with them.

“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.”

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.³⁵ 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:

“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,

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

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.”³⁶

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.”³⁷

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.”³⁸ 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.

²⁵ *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-44.

²⁶ R. Stephen Warner, “Coming to America,” *The Christian Century*, February 10, 2004, 23.

²⁷ 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

²⁸ This is stressed by *End Racism, Improve Race Relations, and Begin Racial Healing*, 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.

²⁹ *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-35

³⁰ *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-35.

³¹ *End Racism, Improve Race Relations, and Begin Racial Healing*, (Syracuse: InterReligious Council of Central New York, 1997 [updated 9/17/98]), 10.

³² James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew: cross-cultural strategies*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 150.

³³ *Study Circles in Paired Congregations*, (Pomfret, Conn.: Topsfield Foundation, Inc., 1995), 15.

³⁴ *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.

³⁵ *Finding Common Ground in the Abortion Conflict: A Manual*, (Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, 1995), 8-9.

³⁶ *Finding Common Ground*, 10.

³⁷ *Finding Common Ground*, 9.

³⁸ 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.

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.”³⁹

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.”⁴⁰ This means that we all have complex multicultural identities which increase our capacity to understand and adapt to a variety of cultures.⁴¹ 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.

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?”⁴²

“We often claim the church is inclusive. But it is not inclusive if it doesn’t incorporate another culture’s understanding of Christ”

Dr. Richard J. Perry, Jr.*
Lutheran School of Theology,
Chicago

* Personal Conversation, February 23, 2003

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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴

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...”

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.

[T]he cross says that despite its manifest enmity toward God humanity belongs to God; God will not be God without humanity.”⁴⁵ 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.

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.”⁴⁶

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*.”⁴⁷ 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
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 have 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.⁴⁸
- Similarly, in European 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.⁴⁹
- Also conquered by Europeans, Latino Americans may tend to see themselves as *mestizo*⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹ They see Jesus is the one through whom this promise is fulfilled in the Exodus-to-Jesus story.⁵²
- 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 European Americans. Seeing themselves and others through the lens of the biblical story and their own experiences of slavery and racism, African Americans may sometimes

see European Americans as Pharaoh and the Egyptians. African Americans tend to focus their action on "building a world of freedom and transforming the structures of evil"⁵³ for all people in both the church and the wider world. European Americans, 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."⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵

With theological insight from Volf and the cross-cultural experience of Celia Falicov, we can envision a process to seek double vision.⁵⁶

- **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."⁵⁷ Recall from the previous section that in conversation we

- o Lower our self-consciousness
- o 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... .”⁵⁸
- **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.⁵⁹ 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. We also become aware of how our own lives, thoughts, and preferences have been influenced by how we describe our own experiences, 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 are 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 26.)

- **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.⁶⁰
- **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.’”⁶¹

This process of “double vision” is how from common ground we may begin to understand one

another's differences 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.⁶²
- 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.⁶³
- 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.⁶⁴
- 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. 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.⁶⁵

- ³⁹ *Finding Common Ground*, 9.
- ⁴⁰ Celia Jaes Falicov, *Latino Families in Therapy*, (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998) 6.
- ⁴¹ Falicov, *Latino Families in Therapy*, 7.
- ⁴² *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-70.
- ⁴³ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, John F. Hoffmeyer, tr., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) 235.
- ⁴⁴ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 241, 251, 108-182.
- ⁴⁵ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) 126.
- ⁴⁶ 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.
- ⁴⁷ *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.
- ⁴⁸ 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.
- ⁴⁹ *Embracing Diversity*, 93.
- ⁵⁰ *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).
- ⁵¹ Jose David Rodriguez, Jr., and Colleen R. Nelson, "The Virgin of Guadalupe," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 13 (Dec. 1986) 368-369.
- ⁵² 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.
- ⁵³ 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.
- ⁵⁴ *Exclusion and Embrace*, 228.
- ⁵⁵ *Exclusion and Embrace*, 250-251.
- ⁵⁶ 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.
- ⁵⁷ *Exclusion and Embrace*, 252.
- ⁵⁸ *Exclusion and Embrace*, 252.
- ⁵⁹ *Exclusion and Embrace*, 252, and *Latino Families in Therapy*, 84.
- ⁶⁰ *Embracing Diversity*, 94-95.
- ⁶¹ *Exclusion and Embrace*, 253.
- ⁶² Jacksteit and Kaufmann, *Finding Common Ground in the Abortion Conflict*, 64.
- ⁶³ *Finding Common Ground in the Abortion Conflict*, 64.
- ⁶⁴ *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-66.
- ⁶⁵ 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.

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 60631-4101. Ph: 773-380-2730; email: womnelca@elca.org

The brief and clearly written guide uses a well-structured process of reflection and decision-making about ministry matters 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. Ph: 3154493552; email: ircny@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. Ph: 1-888-223-7631. Web site: www.churchinnovations.org; *Listening for What You Share in Common* email: info@churchinnovations.org

This leader resource teaches the basics of an excellent process for talking together about a variety of ministry matters. 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 matters. 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 on-line 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: 8609282616; email: 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—Division for Church in Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4101. Ph: 773-380-2996

for single complementary copies. To order multiple copies, call Augsburg Fortress Publishers 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 matters. Has good practical lists of “how tos” for organizing and leading conversation.

A video showing aspects of the process from this resource in some cross-cultural conversations is also available from Augsburg Fortress by calling 800-328-4748. Ask for the video, “Dealing with Tough Issues as Christians,” ISBN 6-0001-3219-0. Price: \$19.95. Clips from this video are online at: <http://www.elca.org/dm/leadership/mult7.html>

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—Division for Church in Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4101. Ph: 773-380-2996 for single complementary copies. To order multiple copies, call Augsburg Fortress Publishers 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 matters. Has good practical lists of “how tos” for organizing and leading conversation.

Mapping Your Synod's Assets for Cross-cultural Conversation

7

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.⁶⁶ 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."⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸
- 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.⁶⁹
- Financial resources.
- Physical assets such as churches, Bible camps, colleges, and synod facilities.
- Something so crazy it just might help.⁷⁰

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:⁷¹

- 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 Action⁷²

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.⁷³

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.

⁶⁶ Luther K. Snow, *The Power of Asset Mapping*, 43.

⁶⁷ *The Power of Asset Mapping*, 44.

⁶⁸ *The Great Permission*, 80.

⁶⁹ 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.

⁷⁰ *The Great Permission*, 11.

⁷¹ *The Great Permission*, 85.

⁷² The following ideas are based on *The Great Permission*, 86-87, *The Power of Asset Mapping*, 17 and 59-64.

⁷³ 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

Cultural Diversity is an Asset

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.

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 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

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 services⁷⁴ 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.

⁷⁴ 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.

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? ⁷⁵
- 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

1. A copy of this training manual

2. 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 12 for examples.

Mapping Assets:

- The team will need a working knowledge of the asset-based approach discussed in Section 12 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 16-22 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 12 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 5. 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 13, 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.

⁷⁵ 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

11

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.

1. One-day format

Morning

Bible study—the biblical vision for multicultural ministry⁷⁶

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?

2. 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 4 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 12 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 27 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 12 offers some guidance for using the resources listed in

Section 6. 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 16-22 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 23. 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 23 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 4. 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.⁷⁷ After sharing, discuss the conversation by using the questions under "Responding to What We Hear" from Section 4.

- 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:
 - o Ask participants first to describe as accurately as they can what they heard in the stories others told
 - o On an easel pad or chalkboard, list the differences they noticed from their own stories. Ask them why these differences seem important to them.
 - o 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.
 - o 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.
 - o 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.
 - o 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 13, 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.

⁷⁶ 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.

⁷⁷ 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.

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.⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹ (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."⁸⁰) 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*⁸¹:

- "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*,⁸² 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.

⁷⁸ *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-81.

⁷⁹ *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-81.

⁸⁰ *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-81—B-82

⁸¹ *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-81 See this page also for additional questions to consider.

⁸² 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.

Your Congregation's Human Assets for Talking Together

13

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 way⁸³:

"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?⁸⁴

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.⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶

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.

⁸³ *The Great Permission*, 22-23.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 38 and 85.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 35

“Mapping” Your Assets for Talking Cross-culturally

14

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 leaders⁸⁷. 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,⁸⁸ 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 OK.
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.”⁸⁹
- Start working together to accomplish your tasks.

⁸⁷ 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.

⁸⁸ 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), p. 8

⁸⁹ *The Great Permission*, p. 85.

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 6, “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 Sections 19-25 (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 Sections 19-25 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.⁹⁰
 - o 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.
 - o Stress that this occasion will be a safe place to share their views with others even when there are wide disagreements.
 - o Target as much publicity to the intended participants as practical in order to raise awareness of the event.
 - o Be clear about the purpose of the conversation and why they are invited.
 - o Give a realistic picture about what people can expect the conversation to be like.
 - o Invite people to listen to the views and feelings of others.
 - o Extend hospitality by offering food, child care, or transportation if needed.
 - o Note that the Holy Spirit may enable participants to hear and understand things they might not on their own.
- o Build relationships which will help the conversation happen.
- o 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—
 - o If you use *Called to Deal with Difficult Issues*, see pp. 9-10.
 - o 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.
 - o If you use *See—Judge—Act*, you may choose between a single session (pp.36-39) and a multiple session format (pp. 11-36).
 - o 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.
 - o 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.

- o If you use *Called to Deal with Difficult Issues*, see pp. 5-7.
- o If you use *Growing Healthier Congregations*, see the section “Conversation Leader’s Self-Help Slide Show,” pp. B-83—B-88.
- o If you use *See—Judge—Act*, see the section, “Some Ideas and Suggestions for Facilitating a See—Judge—Act Group, pp. 40-44.
- o 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*,⁹¹ pp. 7-15. For *End Racism, Improve Race Relations, and Begin Racial Healing*, see <http://www.studyircles.org/pdf/training.pdf>, p. 36

- o 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 18-24 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.

⁹⁰ *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues*, pp. 8-9.

⁹¹ Available from Study Circles Resource Center, Pomfret, CT, 06258, Ph: 203-928-2616, or see their Web site at www.studyircles.org for order information.

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*.⁹² 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.⁹³

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.⁹⁴

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.⁹⁵

In *Growing Healthier Congregations* the ground rules of the ritual are: Attend, Assert, Decide, and Act.⁹⁶ 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—Act*, 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.⁹⁷

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.⁹⁸

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.⁹⁹

⁹² *Lutheran Book of Worship* Setting 1 (Minneapolis and Philadelphia: Augsburg Publishing House and Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978), 57-58.

⁹³ *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-33.

⁹⁴ *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-34.

⁹⁵ *Called to Deal with Difficult Issues*, 9-10.

⁹⁶ *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-35-36

⁹⁷ *See—Judge—Act*, 8.

⁹⁸ *Study Circles in Paired Congregations*, 2, and *Guidelines for Organizing and Leading a Study Circle*, 18-19.

⁹⁹ *Talking Together as Christians*, 11, and *Dialogando en Conjunto como Cristianos*, 21-22.

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 paper version of this resource published by 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.

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.”¹⁰²

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.¹⁰³ 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.¹⁰⁴

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.¹⁰⁵

European 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.¹⁰⁶

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.¹⁰⁷

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.¹⁰⁸

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 European American culture, public discussion tends to be characterized by *dispassionate* conversation. European 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.¹⁰⁹ 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. European 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*.¹¹⁰

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 European 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.¹¹¹

Third example— “Speak for yourself and not as a member of a group.” European 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.

¹⁰¹ 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.

¹⁰² “Working on Common Cross-cultural Challenges,” 67.

¹⁰³ 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.

¹⁰⁴ This was revealed in discussions with members of the Open Circle at Augustana Lutheran Church, Portland, Oregon, May 22-23, 2003.

¹⁰⁵ 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.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Discussion with members of Truth Lutheran Church, Naperville, Illinois, May 18, 2003.

¹⁰⁸ Discussion with members of Iglesia Luterana Sagarada Corazon, Waukegan, Illinois, March 7, 2004, Parroquia Luterana San Francisco de Asis, Aurora, IL, March 18, 2004, and Iglesia Luterana Trinidad, Chicago, Illinois, March 21, 2004.

¹⁰⁹ 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 European Americans and African Americans in conversation.

¹¹⁰ Pp. 10 and 19-20, respectively.

¹¹¹ For an extensive discussion of the differences in public conversation between African Americans and European Americans, see Kochman, *Black and White: Styles in Conflict*.

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 sixteenth through the mid-nineteenth 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 spirituality¹¹² 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:¹¹³

- **Truth emerges from testing the validity of ideas in argument.**
- **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. 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.**
- **When one is unable to make an effective reply to the arguments of another, a person should change his views.**
- **The struggle of argument is not divisive, but instead is ultimately unifying.**
- **Spontaneous expression of ideas and emotions is valued.**
- **Expressing emotion in argument does not 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 immanent 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.**
- **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.**

¹¹² 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)

¹¹³ The following characteristics are based on the discussion in Kochman, *Black and White: Styles in Conflict* and interviews with congregations having African American and Black members.

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

Indian people found themselves constantly on the defensive and in conflict with European 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. European 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 nineteenth 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 were on 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 Indian peoples 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 European American ways instead. Some American Indian people 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 with various tribes.

Beginning in the twentieth 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; even 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 have immigrated to the United States since the late nineteenth century. Some are Christians. Many, of course, are Muslims. Arab Christians often come from churches in the Middle East that date back as far as the first century apostles. These Arab churches have endured living in minority status in Muslim countries where they were often not allowed to evangelize openly. Arabs who have recently arrived in the United States are often displaced and in exile from their homeland because of political and economic pressures there. Christian immigrants report some religious discrimination against them in certain countries. Palestinians have immigrated here because of the particular economic or political pressures caused by the ongoing conflict between the Palestinian people and Israel, especially since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967.

Public discussion among Arabs and Middle Easterners tends to include the following features:

- **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.**

The U.S. Virgin Islands, like many islands in the Caribbean, is a multi-racial society that includes people of both European and African descent. The U.S. Virgin Islands were settled by Danes in the sixteenth 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. A number of Latinos have migrated to the Virgin Islands for economic reasons over the last 100 years. They are a minority in the islands.

The United States acquired the Virgin Islands from Denmark in the nineteenth 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 continue 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.**

Chinese Americans began coming to the United States in the mid-nineteenth 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 European American culture. Initially employed as laborers on 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 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-Twentieth 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.

It is unclear how much the features of public discussion among the Chinese are shared by people of other Asian cultures. Elements of public conversation among Chinese people 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 so 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.

European Americans

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 seventeenth and eighteenth 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, as Section 16 of this field guide emphasizes. 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,”¹¹⁴ 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, 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.

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 them freedom. While European American Christians were divided about whether slavery was right, some persistently argued and worked to abolish of slavery before 1863 along with free African Americans and Blacks like Frederick Douglass.¹¹⁵ Others worked with a former slave named Sojourner Truth to help slaves to escape their masters. 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. The ELCA spoke to this reality in its 1993 social statement, “Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and

Culture,” and continues to address racism within this church.¹¹⁶

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 the following convictions or features:¹¹⁷

- **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.**
- **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.

- **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.**

¹¹⁴ A translation of the Latin phrase, “E pluribus unum.”

¹¹⁵ For part of the story of Lutheran involvement in the issue of slavery by some African Americans and European 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.

¹¹⁶ The ELCA Commission for Multicultural Ministries provides anti-racism training, and is introducing 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).

¹¹⁷ This section is based partly on material in Thomas Kochman, *Black and White Styles in Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 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), pp. 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 trace their ancestral and cultural heritage to Latin America—the countries of Central and South America, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. Latinos immigrate to the United States for basically the same reasons other people do: because of political repression, persecution, or poverty and lack of economic opportunities in the countries from which they or their ancestors came. There are differences in the national cultures and histories of Latin America, but in the United States they are bound together by a common language—Spanish—and by what they share from the cultural heritage of Spain.

Most Latinos are conscious of being a people of mixed 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. These people tend to call themselves “Chicano,” which distinguishes them from Latinos who have immigrated legally or illegally to the United States in later periods. 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 neither a U.S. territory nor one of the 50 states; it is a commonwealth with some powers of self-rule. 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.

Although many Latinos are Roman Catholic, a growing number of them are Protestant, ranging from Pentecostal and Evangelical to Methodist and Lutheran. There have been Lutheran congregations in Puerto Rico for at least a century. Lutheran congregations are often found where Puerto Ricans have settled in the U.S. in large numbers.

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.**

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 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.

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

(Based on Analysis by Deborah Tannen) ¹¹⁸

Men's Styles	Women's Styles
<p>Worldview: See themselves as individuals in a hierarchical order</p> <p>Independence & Self-reliance are Key</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish status Tell others what to do Make decisions autonomously <p>Talk as a means to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preserve independence Negotiate & maintain status in hierarchy Get & keep attention <p>This is done through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exhibition of knowledge & skill Holding center-stage via verbal performance Imparting information <p>In public situations, tend to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Claim the floor and hold forth; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 Use a relatively loud voice Speak in a relatively low pitch 	<p>Worldview: See themselves as persons in a network of connections</p> <p>Intimacy is Key:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimize difference Work for consensus Avoid superiority, appearance of difference Make decisions by consultation, discussion See independence as symmetrical rather than hierarchical <p>Talk as a means to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish connections and similarities Negotiate relationships <p>This is done through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showing similarities with others Matching experiences with others Exchanging Information and support <p>Comfortable speaking in private</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tend to approach public conversation as if it were private <p>In public situations, tend to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep silent, wait for recognition, be reluctant to claim attention Be uncomfortable giving lots of information Ask questions, retrain giving opinions. Be unaccustomed to authoritative speech <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play down their expertise Self-conscious about errors Speak relatively briefly, softly, and in a relatively high pitch

Men's Styles (continued)	Women's Styles (continued)
<p>May interrupt a speaker to lead conversation in a different direction they can control; May expect resistance to such tactics from other speakers</p>	<p>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</p>
<p>Tend to see listening at length as putting them in a subordinate position</p>	<p>Expect listening to be reciprocated, but to show active interest by give-and-take</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>Tend to adjust to "men's rules" of conversation in mixed-gender company</p>
<p>Prone to take credit for a woman's idea that they like or agree with</p>	<p>Feel "onstage" & on display—must watch behavior more closely</p>
<p>May be annoyed by interruptions by women with overlapping expressions of agreement, support, or attempts to complete a thought;</p>	<p>May "overlap" another's talk with words of support, agreement, or by anticipating how speaker's thoughts will be completed</p>
<p>May rather engage in verbal sparring than mutual support</p>	<p>Feel comfortable in supporting others</p>

¹¹⁸ *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1990)

Diverse Leadership of Conversation is Important

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 14), 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.
- **It 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.

- **It 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.
- **It 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 When Talking Together

28

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.¹¹⁹ 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."¹²⁰

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."¹²¹ 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."¹²²

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 matters and how to live in congregations.

When Christians read the Bible for guidance and reflection about how to live 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."¹²³

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 for thinking 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.¹²⁴ The ways cultural groups tend to think about 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.¹²⁵ 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.¹²⁶

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.¹²⁷ 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)¹²⁸

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.¹²⁹ 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 ELCA¹³⁰.

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.*¹³¹ 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,¹³² 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.¹³³

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.¹³⁴

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.

¹¹⁹ 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*, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert, (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*, p. B-38; *Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues*, 15-16; and David L. Ostendorf and Paul R. Peters, *Revitalizing Church and Community*, 3 and 11-12.

¹²⁰ *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (Chicago: ELCA, rev. 2001), 2.03.

¹²¹ 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.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 107

¹²³ Martin Luther, “How Christians Should Regard Moses,” in Lull, ed., *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 144, emphasis added.

¹²⁴ 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.

¹²⁵ For discussions of African American Christian interpretations of Scripture, see, for example, J. Deotis Roberts, *Africentric Christianity: A Theological Appraisal for Ministry*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), pp. 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.

¹²⁶ 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).

¹²⁷ See, for example, Jose David Rodriguez, “Confessing Our Faith in Spanish”; Pablo A. Jimenez, “The Bible: A Hispanic Perspective,” in *Theologia en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology*, Jose David Rodriguez and Loida I. Martell-Otero, eds., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p. 70; Teresa Chavez Saucedo, “Love in the Crossroads: Stepping-Stones to a Doctrine of God in Hispanic/Latino Theology,” in *Theologia en Conjunto*, p. 30. Eliseo Perez Alvarez, “In Memory of Me: Hispanic/Latino Christology beyond Borders,” in *Theologia en Conjunto*, p. 39;

¹²⁸ Rodriguez, “Confessing our Faith in Spanish,” 357n.

¹²⁹ See *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-29—B-31 for a discussion of this in the context of talking together as Christians.

¹³⁰ So 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 Franciscan Synod to slavery in the nineteenth century.

¹³¹ 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” in *Testing the Spirits*, Keifert, ed., (forthcoming) 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, “Christian Imagination in Congregational Deliberation and Discernment: The Play of Scripture and Experience,” in *Testing the Spirits*, Keifert, ed., (forthcoming) for an exploration of this theme.

¹³² 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.

¹³³ Perry, “African American Action: The Will to Build,” 90-92.

¹³⁴ 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.

We have been discussing how to lead congregations in cross-cultural conversations about ministry matters. 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 identity¹³⁵. 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 addressed¹³⁶.

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.”¹³⁷

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 members¹³⁸. 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 Thais teaches them.”¹³⁹

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.”¹⁴⁰

Because our experience happens in particular ethnic communities and congregations, our experience is shaped and edited by those cultures in distinct ways.¹⁴¹ 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.¹⁴²

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.”¹⁴³

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.”¹⁴⁴

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.”¹⁴⁵ 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 practice exercise on the next page.)

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-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.”¹⁴⁶

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.

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 crosscultural conversation.

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.

¹³⁵ James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-cultural Strategies*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 7 and 29.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 38 and 68.

¹³⁷ Craig Storti, *The Art of Crossing Cultures*, (Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, 1990), 53.

¹³⁸ *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-40.

¹³⁹ *The Art of Crossing Cultures*, pp. 52-53.

¹⁴⁰ 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.

¹⁴¹ Martha Ellen Stortz, "Rethinking Christian Sexuality: Baptized into the Body of Christ," in *Faithful Conversation*, 69 and 71.

¹⁴² *Preaching to Every Pew*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁴³ Stortz, "Rethinking Christian Sexuality: Baptized into the Body of Christ," 63.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Daniel L. Olson, "Talking about Sexual Orientation: Experience, Science, and the Mission of the Church," in *Faithful Conversation*, 97.

¹⁴⁶ *Growing Healthier Congregations*, videotape.

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 Salaam 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 Salaam 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.¹⁴⁷ 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.¹⁴⁸ 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 18-24. 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 diversity¹⁴⁹ as well as a curiosity about other ways of being human and Christian.¹⁵⁰

Stories. The personal and communal stories of cultural groups also enhance conversation between groups.¹⁵¹ These draw upon the personal and communal experience of faithful people.¹⁵² 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.

¹⁴⁷ This example surfaced in a conversation between this writer and Salaam's pastor, Khader El-Yateem.

¹⁴⁸ 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.

¹⁴⁹ Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*, 41-42.

¹⁵⁰ 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.

¹⁵¹ Marty, *The One and the Many*, pp. 143-163.

¹⁵² *Growing Healthier Congregations*, B-40.

Congregational Gifts and Assets for Talking Together

31

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.¹⁵³

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.¹⁵⁴

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"¹⁵⁵ about the gospel, and is consistent with the tradition of the whole Christian Church.

Attitudes and Beliefs

Congregations that want to talk about ministry are *ready* to tackle the difficult ministry matters they face. Even though they know that such matters 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. And they have a *longing to engage in spiritual discernment* together about the future of their ministry. And 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.”¹⁵⁶

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:

Congregational Assets for Talking Together (Fig. 2)

<p style="text-align: center;">Basic Knowledge</p> <p>Ways to Handle Conflict and Disagreement Constructively Understand Conflict as Sometimes God’s Gift Have Calling to Participate Together in Body of Christ</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Attitudes & Beliefs</p> <p>God-centered Hope Preference for Action Longing for Discernment We Don’t Necessarily All Agree</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Skills</p> <p>Adaptation & Invention Listening & Speaking Skills</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Practices & Habits</p> <p>Hospitality Servanthood Freeing Others to Participate in Conversation</p>

¹⁵³ Patricia Taylor Ellison, “Doing Faith-based Conversation: metaphors for congregations and their leaders,” in *Testing the Spirits*: Patrick R. Keifert, ed., (forthcoming), 234-239 of the ms.

¹⁵⁴ Patricia Taylor Ellison may be contacted through Church Innovations, PO Box 390207, Minneapolis, MN 55439, Ph: 651-644-3653. Ron Duty may be contacted at the Division for Church in Society, ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631. Ph: 773-380-2716.

¹⁵⁵ Luther, *The Smalcald Articles*, Part III, Article IV, *Book of Concord*, Theodore G. Tappert, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959)

¹⁵⁶ Ellison, “Doing Faith-based Conversation,” 235.

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 which 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

Three kinds of leaders of conversation have been identified so far in research with congregations. They can be described by such figures of speech as pioneers, prophets, and servant leaders.¹⁵⁷

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 deliberately opt out of at least part of the status quo," says Patricia Taylor Ellison, "in order to create a new, 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."¹⁵⁸

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 him and his message of God's grace, focused on his death on the cross and his resurrection

- European 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 created 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.

Assets of Leaders as Pioneers (Fig. 3)

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

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.

Prophets. “Prophets,” Ellison reminds us, “speak truly about the past, present, and future, inspired by and in conversation with God.”¹⁵⁹ 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.

Assets of Leaders as Prophets (Fig. 4)

<p style="text-align: center;">Basic Knowledge</p> <p>God is beyond human power</p> <p>God is present in life and in conversation with humans</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Attitudes & Beliefs</p> <p>The Church is a body called by God</p> <p>People’s talents are God-given</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Skills</p> <p>Teaching</p> <p>Public and Private Prayer</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Practices</p> <p>Focus attention on God</p> <p>Encourage talk about God</p>

6. Focus their own and our attention on God.
7. Are confident teachers because of their God given 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.

Servant Leaders. Servantleaders lead by helping others grow to become servants of others themselves. Ellison reminds us that “Of course, Jesus is the primary model of servantleader and commands the very behavior of his disciples.”¹⁶⁰

Rejecting a dominating or hierarchical model of leadership, servantleaders:

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.

Assets of Servant Leaders (Fig. 4)

<p style="text-align: center;">Basic Knowledge</p> <p>God is engaged with congregations to create a trustworthy world</p> <p>Church is an active community called by God to discern and work for the future</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Attitudes & Beliefs</p> <p>Self as servant</p> <p>Have real fears and real hopes</p> <p>Congregations have gifts for work God gives it</p> <p>Don’t need to be perfect, just helpful</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Skills</p> <p>Helping skills</p> <p>Fostering participation by others in conversation</p> <p>Leading conversation</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Practices</p> <p>Many acts of serving</p> <p>Build trust and freedom for others to participate in conversation</p> <p>Do whatever helps a meaningful exchange of ideas</p>

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.

Work to build trust and freedom for all to engage in conversation.

Are There Other Kinds of Leaders? Its 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 European American 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 to our knowledge.¹⁶¹ 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!

¹⁵⁷ The following discussion of pioneers, prophets, and servantleaders is based on material presented in Patricia Taylor Ellison's essay, "Doing Faith based Conversation: metaphors for congregations and their leaders," 239-250.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 240.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹⁶¹ Again Patricia Taylor Ellison may be contacted at Church Innovations, PO Box 390207, Minneapolis, MN 55439; Ph. 651-644-3653. Ron Duty may be contacted at the Division for Church in Society, ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631. Ph: 773-380-2716.

We have now explored how to train leaders for cross-cultural conversation, and how to lead Christians in such conversation. But why do any of this? What are some good reasons for talking crossculturally as Church today? Answers to these questions have to do with the Church's mission, witness, and service to the world, and the work of the Holy Spirit. They also have to do with how the Church discerns its calling, with Christian freedom, with how it shapes a Christian community and its public ministry, and with the ELCA's own selfunderstanding as a church.

The Church's Mission, Witness, and Service

The Church's mission is fundamentally 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: 19-20, 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 nineteenth century continues today.¹⁶² 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 crossculturally.

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

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 12:5-6)

"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)

of the Holy Spirit which continues to sustain it and all believers. Luther called the Church “the holy community of Christian people.”¹⁶³ He wrote that through the Spirit, God “gathers us, using [the Church] to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases sanctification, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in the fruits of the Spirit.”¹⁶⁴ 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.”¹⁶⁵

Through the power of the Spirit, the Church has indeed made disciples of all nations. Theologian Michael Welker stresses the multi-national, multi-cultural 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.”¹⁶⁶ The Spirit of God rested on Jesus¹⁶⁷ 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.¹⁶⁸ The Spirit does not just tolerate such differences; it actually *cultivates* those “that do not contradict justice, mercy, and knowledge of God.”¹⁶⁹

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.”¹⁷⁰ And yet, the experience of the power of the Spirit empowers diverse people to hear one another and share common, if sometimes, challenging experiences.¹⁷¹

Talking together as Church cross-culturally about ministry matters—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.”¹⁷²

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 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.¹⁷³

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 self-indulgence, 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.¹⁷⁴ (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.¹⁷⁵ 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 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.¹⁷⁶

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."¹⁷⁷ 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 "full partnership and participation" of all racial and ethnic peoples of the ELCA "in the life of our church and society," and for synods and congregational leaders "to reach out to a diverse community."¹⁷⁸ 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.¹⁷⁹ 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."

- ¹⁶² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- ¹⁶³ Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther, The Creed*, III:53, in *The Book of Concord*, Theodore G. Tappert, ed. & tr., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 417.
- ¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶⁵ Luther, *The Large Catechism, The Creed*, III:55, 418.
- ¹⁶⁶ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, John F. Hoffmeyer, tr., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 16.
- ¹⁶⁷ See, for example, the account of his sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth in Luke 4:16-21.
- ¹⁶⁸ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 21.
- ¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 22, 23.
- ¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.
- ¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 234.
- ¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 151.
- ¹⁷³ 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), 285287; Patrick R. Keifert, "The Return of the Congregation: Theological Method," in *Testing the Spirits*, forthcoming, 157159 of the manuscript; Ann O'Hara Graff, "Notes on Discernment: Learning for the Church," in *Testing the Spirits*, 138146 of the manuscript; and Robert A. Kelly, "Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio Faciunt Theologium: Luther's Piety and the Formation of Theologians," *Consensus*, 19:1 (1993), 927. 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.
- ¹⁷⁴ 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*, pp. B-19—B-28. Fredrickson 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.
- ¹⁷⁵ *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.
- ¹⁷⁶ Fredrickson, "Pauline Ethics: Congregations as communities of Moral Deliberation," 115.
- ¹⁷⁷ "The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective," (adopted, 1991) online at www.elca.org/socialstatements/churchinsociety
- ¹⁷⁸ Goals of the ELCA Commission for Multicultural Ministries, online at: www.elca.org/cmm/about.html
- ¹⁷⁹ ELCA social statement, "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture," (Adopted, 1993), 6-7, online at www.elca.org/socialstatements/freedinchrist

Talking among Christians of Different Cultures is Nothing New

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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 fulfills 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

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 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 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 Katherine Luther’s dinner table to talk about these things with the two of them.¹⁸⁰ 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.

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 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”¹⁸¹ 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.

¹⁸⁰ 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.

¹⁸¹ 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.

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.¹⁸²

Asset Mapping: The activity of connecting the gifts or assets of your congregation or ministry and its people in ways that suggest actions which serve your mission.¹⁸³

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.¹⁸⁴

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,”¹⁸⁵ 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:¹⁸⁶ 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 “boarderlands” where different sets of filters meet.¹⁸⁷ 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: 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; and matters of justice.

Public Conversation: In the context of the church, public conversation involves groups of people talking about ministry issues that matter in which the conversations are open to any in the group who wish to participate.

¹⁸² *The Great Permission*, 134.

¹⁸³ *The Great Permission*, 82.

¹⁸⁴ Patrick R. Keifert, “The Return of the Congregation: Theological Method,” *Testing the Spirits*, Keifert, ed., (forthcoming), pp. 157-158 of the unpublished manuscript; Ronald W. Duty, “Words for Faith-based Moral Conversation,” in *Testing the Spirits*, pp. 52-53; and Don Juel, “The Use of Scriptures in Congregational Research,” in *Testing the Spirits*, p. 210.

¹⁸⁵ Ann O’Hara Graff, “Notes on Discernment: Learning for the Church,” in *Testing the Spirits*, Patrick R. Keifert, ed., (forthcoming), p. 126 of the manuscript.

¹⁸⁶ 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.

¹⁸⁷ Falicov, *Latino Families in Therapy: A Guide to Multicultural Practice*, 6-7.

Other Resources



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.

White Privilege

In the United States discussions of culture take place in a context of the reality of race and social class. Here is a resource that helps 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.

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 them 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 Advent and ending with Lent.

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