

Congregations

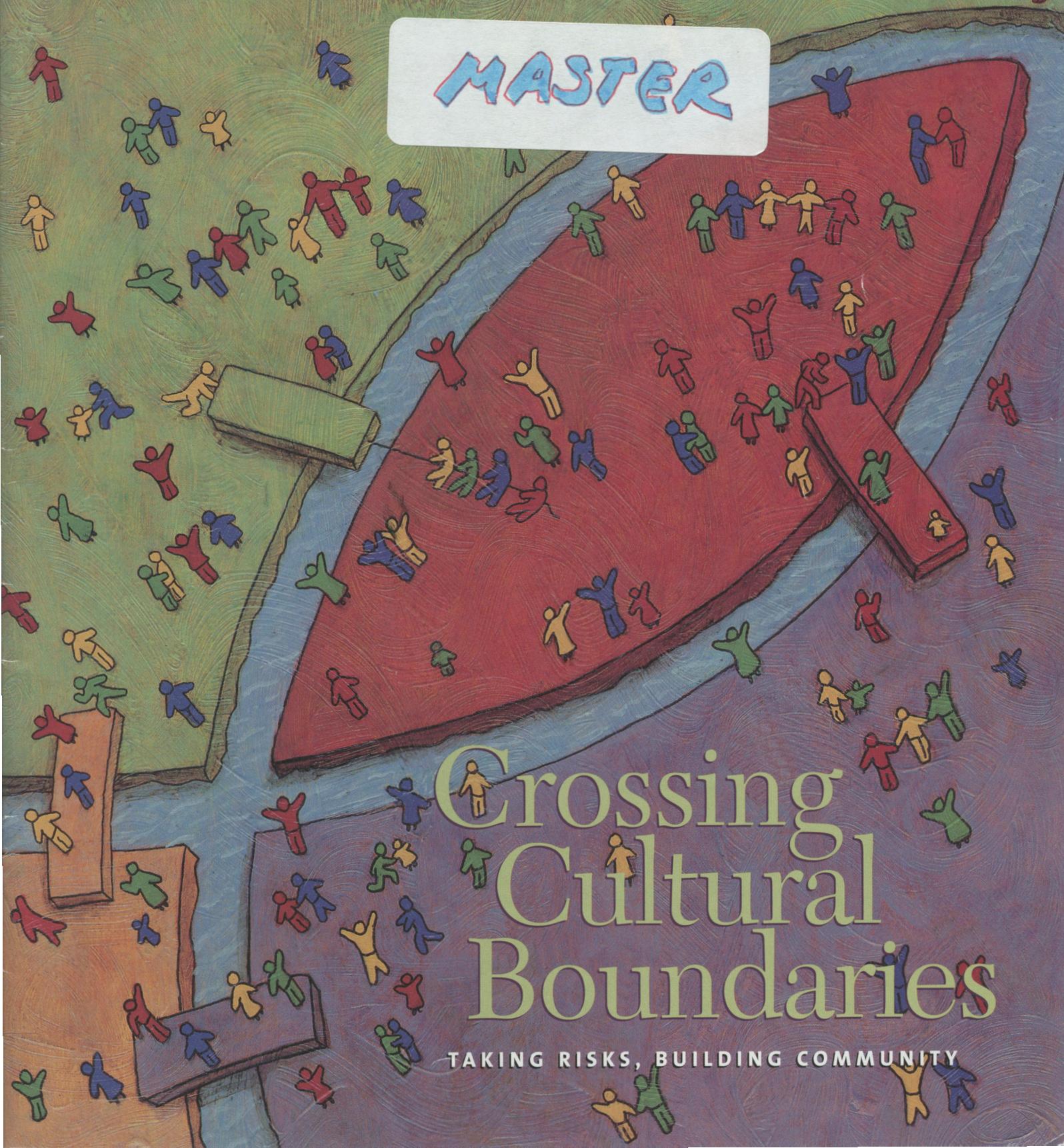
LEARNING LEADING CHANGING

SUMMER 2003

MASTER

Crossing Cultural Boundaries

TAKING RISKS, BUILDING COMMUNITY

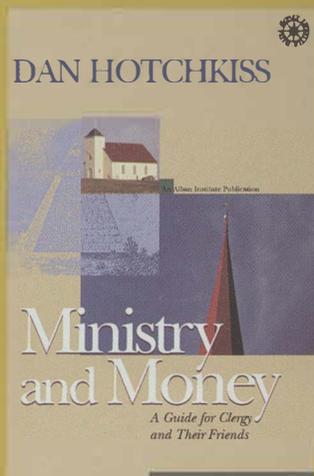


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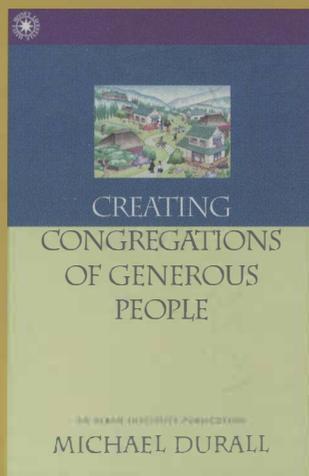
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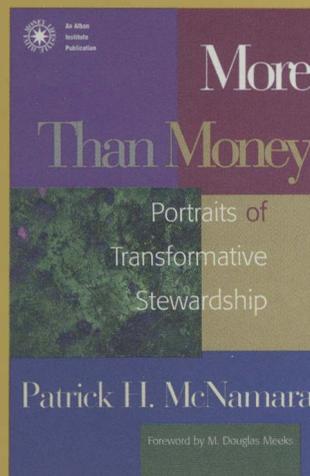
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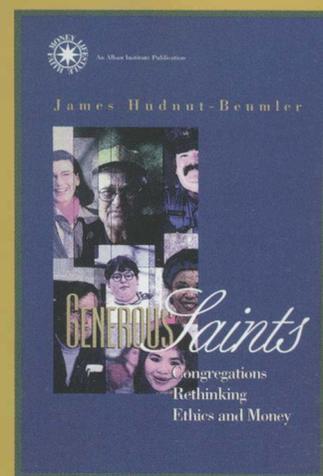
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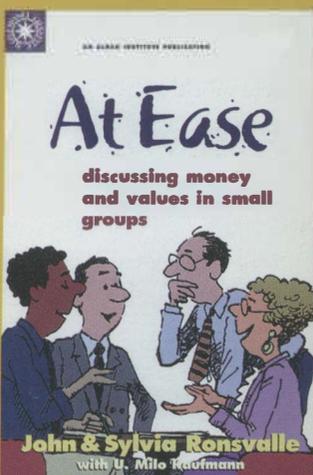
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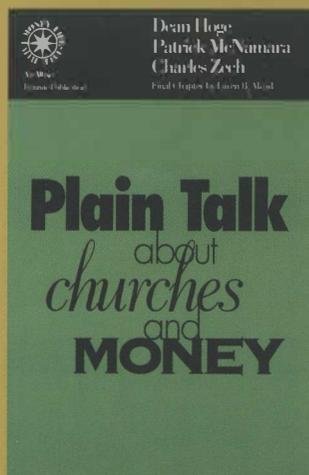
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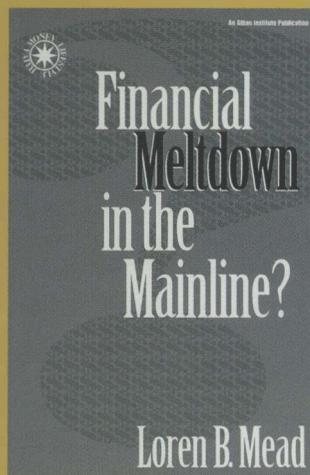
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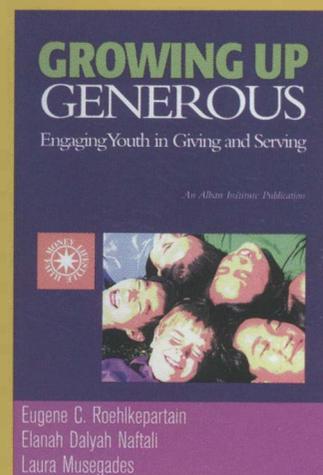
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LEARNING LEADING CHANGING

SUMMER 2003

Crossing Cultural Boundaries



in Focus

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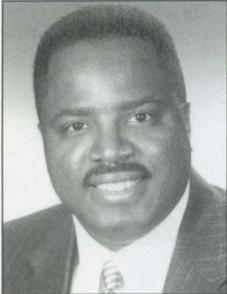
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Risking the Landmines

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Congregations

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This past March I was able to participate in a gathering of the Alban Institute consultants, who come from around the country to discuss their issues, concerns, and practice every four months. At this particular meeting, Jacqueline Lewis—our consultant leading Alban's Negotiating Cultural Boundaries Project—discussed her research and her practice, and invited the assembled group to engage in some conversation about our own experiences with crossing cultural boundaries.

It was readily apparent—to me, at least—that this was a challenging exercise, even for such a collegial, supportive, and enlightened group as the Alban consultants. And it certainly was for me as well. I have a master's degree in cultural anthropology, but I am no more comfortable talking about race, class, and gender differences as they play out in everyday life than anyone else. It is a topic fraught with landmines—verbal blunders, well-meaning (or not so well-meaning) ignorance, frustration, misunderstandings, and simmering resentments that often cannot be fully articulated or moved beyond.

And yet this group rose to the challenge. Jacqui invited us to break into small groups and share with each other a personal boundary-crossing experience that touched us in some way. It seems to me that this kind of conversation requires a vulnerability and an authenticity, a true desire to understand, that usually is not demanded of us in other settings. In order to have this kind of conversation, we need to transcend the desire to be safe so that we can listen and be listened to, and understand and be understood. It occurred to me then that we all, in whatever setting, need to make the time and the space for this kind of communication to occur. It is the place where healing begins.

In this issue, Jeffrey Haggray, executive director and minister of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention, describes how his experience in a cultural boundaries conversation group has enhanced his work in "In Mission on the Boundaries—On Purpose!" (p. 16). Jacqui Lewis shares the importance of story in identity development as she tells her own experience of bigotry as a child and how that influenced her to be a "border person" in our "In Focus" piece, "Living on the Border" (p. 22).

In an introduction to two other articles about specific boundaries that congregations must grapple with, Jacqui reminds us that church leaders must learn to negotiate racial and cultural boundaries both within their congregations and in their surrounding communities (p. 10). Then Christian social ethicist Traci West and author Anthony Healy remind us of how important it is that we really talk to one another across sexual and generational boundaries in "Sexuality and Boundaries" (p. 12) and "Questioning the Age-Segregated Church" (p. 14).

Of course, what to do about these issues is another thorny matter and, as Ian Evison—project director at the Alban Institute—observes, race initiatives at the denominational level are very difficult to implement ("Race Initiatives," p. 32). The reasons Ian cites for this may surprise you, further proof of just how much more listening and understanding is required for this important issue.

Blessings,

Lisa Kinney
lkinney@alban.org



Leading on the New Religious Frontier: Building Racially & Culturally Diverse Communities

Led by Jacqueline Lewis
October 8-10, 2003 Washington, DC

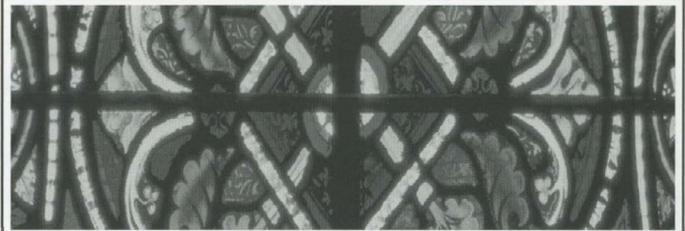
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Mission Accomplished or Unfinished Business?

On May 1, when President Bush triumphantly climbed out of a S-3B Viking jet onto the deck of the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln, his Top Gun arrival was a signature moment of his presidency. In case anyone missed the point, a banner on the ship's tower proclaimed: "Mission Accomplished."

The war with Iraq, though not officially "over," was entering its clean-up phase. In little more than a month, the United States had started a war, demolished a regime, and announced its readiness to move on in the war against terrorism. The brief touch-down on the aircraft carrier was symbolic of events moving so rapidly that few could comprehend them.

Playing Catch-Up

If these events leave us off balance, those of the past year and a half are even more disorienting. In that brief period, all Americans—including congregational leaders—had to adjust to rapidly changing global realities. First came September 11, 2001, and the end of American illusions about our security. Then the U.S. invaded Afghanistan in pursuit of Al Qaeda and toppled the Taliban. Before the dust settled, an international debate began about invading Iraq. Before many churches and synagogues had determined how to address the ethical issues of such a war, it started and ended. Mentally and morally, most of us were playing catch-up.

Congregations responding to the cascading events were all over the map. Over the past 18 months, many had offered special worship opportunities to mourn the dead and pray for those in harm's way. Some held forums to discuss troubling ethical questions posed by terrorism, just-war theory, national sovereignty, international law, and pre-emptive strikes. Others mobilized—to oppose the war, wave the flag, raise money, or assemble food and medical resources. Some, paralyzed by events, kept silent.

Now each congregation—like each American—must come to terms with the "Mission Accomplished" message. It is clear that the American military has completed its work of defeating the

Saddam Hussein regime—perhaps not inducing "shock and awe," but leaving little doubt about our military supremacy. But the rest of us need to think more about our mission. Are we finished or have we unfinished business at hand?

Questioning Our Role in the World

Reflecting on the past months, I see a host of questions that congregations must address to minister effectively to their members and to the world. The debate on just war and pre-emptive strikes is far from settled, even if the heat is turned down now that some jets, ships, and troops have headed home. A larger question is America's role in the world. Our recent military performance and our choice to move almost unilaterally against world opinion raise questions about the uses, abuses, and consequences of power. More than a century ago, in 1887, English historian Lord Acton coined the aphorism "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." As the wealth and power gap between America and the rest of the world grows, what consequences await the world—and our national character?

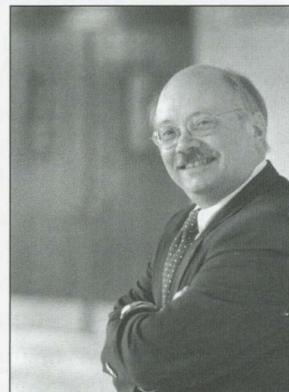
Those questions are occasioned by new political, economic, and technological realities. But old questions return with new urgency. Perhaps the most obvious involves the relationship between Islam and Christianity, especially as the latter is mediated through the modern West. In recent months our nation has begun learning how little it knows about the youngest of the Abrahamic faiths. Despite increased warning since the Khomeini revolution in Iran in 1979, our diplomats, military planners,

media experts—and religious leaders—have continued to misunderstand the clash of civilizations along the cultural boundaries between Islam and the West.

History's Aftershocks

Few of us can move past limiting stereotypes. Few know that Islam has streams of egalitarianism and peacemaking in its heritage as well as those of fundamentalism and jihad. Most Americans would be shocked to learn that for centuries the Islamic world was more advanced militarily, philosophically, medically, and architecturally than the Christian one. At times Islam was more tolerant of its Christian and Jewish minorities than Christianity was of Islam and Judaism. Few of us can understand that the modernity that gives us so many benefits looks very different to people who believe it has been destructive of the great civilization and traditions they have built.

One way to view our present is to see it as a moment when the unfinished business of world history is closing in. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism now bring centuries of tradition, misunderstanding, hatred, and violence to our doorsteps. The question each congregation must ask is how prepared it is to assist its members and its community in working along this precarious set of fault lines. Increasingly, aftershocks from changes along these ancient fault lines reach closer, now often felt in our workplaces, in our neighborhoods, in our families. Helping our people live along and cross cultural boundaries is of the highest importance.



Rev. Dr. James P. Wind is the president of the Alban Institute. Prior to joining the Institute in 1995, he served as program director at the Lilly Endowment's religion division. Dr. Wind is the author of three books and numerous articles, including the Alban Institute special report on leadership.



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Congregational Spiritual Companions

Walking with
Churches on Their
Faith Journeys

CELIA A. HAHN AND COLLEAGUES

Research often uncovers unexpected gems. Such was the case in my work on the Alban Congregational Spirituality Project, a study of five disparate Washington, D.C. churches undertaken to learn about the different ways their congregational spirituality had developed, to discover their unique gifts, and to help them develop processes for discerning their call from these gifts. The hope of those involved in this research was that these experiences could help other churches in going deeper and in discerning their own gifts and call.

It was during my work on this project—sponsored by the Alban Institute, funded by the Soper Trust of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, and described in my book, *Uncovering Your Church's Hidden Spirit*—that I was surprised to discover that my role as researcher was also one of spiritual companion to the churches. The traditional role of spiritual director, guide, and companion to individual people seeking to deepen their spiritual lives was now being exercised in the corporate body of the congregation.

Many years of work with the Alban Institute have taught me that surprises deserve careful attention, so I felt compelled to explore further the possibilities of this role in local churches. To get started, I asked project consultants Tilden Edwards and Jerry May of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation to recommend some trained spiritual guides who might be interested in pursuing this role in local churches, matched the nominees with interested churches, and set up a peer group to support these “congregational spiritual companions” and to serve as a forum for sharing what they learned.

Now, two years after the formation of the Congregational Spiritual Companions Peer Group, these spiritual guides have reported some fascinating results of their work, which has played out in very different ways in different churches. The reasons for this are simple: The role of the congregational spiritual companion is one of receiving the reality of the congregation rather than attempting to direct it. Being a spiritual companion is like being a midwife; it involves being present for congregations and doing what seems useful to support them as they carry out their processes. The spiritual companion walks alongside the congregation, adopting a variety of roles as needed, while remaining respectful of the people’s leadership of their church.

The crucial question for the companion, says Jerry May, is how to participate in whatever God is up to in the spiritual life of the congregation. As Tilden Edwards puts it, the spiritual companion is “a special kind of evangelist holding up the good news of the intimate presence of the Spirit in the congregation’s life. . . . Even though you say, ‘I’m not here to teach,’ in a way you do teach just by your way of being present.”

The following stories of two spiritual companions’ experiences—presented anonymously here to protect the churches’ privacy—illustrate the uniqueness of each church’s experience of being accompanied by a companion, and the powerful impact the presence of this role can have on a congregation’s journey.

Story 1: Layers of Discernment

Imagine a church where all members of the corporate body sit in silence and prayer together and, from that silence, discern the church’s future direction. Imagine a church board that considers discernment a more valuable skill than debate, and committees where discerners help the groups determine their next steps. This may sound like an unusual way for a suburban church to do business, but this is what is happening in one Protestant church in Maryland.

After a churchwide retreat using the book *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* by Suzanne Farnham, Joseph Gill, R. Taylor McLean, and Susan Ward, several parishioners felt a “nudging” to continue in this contemplative way of being. The pastor also had a vision of how the church might continue to listen more intentionally for God’s calling. So, with the support of an outside spiritual companion, this group began exploring how to become discerners and how to support the entire corporate body in listening directly to God’s calling for the church.

The group began meeting monthly to study and practice discernment with one another, developing a simple process that allowed for a rich time of sharing and prayer:

- ◆ Check in, allowing people to connect and be fully present in the room (15 minutes)
- ◆ Outline a question, issue, or idea from the reading assignment (5 minutes)
- ◆ Discuss a question, issue, or idea from the reading assignment (20 minutes)
- ◆ Silence (5 minutes)
- ◆ A member of the group shares an issue on which he or she wishes to receive guidance, which defines the question for discernment (10 minutes)
- ◆ Silence (5 minutes)
- ◆ Share from the silence (15 minutes)
- ◆ Assess the group’s process (5–7 minutes)
- ◆ Close with a prayer (2 minutes)

After two years of this practice, the group was given an opportunity to introduce discernment to the entire corporate body. The board decided to develop a new vision statement for the church, and the discernment group was asked to help lead the entire corporate body through a process of sitting in silence and listening for God’s guidance for their future together.

To provide ample opportunity for participation, three meeting times were selected during a particular week. Each night began with a prayer led by a member of the discernment group, followed by a 10-minute period of silence. Parishioners then met in smaller groups to discuss the church’s future. Board members were present as listeners to the community, whose ideas were captured on a flip chart. Members of the board will use this discernment from the entire church to assist in identifying and articulating the vision for the church.

The process was valuable, if not perfect. A major learning was that, although the discernment group had grown very comfortable with a 10-minute space of silence, it was a stretch for most members of the church. Therefore, for future discernment efforts, the group recommended using a guided meditation that included periods of silence rather than complete silence, particularly when first introducing the practice. Discernment group members also played a critical role in reminding people that the small group discussions were a time of brainstorming and listening rather than the usual forum for debate. Even with these bumps in the path, this was a significant and meaningful experience for the entire corporate body.

The discernment group continues to meet regularly and has discerned that its process is to be a subtle happening within smaller groups. The group’s purpose is to change—intentionally and subtly—the way business is done. In each of the ministries in which the group members are involved, they are seeking to begin meetings with an opening prayer and short periods of silence for the group to open itself consciously to the moving of the Spirit in the midst of their deliberations. The hope is that discernment will gradually become the way of the whole community. It may also prove to be a way individual members of

the community may come to see the discernment group as a resource for them as they are trying to listen for how God may be calling them through the questions and decisions they face in their own lives.

This group of discerners and the corporate body have taken a miraculous step toward becoming a discerning corporate body. The richness of this experience for the members of the group is powerful, and it continues to take them to new depths as they journey together. This is indeed an awesome gift for the parish as a whole.

Story 2: Resurrection Church

The ministry of spiritual companionship, dependent as it is on the promptings of the Holy Spirit, is always suffused with mystery and shot through with surprises. When I embarked on my conversations with the pastor at a church I'll call Resurrection, I felt as if I had an assignment of sorts—to discern and nourish the hidden spirit of the congregation—but I was open to whatever might unfold in terms of my specific role.

From the start, the pastor and I felt a sense of rightness about our connection, and we were delighted to be part of a process that seemed not unlike a parent and godparent getting together to enjoy a child's emerging identity and to discern what support and encouragement the child might need. We hoped that our monthly conversations would bear fruit for the congregation's corporate spiritual identity as well as for individual congregants. However, we had no particular sense of how that would be achieved, and proceeded by simply putting one foot in front of the other, trying simply to show up, pay attention, and listen well. In the early months, our conversations focused most often on what was currently going on in the church and what had happened in the years since the pastor's arrival—and in the chal-

“Receiving this gift, or being allowed to have this gift, has refreshed my spirit. I would say it has increased my capacity for receiving the blessing of God.”

lenging years prior to his arrival, when the church's focus often had been mere survival.

The pastor also described to me his hopes for the church, and his longing for a greater sense of energy and depth in their shared life together. Over time, our focus moved increasingly to his desire for greater depth and integrity in his own life and ministry. Several times during this initial period I offered the pastor some different options for how our work might proceed, most of them involving my meeting with various groups of church members and lay leaders, but also including the option of concentrating on the movements of the Spirit in the pastor's own life and how that might, in turn, shape the life of the parish. What might constitute his own hidden spirit, hidden from the congregation and even at times from himself? How might his

own “going deeper” evoke something similar in the congregation, not through the sharing of the particulars of his interior journey, but by the agency of his own being as he grew in wholeness and authenticity, openness, peace, and pervasive rootedness in God?

About nine months after our first conversation, the pastor acknowledged that, prior to my arrival, he had had a sense of having no one to talk with about certain topics, such as his prayer life, his joys and frustrations in the parish, and the demands of family life and the impact of these on his ministry. He realized he had wanted a spiritual companion for quite a while but hadn't found the time to seek one out. He also felt it might be selfish to spend time or money on such a thing, or that it might be perceived that way. However, he had come to see my arrival as an answered prayer. Looking back on this fork in the road, he wrote: “When our congregational spiritual companion raised the question of how our work might evolve, I was between spiritual directors myself, knowing I needed to find someone but unsure where to start. While our companion had previously mentioned individual spiritual direction as a possible path, the idea had not registered with me. I was focused on the project as discernment with the whole parish, and did not think individual direction would be ‘allowed’ within the context of the project. So, when our companion again stated that this was an option, my reaction was very powerful: God was offering me just what I wanted and needed, and it was almost too good to be true. Receiving this gift, or being allowed to have this gift, has refreshed my spirit. I would say it has increased my capacity for receiving the blessing of God.”

Not long after we began our work together, the pastor established for himself a disciplined daily practice of centering prayer. He now feels that maintaining this contemplative thread in his

life has contributed significantly to what he has described as “continents moving and shifting within.” Paradoxically, he finds himself more consciously vulnerable and also more firmly anchored in God, sustained by a Source beyond ego, beyond anyone's potential to hurt or humiliate him. He feels he is living from

a more truthful center and is now free of what he feels was a tendency to over-function and an excessive need to feel “in charge.” This particular shift has borne fruit both in his family life and also in the parish, where he increasingly relies on lay leaders to take care of certain administrative tasks and asks non-stipendiary clergy in the parish to preach more often. He continues to set aside time in meetings of the governing board for prayer, reflection, and bible study, and he is so convinced of the value of centering prayer in his life that, for a time, he led a small group of church members in the practice. He hopes that their experience will produce a ripple effect in the congregation. Similarly, he is considering instituting a group of “wise ones” to engage with him in continuing discernment on the congregation's behalf.

Over time, my conversations with the pastor at Resurrection Church have provided a protected container in which he can reflect on and knit together learnings and experiences from the personal and congregational spheres of his life. Having a regular time and place and a willing listener have allowed the surfacing of many painful concerns—grief, regret, and self-doubt—as well as joy, awe, and much gratitude. “As it happened,” he wrote, “during the past year I have been through some major challenges and changes, including the death of my mother. This holy relationship with a spiritual companion has provided a wide open space of welcome, safety, and trust for reflecting on how the Spirit has been present and moving through it all. Having this spiritual relationship has opened me in many ways, bringing breadth and freedom of spirit and security even in the most difficult times. I know that the parish has benefited from my growth, even without being privy to the vehicle. Having a pastor more fully present and able both to give of self and admit others, in appropriate ways, just loosens up the soil around the spiritual roots of the whole parish.”

Reflections on the Stories

As is obvious from these two stories, the role of the companion can be performed quite differently in different congregations. The reason is that this ministry becomes the opposite of any “cookie-cutter” program. Here we speak of discernment rather than “program.” These clergy and congregations are reaching toward a way of *being* that flows into doing.

In Resurrection Church, the pastor wanted to discover how his own “going deeper” might evoke something similar in the

congregation. And while this companionship experience began in the personal experience of the pastor, the private journey did indeed enrich the corporate life of the congregation.

In contrast, the role of the other spiritual companion was firmly grounded in the parish structure. Notice this church’s intricate multidimensional process—how it progressed at individual, small group, and total congregational levels, and how all those dimensions reinforced each other and moved toward a well-articulated vision of the church’s mission.

Just as the “roominess” of the role of the spiritual companion can be seen in these contrasting stories, so will any church choosing to be accompanied on its journey by a spiritual companion find that its own uniqueness will determine its experience of this role and the impact it has on the congregation. Perhaps we will soon have even more stories to share with each other about the remarkable benefits of having someone walk alongside a congregation as it seeks to discover within the working of the Holy Spirit. ♦

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Join Celia Hahn at “Uncovering Your Church’s Hidden Spirit,” a one-day program for pastors and lay leaders seeking spiritual companions for their congregations. The event will take place on October 25, 2003. Visit the Web site of the College of Preachers (www.collegeofpreachers.org) for more details.

FINDING SPIRITUAL COMPANIONSHIP FOR YOUR CHURCH

Perhaps you are wondering whether a spiritual companion could be helpful to your own church. If so, there are many ways to begin the process of fulfilling this role.

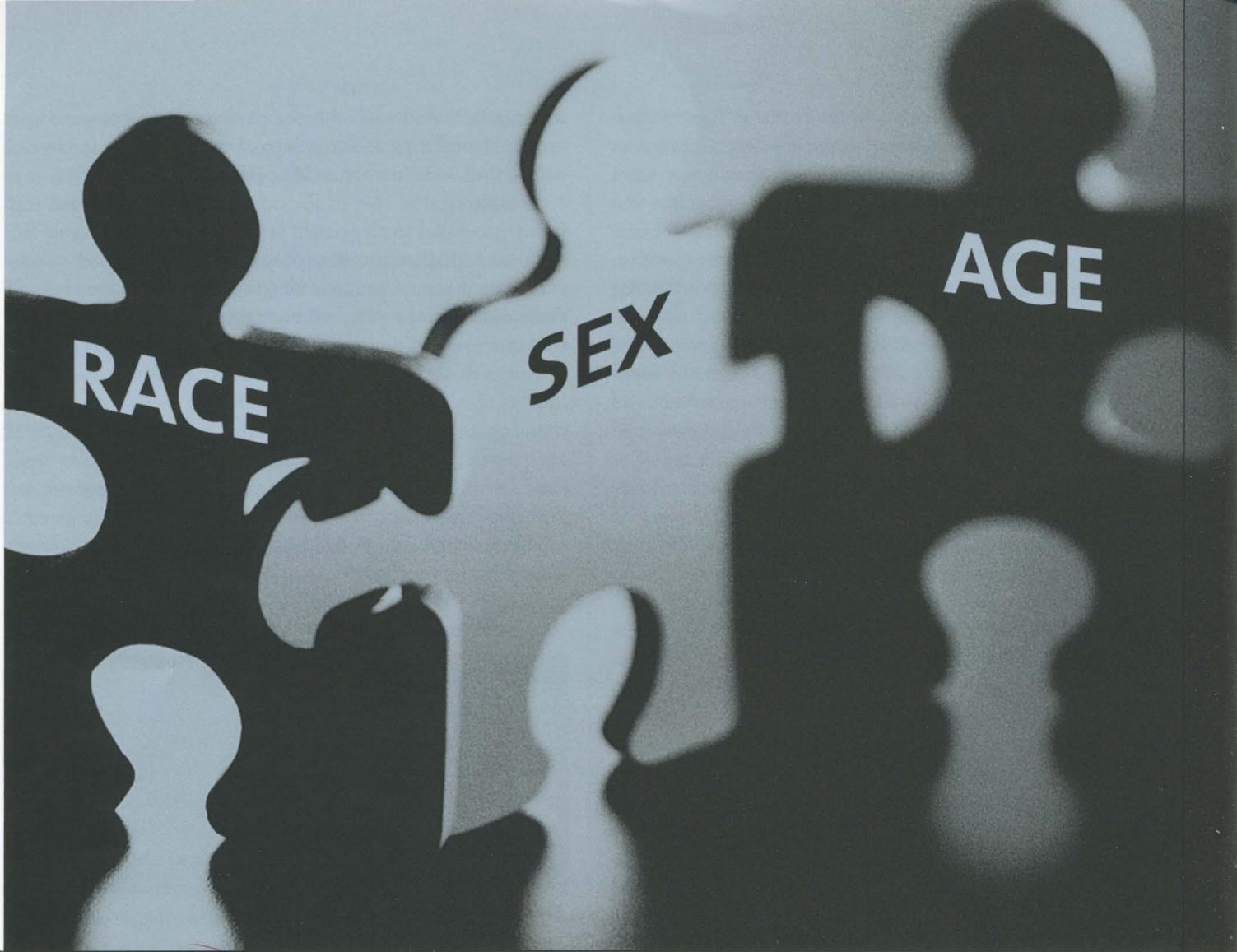
You may already know someone who could walk beside your church as a spiritual companion, perhaps a person in your local denominational office, a retired judicatory executive who is spiritually attuned, or a trained spiritual guide who has some experience with congregations. If a possible companion comes to mind, you might ask him or her to read my book, *Uncovering Your Church’s Hidden Spirit*, and then engage in a conversation with you about walking alongside your church.

If you don’t know anyone you believe would be suited to the role of spiritual companion, the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation may be a resource for letting you know which graduates of its Spiritual Guidance Program are living in your area. The Institute can be contacted by telephone at (301) 897-7334, by mail at 5430 Grosvenor Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814, or online at www.Shalem.org.

Another way to get the benefit of the perceptions of someone outside the congregation would be to team with a nearby parish with similar interests in discernment. Consider using the questionnaire in chapter 10 of *Uncovering Your Church’s Hidden Spirit* to surface the lay spiritual leaders of the congregation. Design a training session on interviewing (perhaps using the section entitled “The Process of the Interview”) and then let each participant interview someone in the other church—teaming up to listen for the church’s gifts.

If you decide that your church needs to undertake this discernment without any external assistance, consider prayerful journal writing in response to the interview questions mentioned above, and sharing your responses with one another.

Whatever process you choose for achieving spiritual accompaniment for your church, know that it is a first step toward more fertile ground in the congregation’s spiritual journey.



1,294

Struggling with Boundaries in the 21st Century

In this issue, authors analyze several cultural boundaries we must negotiate if our congregations are to become truly inclusive

JACQUELINE J. LEWIS

Every Sunday morning in American churches the bulletins, greeters, and signs on the door offer messages of welcome. Biblical images of inclusivity are abundant. Isaiah's prophecy of a time when lions will lie down with lambs; Paul's teachings on the equality of male and female, Jew and Gentile, slave and free; and John's challenge to love the neighbor whom we can see as an expression of the love of

God, whom we cannot see—all these echo the teachings of Jesus. The Beloved Community is an inclusive community, born of the love of God, neighbor, and self. Yet what we often mean is that folk are "welcome" as long as they don't offend us, don't challenge us, and work hard to "fit in" with our communal sense of self. We say, in effect, "Y'all can come as long as you leave outside the part of you with which we are uncomfortable." In our culture, these may be gender differences, generational differences, theological differences, language differences, or differences of sexual orientation. But, in America, it is race that matters most.¹ Sunday morning is still the most segregated hour in America.

Overcoming Racial Separation

Being at the table together can be difficult. Even though American congrega-

tions share the call to inclusivity, studies show that over 90 percent of American Christians worship in congregations where 90 percent or more of the people are like them. In fact, only 7 percent of congregations in the United States are multiracial, which means that no one racial/ethnic group makes up 80 percent of its members.² Despite the gospel mandate to inclusivity, non-Christian congregations are more likely to be multiracial than Christian congregations.³ If current demographic trends hold, experts predict that almost half of the nation's population will be nonwhite by the year 2050. These demographics raise questions for how we will "do church" in the future. Besides seeing demographic shifts, America has also become more religiously pluralistic. The report from the Pluralism Project shows that today there are more Muslims in America than Episcopalians, Presbyterians, or Jews.⁴ In these times when the culture may be looking to religious congregations and communities as a source of leadership on social issues, we may fail them if we ourselves do not practice negotiating cultural boundaries.

Why is it difficult to do so? Some of the arguments for a homogenous church seem valid. Church-growth experts point to the success of growing homogenous congregations; denominational leaders of all races argue for a safe haven on Sunday mornings—a place where the burden of difference is relieved, if only for an hour. And immigrant congregations sometimes have language barriers that keep them separate.

Diversity: Ignore or Build Upon?

Even for churches with a sincere desire to diversify, barriers of location and language are difficult to overcome. For other congregations, worship style and ethos contradict the "welcome" extended to strangers. So abundant sameness persists in our congregations in race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, and theology.

Even in churches where difference is valued and celebrated, the challenge is how to honor the uniqueness of each individual even as a new group culture or story is developed. The issue, then, is whether

we choose to look at diverse communities as places where difference is ignored or undervalued, or as places where difference is the cornerstone on which the community is built. When we close our eyes and pretend that we are all alike, we miss the opportunity to celebrate with blessed assurance the psalmist's proclamation that each of God's children is fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps. 139:14).

The Roles Leaders Play

The very gifts that make America the mosaic that it is—diversity in perspective and culture due to experience and history; varieties of gifts and values; race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, generational differences, disparity in economics and class—can often serve, as historically has been the case, to pull us apart more often than to bring us together. How do we create communities in which difference is celebrated? When can difference be a core building block of community, and how do we ensure that outcome? What roles do leaders play in the shaping of communities of difference?

Congregational leaders must be able not only to tell and embody stories that compel their communities to live the gospel story, but also to negotiate racial and cultural boundaries inside their churches and within their communities. Bearing the vision for the Beloved Community is a task of leaders—and a leadership task shared by clergy and laity alike. As theologian and seminary president Lovett Weems notes, vision is the most significant theme in leadership studies.⁵ As the larger society struggles with diversity, congregations of all types must step into the vacuum and be a public presence that is congruent both with the needs of the larger community and with God's vision for humanity. How will congregations bear and interpret the vision and become co-authors of the story of God working with differences in these times?

Sexual Boundaries

One important strategy, raised by Christian social ethicist Traci C. West as she discusses sexual boundaries in this

issue, is for communities of faith to have essential conversations about the places where cultures intersect. As West writes, "We have to talk about sexual boundaries in church." In her article *Sexuality and Boundaries* (p. 12), West helps us to understand how some of God's people are more vulnerable than others in these conversations. Further, she helpfully frames the need for sexual boundaries that make faith families safe while being permeable enough to extend to all "a genuine welcome and full inclusion in Christ's church." The conversations West recommends allow people to become co-authors of a new story in which difference is celebrated.

Boundaries of Generation

Anthony Healy's article (p. 14) sheds light on the complicated issues that surround generational boundaries. His analysis and helpful vignettes support the importance and highlight the complexities of finding sameness in the midst of difference to build community. One way to do that is through structured storytelling that mines congregational, biblical, and cultural stories for meaning and shared values, even as fresh, shared stories are shaped in community.

NOTES

1. Robert Carter, *The Influence of Race and Racial Identity in Psychotherapy: Toward a Racially Inclusive Model* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1995), 3.
2. Curtis Paul DeYoung, Michael Emerson, George A. Yancey, and Karen J. Chai, *United by Faith: Multiracial Congregations as a Response to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.
3. DeYoung, et al., 2.
4. Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), 2–3.
5. Lovett Weems, Jr., *Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture, and Integrity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 37.

STORYTELLING AIDS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY

These questions might enable structured storytelling that can help to build communities of difference in your ministry context.

- ◆ Which biblical story or image most shapes your understanding of who God is?
- ◆ Which story or image contradicts your understanding of God or is troubling to you?
- ◆ Which biblical story or image best describes who this congregation is?
- ◆ Which biblical story or image most shapes your understanding of yourself?

Share key plot points that shape the story of who you are..

- ◆ Was there ever a time when your [race/gender/sexual orientation/age] made you feel “other?” Tell that story.
- ◆ What about your story connects to the story of this congregation?
- ◆ What key events or event in the life of this congregation shaped its story?
- ◆ If you were to write a story about the way this congregation currently deals with [race/sexuality/gender/generations], what would be the title?
- ◆ What would you dream the title should be?
- ◆ What is the story you imagine that this larger community tells about your congregation?
- ◆ If you could write your congregation’s story for the future, what would be different? What would be the same?

Sexuality and Boundaries

To honor sexuality as a gift of God, we need agreed-upon rules about appropriate sexual boundaries that foster respect in church settings

TRACI C. WEST

When it comes to sexuality, we need boundaries and we want them. But often in our church relationships, we don’t know how to communicate appropriate boundaries:

- ◆ A pastor is dismayed to find herself visiting with a male parishioner who seems to assume delightedly that sexual possibilities are attached to the special interest and time she has given him.
- ◆ A Sunday-morning worshiper, receiving a hug during the “passing of the peace” before communion, suddenly feels the other worshiper’s hand sliding and rubbing in ways that seem sexually suggestive.
- ◆ A senior patient in a nursing home craves a gentle, loving touch instead of the rough, impatient handling she receives at the hands of the busy attendants who change her sheets or check her temperature. She wonders if she could ask her pastor (who visits regularly) for a hug—or will the pastor misunderstand what she wants?
- ◆ A gay pastor must hide his sexual identity and his relationship with his life partner or be ousted from the ministry to which God has called him. He wants to give a comforting hug to the teenager who has burst into tears after coming to confide problems he’s having at school. But the pastor hesitates, worrying that certain people might raise accusations if he even touched the young man on the shoulder reassuringly.

Pastors and parishioners who find themselves in these kinds of everyday encounters may long for established, appropriate sexual boundaries. Either they want to communi-

cate those boundaries directly to a church lay or staff member, or they wish that a set of rules were in place that church leaders and members had already agreed upon. Church people long for a trusting faith community whose participants all assume that the agreed-upon rules about appropriate sexual boundaries apply in all church interactions, and they behave accordingly.

Let’s Talk about Sex

In many situations we find it difficult to discuss the topic of sexuality. When we are in a romantic situation—for example, being out on “a date”—sexual communication tends to be nonverbal. We send complex “signals” to let the other person know whether we feel any sexual attraction. In a romantic situation we generally let the other know in a nonverbal way whether we want to be touched or kissed. However, even in dating situations we can get into trouble by relying on nonverbal communication about sexuality. We can misunderstand “the signals” and behave disrespectfully, violating the other’s trust.

In church settings not designed for a romantic purpose, such as Sunday morning worship, business meetings, or pastoral counseling sessions, we can definitely get into trouble by relying upon nonverbal signals to convey messages about sexuality. We have to talk about sexual boundaries in church. We need to clarify our expectations of one another, starting from our theological understandings of how God calls us to care for each other. Can we develop guidelines about ethical sexual conduct for the whole congregation? In light of the unique power and authority vested in clergy, what is appropriate sexual conduct for the pastoral staff in relating to parishioners? How should parishioners treat the staff in terms of ethical sexual



conduct? How should parishioners treat one another in church? Most churches wait for a crisis—for example, when an already-committed breach of trust becomes widely known—before setting up such guidelines. Even when congregations have adopted formal guidelines about appropriate conduct, they rarely have ongoing discussions about how to keep that covenant with one another.

Identity: The Unfamiliar Is Uncomfortable

Ironically, the fact that we need sexual boundaries is often precisely what makes some of us uncomfortable with people in our communities who identify themselves as bisexual or transgendered. Some, who may be gay or heterosexual, find it impossible to believe those who describe their sexual orientation as including sexual attraction to both males and females, as bisexual individuals do. (For example, on several occasions, I've heard the derisive comment: "Bisexuals are just gay people in denial.") Similarly, possessing a sexual orientation that uniquely combines sex (biology) and gender (male/female) identity, as transgendered people do, may be unfamiliar to some—in which case, bisexual and transgendered people in our communities introduce unfamiliar ways that God has formed human creation.

Therefore, for some, when familiar classifications of people's sexual makeup are broadened in this way, we have to expand our understanding of God's creative power, and that is an awesome spiritual challenge. How do we find ways to talk about what makes us fearful about individuals whose sexual identities cross the boundaries of categories that are the most well known to us? How do we find approaches, rooted in God's call to us about how to treat one another, that break the silence and end the hurtful shunning of people who have boundary-crossing sexual identities?

Some More Vulnerable than Others

On the one hand, when negotiating sexual boundaries, we are often unable to talk about our fears and other feelings related to sexual attraction and sexual identity. But on the other hand, the topic of sexuality is

being discussed incessantly in our society, especially in the church. Issues of sexuality dominate discussions in church life across many Protestant denominations. Because of this current climate, some of the people present (or who should be present) are more vulnerable than others in the discussions of sexuality that I recommend. Certain social labels attached to our identities create boundaries between us. These boundaries include moral characterizations of our identities that label some as superior and others as inferior. These boundaries protect some and invite attacks on others.

If we are heterosexual, we are usually pretty clear that our own sexuality is an intimate and vulnerable dimension of who we are. More important, we don't have to worry that our sexuality will be debated at some denominational gathering or state legislative session. We don't have to fear that, however partial or distorted the depiction of our sexuality might be at such a meeting, rules based upon that demeaning depiction will be enacted about our basic rights as church members or as

openly discussed by politicians and policy-makers at hearings in Congress and on op-ed pages of newspapers. Many of those opinion-givers labeled them as immoral women who seek sexual liaisons to have babies and to live off welfare payments. The current punitive welfare policy is based upon such erroneous, insulting characterizations.

Can we find a way to be especially concerned with welcoming God's people who are cordoned off by these kinds of assaultive boundaries?

Sex and God

We urgently need more conversations about all of these boundary concerns. But most important, we need theological reflection and more ethical practices.

Is it true that sexuality is a good gift from God and that our appreciation of this gift can strengthen our relationship to God? Or is sexuality a shameful, dirty, sinful aspect of our humanity that creates a boundary separating us from God?

If it is a precious gift of God, as I believe it to be, honoring God means honoring the

How do we find approaches that break the silence and end the hurtful shunning of people who have boundary-crossing sexual identities?

citizens. If we are heterosexual, a basic ingredient in the boundary surrounding our sexual identity is protection. Our sexual identity is not stigmatized, shamed, or used as an excuse to discriminate against us or to beat us up. We don't have to enter into self-revealing dialogues to persuade people not to hurt us in these ways. (I had a friend who was willing to discuss her lesbian sexuality with Christians who condemned her or felt they did not understand what it meant to be a lesbian. She was asked by one group member: "What exactly do you and your partner do in the bed together when you have sex?")

If we are heterosexual, married, parents of children, and economically advantaged, we have no stigma attached to us—unlike the poor single mothers who need welfare assistance, especially black and Latina women in poverty. Their sexuality has been

preciousness of this gift in myself and in my neighbor. To honor this gift, we need to maintain sexual boundaries that foster respectful treatment. This means establishing sexual boundaries that will exclude and discourage coercion, violation, and exploitation. It also means tearing down institutional boundaries focused upon sexual identity that prevent a genuine welcome and full inclusion in Christ's church. Making sure that we incorporate the right to privacy, dignity, and respectful treatment, we can create permeable social boundaries; that is, social boundaries with definitions and labels for sexual identity that are flexible and expansive. This approach allows for the possibility of intimacy without any sense of personal or political threat, and permits an awareness of God's holy presence to thrive within that intimacy. It also allows recognition of the amazing variations in the unique imprint of God on human identity.

Questioning the Age-Segregated Church

Generational cultures are not the only factors blocking age diversity in our congregations today

ANTHONY E. HEALY

Keeping a congregation generationally diverse is not impossible today, but it is becoming more improbable. But too much blame is being placed on generations and generational culture—an analysis that keeps us from seeing the other issues blocking age diversity in religious bodies.

Rather than seeing faith communities successfully negotiating the interaction of multiple age groups, we find today that congregations are being reduced to a few core age groups.

As with everything else in our present society, this shift toward age homogeneity has exceptions. The exceptions are generally congregations in which generational impediments are overridden by the community context or by specific religious interests.

Conflict among generations is not the base cause of age homogeneity. The problems within congregations that are pegged as issues of difference in generational cultures usually stem from other factors—from the complexion of communities, the social networks of congregants, and the spiritual needs of people at varying times in their ever-longer lives.

Despite popular views and media accounts to the contrary, even the existence of generational culture is not a given. We can speak confidently about ethnic cultures. We can talk assuredly, too, about sexual subcultures. But not all age groups have generational cultures.

What is a generation, and what is generational culture? Social scientists define generation in two ways. The first is by grouping people by the years in which

they were born. Such a grouping is called a cohort. The second definition is based on identity. People born in an arbitrary range of years have a clear picture of themselves that separates them from other people

Not All Age Cohorts Are Distinct

The second definition is basically what many people mean by generational culture. Such a picture or culture is created when a cohort reaches a formative age and experiences the same historic and social events. At that point, according to German scholar Karl Mannheim, the cohort has the potential to bond culturally. But that potential is not always realized. In the process outlined by German sociologist Michael Corsten of the Max Planck Institute, the creation of a generational identity is fragile and chancy. Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott, both sociologists at the University of Michigan, have noted that historic and social events do not necessarily determine generational behavior.¹

The reality is that not all age cohorts have distinct values, beliefs, and outlooks that separate them culturally. A gap does exist between the age cohort born before and during World War II, and the one born after that war. Members of the latter cohort, the baby boomers, are culturally distinct from pre-boomers. But sociologists see scant evidence that successive generations are clearly distinct from boomers in the way that boomers are from their predecessors. Religion scholar Jackson W. Carroll of Duke University and sociologist Wade Clark Roof of the University of California, Santa Barbara, have found that

what primarily separates Gen Xers from boomers are behaviors and attitudes that are due to differences in age and life stage.²

Issues that Impede Diversity

What many are calling “generational cultures” are the natural gaps in social maturity between age cohorts, and the powerful and diverse youth cultures that flourish and dissipate so rapidly. This gap in social maturity and immersion in youth cultures can impede age diversity in congregations. But congregations are usually blocked from age diversity by these three factors:

1. The geography of our metropolitan areas—where most people now live—has changed tellingly over the past three decades. In many metro areas, what now divides one community from another is differences in age and family status. For example, near Stevenson Ranch in north Los Angeles County, over two-thirds of the 46,000 residents are young parents and their children. Most are married couples. Outside Dunellon in Marion County, Florida, about half of the 38,000 residents are age 65 and over. Most are empty nesters. East of midtown Atlanta, Georgia, about half of the 36,000 residents are young adults. Nearly all are single. These residential areas, which happen to be near houses of worship, are not exceptional; they are more and more typical of the locales in which faith communities minister today.

2. Members of faith communities have networks of friends, associates, and colleagues that are increasingly age-segregated. In the past century, contacts across age groups were naturally fostered in tightly knit and age-layered communities. Lacking such community-grounded contacts now, people find their social networks among those of their own age group. These are their close friends, old school classmates, professional colleagues, softball teammates, parents of their children’s friends, and even an occasional neighbor. For several reasons, a faith community generally depends on its current participants’ social networks to

gain and keep its participants. If most members are young, then the new participants are usually young.

3. People are not only living longer but also staying agile. Several studies say that as people age, their spiritual framework changes, too. Unlike the immediate, concrete spirituality of the young, some researchers say that older adults have a transcendent spirituality: "a feeling of cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe."³ More religious participants are agile older people whose spiritual needs may be unlike those of younger generations. The ability of congregations to bridge that spiritual gap may be thoroughly tested in coming years by an aging population.

Exceptions to the shift toward age homogeneity are usually congregations that must hold together multiple age groups because of their religious niche, ethnicity, subculture, social concerns, or community context. These latter bodies can still face generational conflicts over power (too many old people on the council!) and different life stages (we need a youth program!) that are not due to culture.

Four Congregations

Mix these factors together, and we see the issue of age playing out in interesting and varied ways in congregations. These four churches in southern California are an example:

- ◆ At a Catholic church outside Los Angeles, parishioners are a mix of new and older Hispanic immigrants

who live in a tight-knit ethnic enclave. Youth in this strict community adjust slowly to the outside culture. Because of ethnic solidarity, the gap between youth and their parents is not wide. Except for the young men who linger outside while their girlfriends attend Spanish-language mass, young and old take part in the parish in more or less the same way.

- ◆ But further south in Los Angeles, young Koreans attend a separate English-language service at an ethnic Protestant church. College-educated and immersed in American life, these youth are divided from their parents by ethnic culture. In this church, the old and young fret over the existence of the English service, as well as struggle over issues such as who should be a deacon.

- ◆ In downtown L.A., 20-somethings converge for a Sunday-night service in a nightclub. One evening, the energetic, with-it pastor urges the ethnically mixed attenders to spend time talking seriously with their parents when they go home for Christmas in a couple of weeks. Imbued with youth culture, the musically and visually eclectic service has few attenders older than 30, even though this service has been around for nearly a decade.

- ◆ Meanwhile, in a suburb east of downtown, a church made up of young boomers is undergoing change. Since they joined the

church with its contemporary approach to worship and Bible study, many early members have married and had children. A new issue is the lack of children's programs. The high-energy rock band has become a concern, too. Some now think it plays too loud!

Instead of fussing over supposed conflicts in generational culture, astute faith communities should tackle basic issues that are endemic to our time—ever-increasing longevity; a growing older population; and the changing age complexion of the residential areas around them. ◆

NOTES

1. See Michael Corsten, "The Times of Generations" in *Time & Society*, Sage Publications, 1999, vol. 8, 2: 249-272; Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, Paul Kecskemeti, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952); Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott, "Generation and Collective Memories," *American Sociological Review*, 1989, vol. 54, June: 359-381.
2. See Jackson W. Carroll and Wade Clark Roof, *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).
3. "The theory of geotranscendence in brief" (Uppsala, Sweden: Social Gerontology Group, Department of Sociology, Uppsala University). <http://linux.soc.uu.se/research/gerontology/gerotrans.html>

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Isaiah 49:25*





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In Mission on the Boundaries— On Purpose!

Members of a diverse conversation group discover that they share a key attribute—all feel drawn to serve in ministry along cultural borders

JEFFREY HAGGRAY

I remember the day I first heard the words “Cultural Boundaries Project.” As executive minister of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention (DCBC), I called Gil Rendle at the Alban Institute for help in strategic planning for the convention’s future. The DCBC serves more than 150 socially and theologically diverse congregations throughout the metropolitan Washington region. When Gil recommended Jacqueline Lewis, Alban’s consultant for the “Cultural Boundaries Project,” I wondered whether an expert with such a title might be too limited in her approach to a Baptist convention. After all, as an African American ministering in the city, I felt that I was painfully aware of the cultural

boundaries in my community and needed to get beyond them. I didn’t feel the need to be reminded of my community’s cultural boundaries, or of the challenges associated with them.

Subsequently, I went along with Gil’s referral and invited Jacqui aboard as our consultant. Fortunately for us, she was available. To my surprise, she never said a word about boundaries—cultural or otherwise. After spending several sessions with our leaders, grappling with ideas, values, assumptions, vision and mission statements, and process questions, Jacqui said her term with our group was completed. Our robust group of Baptists represented congregations of multiple shapes, sizes, hues, ethnic backgrounds,

and languages. Our urban, suburban, and economic differences were spread across the three national Baptist bodies with which we were affiliated. With Jacqui's help we reached agreement on a vision and mission statement, values, priorities, and next steps for our envisioning process—all that, and we were not sidetracked by cultural boundaries.

The Conversation Group

Then one day, while I was celebrating Jacqui's splendid capabilities as a consultant, she invited me to participate with her and several other colleagues in the Negotiating Cultural Boundaries Conversation Group. The group's objective was to explore the motivations, perspectives, and values that lead us to practice ministry intentionally along cultural borders, and our desires to negotiate the challenges we encounter. In sharing with me sample questions for the conversation group, Jacqui presented issues of fundamental concern for me in the practice of ministry:

- ◆ Why am I serving multiple congregations whose members come from diverse walks of life and perspectives when I could easily be serving in a setting with only people who look like me, talk like me, and share nearly identical life experiences?
- ◆ What is the nature of the inescapable call to practice inclusive ministry? What is the source of my motivation and passion to endure the misperceptions and misunderstandings associated with ministry on the borders?
- ◆ What kinds of experiences influenced my worldview?
- ◆ What resources inform, equip, and re-energize me in the practice of ministry on the borders?

These and related questions struck a chord with me and offered hope that others were also serving along cultural borders with a sense of call and intention—people who wanted to reflect critically on a wide range of questions related to this ministry.

Having taken part in the Cultural Boundaries Conversation Group for

several months now, I feel both personally and professionally empowered by relationships with a collection of clergy professionals who approach ministry from various perspectives. They are as diverse in their racial and ethnic identity, their cultural experiences, and their appearance as they are in their ministry assignments. It is unlikely that I would have ever crossed paths with some of these folk were it not for the conversation group. Or, had I met them outside the group, I would not have assumed that we had much in common apart from the vocation of ministry.

Diverse Histories, Similar Encounters

In the conversation group we discover our commonalities only as we scratch, shovel, and sift through shared readings, personal stories, and group activities. We are uncovering similar experiences, convictions, and thought patterns that hide beneath layers of hard dissimilarities in genealogical and geographic background, theological orientation, ethnic and cultural experience, and overall social location. What would these people have in common? The group includes

- ◆ a Latina Presbyterian pastor in New Jersey;
- ◆ an African American male who is a regional minister for Baptists in the Washington, D.C. area;
- ◆ a Jewish woman in Connecticut with a doctorate; and
- ◆ a Caucasian minister with several years of pastoral experience, who now writes books from his home in Wyomissing, Pennsylvania.

Our commonalities do not leap from our biographical sketches. The components of our identities in terms of race, gender, theology, memories, and backgrounds differ dramatically.

In fact, we are learning that we have been defined by our differences throughout our lives to such an extent that we now embrace and celebrate diverse components of identity when we encounter them as part of our life's mission. We share experiences that have sensitized us to race, gender, and other

identity issues. We are highly developed in our awareness of ethnic, cultural, class, and generational particularity. Moreover, we are motivated to live, move, and minister along the same boundaries that often divide people—so that we may exemplify and promote diversity and inclusivity.

Boundaries from Childhood

I am learning that cultural boundaries have been present in my life from the outset, and that I have always felt challenged to confront them—by necessity, by family and religious values, or by a sense of justice and destiny. I have heard it said that we can trace life's most enduring lessons to our childhood. The Cultural Boundaries Conversation Group has provided a safe space for me to recollect and to reflect aloud on my earliest experiences of cultural boundaries, though at the time I did not think of them in such terms. The conversations have also helped me to acknowledge that I encountered multiple boundaries in my experience. Having grown up in Savannah, Georgia, in the 1960s, I find it too easy to think of boundaries only in terms of black-white relations.

The son of a Baptist deacon and a Pentecostal deaconess, I was the youngest of seven children in our West Savannah household. But when we moved to East Savannah after the death of my father, I encountered additional boundaries. It is clearer to me now that my childhood and youth entailed countless boundaries related to class, gender, generations, academics, theological perspective, worship style, geography, political orientation, and so on.

Identifying the Borders

The discussion goes beyond the question of whether to cross the borders. The conversation centers on how we identify the borders. We have also given attention to various approaches for negotiating borders while being mindful of the values and perspectives that inform us as we do so. I now recognize that I have not simply encountered multiple cultural boundaries throughout my life, but that at some

point I began to gravitate toward boundaries. Eventually, I discovered my comfort zone, even my life's mission, along the borders. It makes sense that I serve in an organization that is affiliated with not just one but three national Baptist bodies, consisting of broad theological, social, and economic diversity. *I find that I am in mission on the boundaries on purpose.*

I am also discovering that I have much in common with clergy of various traditions who have negotiated cultural boundaries throughout their lives. I now recognize that I am surrounded by clergy from all walks of life who have had radically different life experiences from my own, and who emerged from those diverse experiences to practice ministry along the borders just as I do. In one group exercise, I was amazed to find that although clergy experiences and backgrounds differed considerably, our experiences all fit into similar categories. My ministry is strengthened when I can reflect on border issues with other clergy as a means of strengthening my own ministry along the borders.

Congregations on the Borders

Most important, I am learning from the Cultural Boundaries Project that the congregations I serve are strategically situated along multiple cultural borders, and that they consist of people who have negotiated boundaries all their lives. As such, our congregations are poised to be agents of reconciliation, diversity, and inclusivity. If I can help many of the pastors and laypeople in our congregations recognize that they are not constrained or limited by borders, and that they are empowered by their experiences as "border people," then their vision for ministry and sense of mission will expand exponentially.

I am more sensitive now than before to the pastor of a church that was at one time a traditional suburban Southern Baptist congregation, but that today thrives in one of the most ethnically diverse communities in the Washington metropolitan area. More than 40 nationalities are represented in its membership, and at a time of widening ethnic tensions in our world, this congregation witnesses daily to the reconciling power of the gospel as pastor and members celebrate their existence on the borders.

I am highly motivated to provide encouragement, prayer support, and denominational resources for a laywoman from the Northwest. Reared on a farm where her father hired migrant workers from Mexico, she later studied at a college in California where being a white female placed her in the minority. Today she works in the corporate sector in Washington, D.C., and is a mission leader in a diverse congregation in the heart of the city's Chinatown district. She is preparing for yet another mission trip to South America. As a border person, she says, she is touched by the examples of humility that she sees in working with people on the borders. She also feels compelled to confront injustice wherever it surfaces, especially in the Christian community.

An Empowering View

Finally, viewing my ministry from the perspective of negotiating cultural boundaries has given me a fresh perspective on all aspects of my work. This conversation has empowered me to celebrate the fact that my life, theology, and sense of mission are all informed by a complex array of cultural factors. My ministry is strengthened when I reflect critically on these factors with others so influenced, and when I am aware how these factors affect my decisions, actions, and worldview. I now understand my ministry to a large degree as helping congregations to discover the tremendous need to negotiate cultural boundaries, and to develop the motivation and fluency to converse with people from all walks of life to build communities of faith that reflect and honor the larger community wherein we serve.

Let me add in closing that the hesitations I acknowledged at the outset about enlisting the Cultural Boundaries Project consultant to work with a Baptist convention have disappeared entirely. Although Jacqui Lewis never talked about cultural boundaries while working with us, it is apparent in retrospect that she was negotiating cultural boundaries the whole time, and demonstrating a great deal of mindfulness, thoughtfulness, precision, and effectiveness in doing so. ♦

MORE ABOUT THE CULTURAL BOUNDARIES CONVERSATION GROUP

The Cultural Boundaries Conversation Group, led by Alban Institute consultant Jacqueline Lewis, has been meeting once a month for the past year. The purpose of the group is to bring together parish clergy, denominational staff, and Alban Institute staff who are passionate about this issue and who serve or have served multiracial/multicultural congregations and support their denominations' efforts to do so as well. Several group participants have also researched and written on the subject of negotiating cultural boundaries, such as race/ethnicity, gender, and generations.

The group is composed of five women and seven men and is multiracial/multicultural (four African Americans, six whites, one Latino, and one Jew). The group represents several denominations: American Baptist, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Reform Jewish, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Disciples of Christ.

Together the group has read a number of contemporary articles on managing boundaries, race, and economics, as well as books on the subjects of theology, congregational studies, and psychology. Specific books include *The Future Is Mestizo* by Virgilio Elizondo, *Coming Together* by Curtiss DeYoung, and *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon.

If you would like to learn more about negotiating cultural boundaries, consider taking Jacqueline Lewis' Alban course on the topic (see ad on page 4). You also may contact her directly at jlewis@alban.org.



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In Communion with One Another

Characteristics of Successful Multiracial Congregations

SHERYL KUJAWA-HOLBROOK

To bring people together across racial differences not only requires sharing in God's great love, it also necessitates the power to accomplish human community, hopefully and intentionally, despite inner turmoil or outside conflict. Love on its own does not form healthy multiracial congregations. But love and power combined gives congregations the ability to transform themselves and impact the larger community.

One of the reasons why so many attempts at multiculturalism fail is that white culture often does not recognize or strive to correct the deep power imbalance that exists in many congregations.

Multiracial communities emanate from the collective concern that we are all, despite the divisions we perpetuate, part of one human community; if life is improved for one person, all benefit. Justice does not admit of partitioning. In the Jewish tradition this practice is known as *tikkun olam*, or the healing and repair of the world. Christians are called to live in communion with each other, to be transformed for the sake of one another and the world.

Congregations are rooted in their local contexts, and thus it is not possible to suggest a "recipe" for building multira-

cial congregations. Multiracial community can be found in congregations of all sizes and all economic levels; what is critical is that the congregation sees multiracial community as integral to the work of the church and in its own self-interest. However, my long-term work with multiracial congregations, and recent in-depth research with six such faith communities, has indicated that it is possible to suggest some of the characteristics of healthy multiracial congregations.

7 Characteristics of Healthy Multiracial Congregations

1. Build On Health. Overall, congregations that build multiracial community are those that strive on all levels to affirm the dignity of every person, and sustain relationships based in mutuality and respect. Although all congregations experience transitions, those that seek to build multiracial congregations should do so from the perspective of congregational health.

Though “health” is a relative term, it is clear that a congregation that is already

and recognize the abuse of power; where there is an openness to ongoing education and issues in the community; and where the spiritual concerns and pastoral care of the members are, for the most part, addressed.

2. Know Their History. The study of history reveals both the heritage and traditions of a given congregation, and leads to further discernment of a church’s mission and ministry in the present. Successful multiracial congregations studied are not only conversant on their congregation’s history, they are willing to reinterpret that history from the perspectives of both the dominant culture and communities of color.

If a congregation is destined to be something more than a museum, the study of spiritual ancestors living in the past are a means to transform a congregation’s sense of where they have been and where they wish to go in the future. Certainly, in terms of building multiracial community, the study of history is imperative in order to understand the dynamics

“American Dream” of freedom, justice, and liberty for all that excludes those who are not in the dominant cultural group. If the truth is to be told, all congregations, just as all human institutions, share a history of heroism and courage alongside a history of failure and fear.

3. Seek Committed Leadership.

Leadership is a key variable for congregations concerned with building multiracial community over the long haul. Clearly, clergy and laity who understand the dynamics of power and oppression and who are committed to change are integral. Such leaders tend to view building multiracial community more in terms of long-term *process* rather than *product or program*. At the most basic level, they experience building multiracial community as a call from God. They tend to share a sense of long-term and “sacrificial commitment.” They strive to “walk the talk, knowing the risks.”

Leaders in multiracial communities come from different backgrounds, yet many share a common experience in that they express some “turning point” or “conversion” in their lives resulting from a direct and personal encounter across the boundaries of race, ethnicity, and culture. Grounded and nourished spiritually, these leaders have challenged their own racism and resistance to change, and thus are better equipped to lead a congregation through a similar process. Moreover, they understand the impact of racism and other forms of oppression on those within their communities from a pastoral perspective. On the skill level, such leaders are good listeners, knowledgeable about power dynamics, reflective preachers and teachers, effective process facilitators, experienced in community advocacy, skilled with the media, and able to communicate across cultural differences. They are willing to take risks, are open to the possibility of failure, and perhaps most importantly, they are persistent.

Because authentic multiracial community is difficult to achieve and sustain, it is crucial that leaders in these congregations are able to withstand criticism and

Because authentic multiracial community is difficult to achieve and sustain, it is crucial that leaders in these congregations are able to withstand criticism and periods of frustration and disillusionment.

riddled by unresolved conflicts, lacks coherent leadership, is plagued by mismanagement, fails to provide pastoral care to its members, or is avoidant or hostile to the surrounding community will not be in a good position to build healthy community across racial differences. Though congregations are always in process, health in this respect denotes a community where people interact with each other in respectful and appropriate ways; where feelings and ideas are expressed directly and openly; where the gifts of all are welcomed and utilized appropriately; where clergy and laity use power justly and constructively for the common good,

of institutions and who is included or excluded in the present. Otherwise, the community is built on the premise, “we want to include more people who are just like us.” Denial of the negative—and in this case, racist aspects of a congregation’s history—will not only prevent the formation of authentic community, it will serve to maintain social oppression.

Just as it is crucial for individuals engaged in anti-racism work to continue to delve into their own personal history for the sources of racist attitudes and beliefs, it is critical for congregations to undergo a similar process of investigation, interpretation, and ultimately, of renewal. Such a study of history unmasks the duality of the

Building multiracial community is a long-term commitment.

periods of frustration and disillusionment. Obviously, change is personally painful to people in congregations, and any leader seeking multiracial community should be prepared for periods of resistance, conflict, doubt, and disillusionment. Yet, those leaders who find joy in the challenge of working for change tend also to be the type of people who cultivate support systems for themselves, and who can accept care from individuals and from the community.

4. Share a Rich Symbolic Life. Though congregations have different “entry points,” those committed to building multiracial community eventually experience change on all levels of the organization: education, worship, governance, pastoral care, outreach, etc. Part of the challenge of building multiracial community is adapting the symbolic life of the congregation in terms of worship, music, education, even architecture, to reflect various cultures. Does the worship and music of the congregation reflect racially and culturally diverse language and content? Is the multiracial character of the congregation upheld through religious education programs for all ages? Are people from different races and cultures welcomed to share in leadership? Does the congregation reserve time for cultural sharing and discovery? Does the community regularly celebrate holidays and heroes of the faith reflective of the racial diversity of the congregation? Does “sacred space” of the congregation—architecture, seating, windows, art—reflect a multiracial, rather than a homogeneous reality?

5. Develop Effective Programming. Though there is no one way to design structured experiences in anti-racism, effective programs tend to share a number of common elements:¹

- ◆ For Christian programs, biblical and theological doctrine that names racism as a sin;

- ◆ A dual focus on teaching and experiential activities;
- ◆ Clearly stated definitions of racism as prejudice plus power, bias, discrimination, and other forms of exclusion; and discussions of culture and ethnicity;
- ◆ Activities that focus on institutional and systemic racism as well as individual racism;
- ◆ Explicit connections between racism and other forms of exclusion and oppression;
- ◆ Strategies and plans for a long-term implementation of a comprehensive anti-racism program in organizations and communities of various sizes and complexities in a variety of contexts and settings, as well as practical tools and resources for implementing this process;
- ◆ After examining racism within the church, a focus that extends beyond the organizational church to civil society; and
- ◆ An approach that fosters ecumenical and interfaith connectedness.

6. Implement an Action Plan, Monitor, and Evaluate. In any successful community-building effort, there should be a clarity of purpose and a clear plan of action. As you gauge your congregation’s needs and capacities for multiracial community, and discover what has worked for others engaged in similar efforts, you will begin to develop the strategies and tactics best suited for your context. Without ongoing evaluation, discernment, reflection, adjustments, and modifications, any action plan will soon lose its relevance, energy, or direction. As long as injustice remains, so does the need for goals and strategies, action, and analysis. Building multiracial community is a long-term commitment.

7. Cultivate Spiritual Stamina. God calls all humankind to a life of rich diversity. Our spirituality reflects the relationships

we have with God, other people, and the world, and are consistent with our racial, ethnic, and cultural heritages. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is frequently found in relationship with and in communication with persons of cultures different from his own. The process of living out multiracial community impacts our hearts and minds and lives, and brings about new attitudes and behaviors concerning God, oneself, and our larger society. Choosing to live in multiracial community is countercultural, given the monocultural bias of American culture, and requires a great deal of spiritual stamina. A disciplined life of prayer and reflection rooted in a multiracial community of faith is perhaps the greatest source of support for the challenges faced by those who choose to open up their lives in this way.

Moving Toward Wholeness

We, as the people of God, are called to respond to a world that is groaning under the weight of injustice and broken relationships. Our differences and our interdependence are intended to be a source of strength and a gift from God. As people of faith, we know that the reign of God will not ultimately be built on separatism or political arguments, but on the transformation of hearts—*new* life, not just reordered life. As the people of God who believe in justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation, we can resist the temptation to stop at the political, social, or even emotional level of racial awareness. Rather, through building multiracial community we can work toward being about the healing and wholeness that the world craves. ◆

NOTE

1. Developed by Jayne J. Oasin, Social Justice Ministries Office, Episcopal Church Center, 2002.

This article was adapted from *A House of Prayer for All Peoples: Congregations Building Multiracial Community* (AL272; \$19), available from Alban in July 2003. Order online at www.alban.org or call 1-800-486-1318, ext. 244.

Living on



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the

BORDER

*Alban consultant
Jacqueline J. Lewis
shares stories of
crossing cultural
boundaries*

I love a good story. Virgilio Elizondo, a Roman Catholic priest and professor of theology, passionately tells the story of his life on the border of two cultures in his book *The Future Is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet*. Elizondo

discusses *mestizaje*—the process through which peoples mix biologically and culturally to make a new people—as a way of explaining who he and his people are on the border of Mexico and the United States, both physically and socioculturally. How does being on the border shape them? And how do they shape the border? What can we learn about border living from Jesus, the one who, as a Galilean, was *mestizo* himself, and a border crosser?

One conclusion that Elizondo draws about Jesus is that

In his Mestizo existence Jesus breaks the barriers of separation, as does every Mestizo, and already begins to live a new unity. . . The Mestizo affirms both the identities received while offering something new to both.¹

Elizondo argues that Jesus' life in Galilee meant constant border crossing. All kinds of people passed through the border region of Nazareth occupied by Roman soldiers. Encountering other cultures shaped Jesus' identity, making him what Elizondo calls a cultural *mestizo*. Elizondo and others suggest that Jesus' racial and ethnic identity was *mestizo*, or mixed, as well.² For me, the multicultural/multiracial identity of the historic Jesus is as important as his poor, humble beginnings. God used an unlikely agent to work wonders in the world; it is a strategy that God has used repeatedly.

The Borders Jesus Crossed

Even if one does not embrace the *mestizaje* of Jesus, the gospels tell stories of Jesus crossing other borders as well. His table

a house of prayer for all the nations. Jesus, who was called to preach the kingdom with his words and in his healings and exorcisms, effectively performs an exorcism of the temple. Quoting Isaiah, Jesus says, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers" (Mark 11:17). Blount, professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, writes:

For Mark the future should exist in the present; the Temple should be a house of prayer for all the nations. . . . When the leaders, the priests and the scribes, refuse to allow this to happen, they refuse to let the Temple bear the fruit it has always been intended to bear. Jesus' "casting out" in the Temple, then, was as potent a symbolic strike against the Temple as his exorcisms were against the kingdom of Satan.³

Border Living Stories

Elizondo draws on his own story as he analyzes the parallels between the socio-cultural identity development of Mexican-American peoples and that of Jesus from Galilee. Early school days in a

As I look into the past and try to understand it from my present perspective many years later, I re-experience the original pain, sadness, embarrassment, ambiguity, frustration, and the sense of seeking refuge by being alone. Yet I can also see that it was already the beginning of the formation of the consciousness of a new existence—a new *mestizaje*. The daily border crossing was having its effect on me. I didn't know what it meant. I didn't even know why it had to be. But that constant crossing became the most ordinary thing in my life.⁴

I, too, am a border person. How did we, Virgilio and I, get to be this way, comfortably negotiating multiple cultural boundaries? I live and work on the edge of cultural boundaries—race, ethnicity, gender, and theology, for example—every day as an African American clergy leader in a predominantly white denomination (Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.]), as a doctoral candidate, as a consultant for the Alban Institute. When not traveling for work, I live in the greater Washington, D.C., area. These experiences are not new for me. When I consider my life as an unfolding narrative, I find formative chapters in many overlapping stories that shape my identity as a border person who negotiates cultural boundaries constantly.

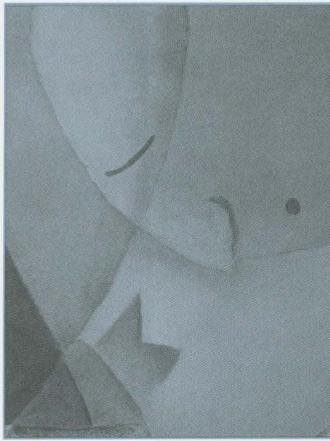
Stories shape the complexity of my identity. My parents told some of the stories to me, as did my peers, the media, and others in the culture. Other stories are my own experiences, remembered and revised as I make meaning of them. They lie alongside other meta-stories—the biblical story, for example, and the story of my people from

Africa here in America. Those stories inform my sense of God (my God image) and my theoethics (how I live my life because of what I believe). My gender, my sexual orientation, my trust (or lack of trust) in others, my successes and failures—all of these and the stories that inform them are part of my complex storied self.

fellowship was scandalous; he broke bread with sinners and tax collectors. He spoke to the unspeakable; he touched the untouchable. He challenged the cultic status quo. Bible scholar Brian Blount's insightful exegesis of the story of Jesus turning out the temple concludes that what outraged Jesus was the way the temple refused to become

German Catholic school in Texas were painful for young Virgilio. His language was banned, the food was strange, and he was lonely. Feeling guilt and shame for being different, he experienced going to school as a daily border crossing. Reflecting on his boyhood later, Elizondo writes:

Africa here in America. Those stories inform my sense of God (my God image) and my theoethics (how I live my life because of what I believe). My gender, my sexual orientation, my trust (or lack of trust) in others, my successes and failures—all of these and the stories that inform them are part of my complex storied self.



For me, the multicultural/multiracial identity of the historic Jesus is as important as his poor, humble beginnings. God used an unlikely agent to work wonders in the world; it is a strategy that God has used repeatedly.

Storied Selves

As I see it, we are storied selves. Our identity development, then, can be thought of as the process of finding our own narrative voice amid the speech of and in dialogue with others, as we interpret and make meaning of identity stories told to us by family, teachers, peers, and others. We are told multiple stories, and have complex, multiple identities (for example, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and religious traditions/belief systems). We can therefore think of identity development as how these overlapping, interweaving, multi-textured stories inform one another. What kinds of stories shape border people?

What kinds of stories and experiences can form the identities of people who will be better equipped to deal with our increasingly multicultural world? I tell part of my story here, to place this conversation—this text—in a real-life context.

Racial/Ethnic Identity

I have vivid memories of my early childhood. I remember the smells of dinners made in our kitchen in New Hampshire, after we moved off the Air Force base and into town, and the sounds of Dad watching football games in the living room. I remember the crush of leaves under my shoes in the fall, and the blueberry patch in the woods near our house, where Wanda and I, before the brothers came along, played. I remember starting kindergarten at one school and then moving to Michigan to another military base for first grade. I remember playing on the swing set in my backyard with buddies, sitting in a circle after recess, and going to birthday parties at the homes of friends. Lunchtime with bologna sandwiches, carrot sticks, and Oreo cookies was more fun because my friend Tommy not only carried my lunch box—he put my chair up on the table and napped next to me, too.

I remember the first time I realized I was different. When Lisa moved to town

from “down south” somewhere, things started to change. She had a birthday party and did not invite me. She sat between Tommy and me, and put more

enslaved Africans in America, about the Jordans and Lewises struggling and making it in Mississippi, and about their own journeys to the north and to each other gave me and



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distance between us than just her body. This was the first time I heard the “n-word,” as in, “Why do you sit next to that nigger?” That fall, Lisa, with her prejudice, and Kenny, another little black kid, moved to town and I learned for the first time that we—Kenny and I—were different. Our mothers, we learned from Lisa, gave us chocolate milk from their bodies because they—and we—were [n-words]. It was shocking!

Mom and Dad took action after this event. Dad spoke to the base commander, and Lisa’s dad was told to manage his child’s behavior. That made Dad my hero. Mom told me that, as unbelievable as it was, some people would not like me just because of the color of my skin. She then said that I belonged to her, to Dad, and to God, and that I was able to do and be anything I wanted. I was comforted by that assurance, and felt deeply loved, but still surprised and somehow sad. I prayed that night that everyone would be the same, a child’s prayer to make the pain of difference go away.

Becoming Me

Mom and Dad both did something else. They, proud African American people, began to teach me and my siblings about our family, history, culture, and heritage. The stories they told us about Africa, about

my siblings a sense of self that made us know that being different was wonderful. We are a proud family: capable, competent, creative, curious, and caring. My parents deepened my sense of difference by mining family and biblical stories for pride, achievement, resilience, grace, justice, and love. Their determination laid a framework for me really to differentiate, to become myself. As a young woman, influenced by the philosophies of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, and the culture of the 1970s, I joined in protests for racial equality and social justice, even as I continued to build friendships across racial, ethnic, and cultural differences.

Called to Be a Bridge Builder

My childhood church experienced the demographic shifts that many urban churches did then and do today. White middle-class people moved out of our community and were replaced by middle-class blacks, who moved in because housing was affordable and the schools were good. Our little church had the blessings of several cultures—our worship was filled with amazing classical music, traditional hymns, gospel music, and show tunes from *Hair*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and *Godspell*. I learned early that church meant having something for everybody—and that meant that God has something for everybody as well. My childhood image of

God—One who loves, creates, and accepts everyone—stays with me, and only becomes more sophisticated with time. Loving and accepting one another is the best testimony to God's love of us.

I think of "call" as learning to discern and hear the story that God is writing with us. Accepting our call means signing up as an active coauthor of that story with God and with our community. It means believing that our unique qualities and experiences are designed by God for us and for the world, and can be used to do God's reconciling and saving work. When I accepted my call to ministry, I began to see that my story had unfolded in all the right ways. Discovering my difference, deepening that difference, and growing to accept and celebrate fully the differences of others were all overlapping stories of a border person in the making. In my work at the Alban Institute, I cross borders all the time, working across denominational lines, often in predominantly white denominational systems, and as a woman working in what is still too often a man's world. I train clergy from many contexts in negotiating cultural boundaries—not just racial and ethnic boundaries, but sexual boundaries, gender boundaries, and religious boundaries. I feel called to live and work on the border, and so I do.

Leading on the Border

If we define a racially mixed congregation as one in which no one racial group is more than 80 percent of the congregation, only 7.5 percent of the more than 300,000 congregations in the United States are racially mixed. And half of these are only temporarily mixed because of shifting demographics.⁵

Psychologist and educator Howard Gardner says that leaders are those who tell stories that effectively wrestle with the stories that already populate the minds of others.⁶ I agree, and would add that those stories, formed by the leaders' storied selves, help create a group identity or story. So the vision articulated by leaders is affected by their vision of themselves. What kinds of leaders tell stories that encourage border crossing?

Gordon Dragt is the pastor of Middle

Collegiate Church in New York (Reformed Church in America). Gordon's story was forever changed by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He vowed he would never serve a monocultural church again; he intentionally changed the identity of the congregation he was serving to reflect his values. These values have shaped his ministry ever since, and are shared and enacted in stories at the diverse congregation he serves in Manhattan.

Karen Hernandez-Granzen is a "Newyorican" (a Puerto Rican born in New York) Presbyterian clergy leader, and is pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Trenton, New Jersey. Karen is proud of her multiracial heritage. She often tells the story of the richness of her Taino Indian, Spanish European, and African bloodlines. These multiple story lines shape Karen's vision for her multiracial and multicultural congregation, in which Euro-Americans, Africans, African Americans, and Hispanics work and worship together.

I believe the clergy and congregants together are crafting a new group story, and a group sense of call informed by the leaders' stories, the members' stories, and master stories (for example, the biblical narratives—binding narratives like chosenness, vision, and mission). Stories shared in worship, in rituals, in liturgy, even at potluck suppers, build trust, create and uncover shared values, and bind the community together.

Joining a Multicultural Community

People choose multiracial/multicultural congregations for various reasons. Linda and Dave both grew up in middle-class white families. They found each other at a singles meeting and discovered their shared passions for music and people. They found their way to urban churches, where they stay because they are committed to diversity.

Pat and Jim, another white couple, share the same passion for diverse communities; such congregations are the only kinds of churches where they feel at home. Cherry, an African American woman who grew up on military bases, is a border person as well. She was often

the "only" in her class as a child and feels at home wherever she goes.

Chris and Don, a gay couple who have been together for more than 50 years, worship in a multicultural/multiracial church because they have been on the margins elsewhere and want to be in a community where they can feel at home. Carla and John, an interracial couple, worship in such a church because they want to be where they and their adopted children can share what they have in common with others—their wonderful difference.

Whatever brings people to these congregations—to life on the border—once they come, they are changed. In other words, risk-taking experiences on the border change our culture and us; they create new storied selves. Like Elizondo, I believe that through these experiences we participate in creating with God something new—a new world paradigm, a new humanity, the Beloved Community.

As a leader committed to celebrating the wondrous differences in God's creation, I tell these stories—my story along with others, to wrestle with the old stories of homogeneity and unicultural expectations in our congregations. If God, as Isaiah prophesies, is going to do "a new thing," negotiating cultural boundaries will be at the heart of it. Together, we, the called-out ones, can help create new stories for a new religious reality. ♦

NOTES

1. Virgilio Elizondo, *The Future Is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet*, Revised Edition (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000), 84.
2. Curtiss DeYoung, *Coming Together: The Bible's Message in an Age of Diversity* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1995).
3. Brian Blount, "The Apocalypse of Worship," in *Making Room at the Table: An Invitation to Multicultural Worship*, Brian Blount and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 22.
4. Elizondo, *The Future Is Mestizo*, 17.
5. C. P. DeYoung, M. O. Emerson, G. A. Yancey, and K. J. Chai, *United by Faith: Multiracial Congregations as a Response to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.
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Choosing Life over Death

The Story of a Congregation's Rebirth

PATRICIA DALEY

I arrived in Boston in 1995 with a heart and a history for urban ministry. I soon discovered that there were many fewer Presbyterian congregations in New England than in my old New Jersey stomping grounds where I served congregations in Flemington, New Brunswick, and Trenton. As I cast about for pastoral opportunities in the city, I learned that one urban congregation was about to dissolve, and three others were on the edge of closure. The field did not sound particularly fertile or

promising. Nonetheless, my interest was piqued when I was contacted by an elder (a lay leader) of one of those congregations, Hyde Park Presbyterian Church, located in a southwestern neighborhood of Boston.

Hooked by Warmth and Hope

What captured my interest was this elder's enthusiasm for a congregation that was supposed to be moribund. Joe was a relative newcomer. He had been looking for a church in which to be married after a Roman Catholic parish declined to bless his union with a divorced non-Catholic. The newlyweds were so grateful for the willingness of the stated supply pastor¹ to

perform the ceremony that they returned to worship the next Sunday. Warmed by the small congregation's welcome, the couple soon became members. As this spunky elder put it to me, "We won't let them close the church. We just got here!"

I was interested enough to talk to the executive presbyter, plying him with questions about the congregation's viability. Signs were abundant that the congregation was dying. A stated supply pastor had replaced the last installed

Most significant, a handful of people believed that change was preferable to slow death or quick dissolution.

pastor. She had served for five years before leaving for a counseling position. Along the way, several congregational meetings had raised the question of dissolving the church. After two years of Sunday supply preaching, the congregation's worship attendance had dropped to 15 or 20 adults and three children who came with their grandmother. Most of the worshipers were senior adults.

This was a "one-hour-on-Sunday" congregation. With only three youngsters attending, no regular Christian education program was available for them. No adult classes were held. The church had no choir. Members had no regular after-worship fellowship time. Outreach programs were nonexistent. Vacant session (governing board) slots could not always be filled. Financial reserves would last only five or six more years, since they had in recent times been dipped into annually.

Not a very encouraging picture—but after serving as guest preacher on Easter Sunday to the remnant gathered there, I was hooked by the warmth of the members' welcome and their hunger for hope. I happily signed on as stated supply with a contract for 15 hours a week.

Changing Demographics

A look at the church's history revealed that since its founding in 1896, it had

experienced a long succession of short-term pastorates (35, to be exact). Longtime members explained, with some pride, that the church had served as a launching pad for young ministers who moved on to larger parishes. This congregation had never experienced a long "golden age."

In recent years, the community's demographics had changed. In what was historically a community of small manufacturing companies, businesses had closed or moved out. Many of the newest

community residents were from the Caribbean, with Jamaicans and Haitians supplying the largest numbers. As demographics changed, the all-white congregation aged and finances dwindled.

The congregational story, thus far, is not entirely unfamiliar—years of gradual decline and a slow death. Yet that did not happen in Hyde Park. What made the difference?

A Century-old Parish without "Ghosts"

In a curious way, the historical absence of long-term pastors or a "golden age" relieved the congregation of the temptation to wax nostalgic on ghosts of the past. When it came time to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Hyde Park Church's founding, it was hard to stir up interest. Certainly the oldest members had fond memories of a time when several women's circles were thriving (and somewhat competitive). People recalled with pride how the men of the congregation had helped rebuild after the church's earlier building burned to the ground. But this was not a church overburdened with "Remember when?"

Most significant, a handful of people believed that change was preferable to slow death or quick dissolution. Fortunately, few "turf issues" endured to create resistance to change. (Yes, some

worshippers preferred the old red hymnal to the new blue hymnal.) I imagined it would take a year for me to earn the congregation's trust before suggesting any major changes. However, I was encouraged to do whatever I wanted to do—right away!

Celebration, Sorrow, and Growth

The first official Sunday of our shared ministry was Pentecost 1995. I had forewarned the congregation that this would be a real celebration of the Spirit. Everyone had been urged to wear something red. Worshipers were greeted by a sanctuary filled with red balloons and red geraniums. The three children who came regularly had brought friends who helped decorate a birthday cake for the church. They also made kites, symbolizing the fresh winds of the Spirit. An amateur photographer invited all present to the front steps for a group photo. Several women planted the red geraniums as a finishing touch to a joyous day. Pentecost became our symbol of new life. Each year, the photo on the steps became more complicated as we tried to arrange our growing congregation.

Early on, a critical turning point ensued—the death of one of the four Jamaicans who had found their way to this tiny congregation. Ruel was a remarkable man, a towering figure in the life of the local Jamaican community. He served as the congregation's clerk of session (governing board secretary) and never missed a Sunday until a brain tumor swiftly took his life. The congregation was stunned; the Jamaican people of Hyde Park and beyond were devastated.

The family requested a wake (visitation) in the church sanctuary on the night before Ruel's funeral. Though this was not the custom of the congregation, governing board leaders showed no hesitation in agreeing. The church was filled to overflowing for both wake and funeral. On each occasion, members of the congregation fed the crowds with warmth and welcome and filling food. A Christian hospitality that reached out to strangers made an impression on those

who came to these services. Some who had attended the funeral returned to worship with us the following Sunday. They began to bring their friends. We were becoming multicultural.

Two of our Jamaican members were instrumental in building a Sunday school.

A Christian hospitality that reached out to strangers made an impression on those who came to these services.

Gloria and Winston took it upon themselves to bring children to church, week after week. Suddenly there were enough youngsters for a Sunday school. Visitors with children began to return because the church had a class and a curriculum for kids. One multi-age class met during the first nine months of my ministry. But soon we needed teachers for preschoolers and elementary children and junior and senior high youth.

We decided to continue our Christian education program during the summer to avoid losing momentum. By the end of 1996, 30 children were on the church school rolls.

Because Sunday school ran concurrently with worship, it seemed important to involve children and youth in the early part of the service before dismissing them to class. We wanted our young ones to begin to learn the language of faith. The children's message and prayer concluded

with the Lord's Prayer. The opening hymn was a child-friendly one. The words used in the prayer of confession were understandable to youngsters. Children took up the morning offering, and youth frequently participated in worship leadership. Often the children would return at the end of the service to share what they had learned that morning, whether it be art or a song or a service project in which we were invited to participate.

I am a narrative preacher. When appropriate, I do not hesitate to connect my personal story to *the* Story. In a diverse congregation such as Hyde Park's, many worshipers came from storytelling

cultures and thus felt as comfortable with hearing that style of proclamation as I was in preaching it.

Other Innovations

As soon as I arrived, we established a regular fellowship time after worship. The steps down to the lower-level fellowship hall were too steep for some of the older folk we wanted to include. For that reason, we drank our coffee and ate our cookies in the narthex. Crowded and cozy, the arrangement made it hard for a visitor to slip out unnoticed and uninvited. For those seeking anonymity, this was not the place to be.

The blue 1990 *Presbyterian Hymnal's* newer hymns from other cultures were gradually introduced while we continued to sing the more familiar ones as well. An occasional before-worship hymn sing allowed members to sing from the old "red book" of the 1950s. We became more "sensate" in worship, with rituals of the liturgical season. For example, during Lent, worship began with the silent draping of a rough wooden cross in ever-deepening shades of lavender and purple. The children eagerly took responsibility for this ritual with great respect and seri-

ELEMENTS OF REBIRTH

Looking back on this remarkable experience with the congregation of Hyde Park Presbyterian Church, I can identify several key factors that help a multicultural congregation to be born:

- ◆ The existing congregation must demonstrate a willingness to be hospitable to all who come through the door. The Hyde Park congregation was willing to do so without hesitation. As far as I know, only one member dropped out because the congregation was becoming more diverse.
- ◆ The existing congregation must be willing to explore different styles of worship. In some congregations, varying the worship may need to be a gradual process. The Hyde Park congregation was able to move quickly toward a livelier worship style. Members were willing to sing new hymns, to change the order of worship, to make worship child-friendly, to welcome the Word made visible and touchable as well as audible.
- ◆ Members of a multicultural congregation need to spend a good deal of time getting to know one another. Smiles, handshakes, and hugs shared in the passing of the peace or over a cup of coffee are not the same as sharing one's journey of faith, or communicating one's hopes and visions for congregation and community. This deeper knowing does not happen automatically. A process is needed.
- ◆ Current leaders need to be open to widening the circle to newcomers. Consequently, attention to internal leadership development is critical. One can never assume that people have had opportunities to be leaders. Assuming the role of leader may be a first-time experience for some. Process and practice are needed.
- ◆ A willingness to initiate community outreach programs communicates a desire to relate to the neighbor near at hand. It provides the opportunity to make the congregation's diversity a visible reality.
- ◆ The congregation must welcome the work of the Spirit!

ousness. On Easter morning the entire congregation moved in procession to the front of the sanctuary with flowers and a white cloth to proclaim the resurrection.

Almost immediately, we began a choir that we informally called "Add Water and Mix." This meant that each Sunday we dared to call forward any who were willing to sing a simple anthem or hymn with no more than a few minutes of prac-

denomination, and ministry were not well known to newcomers. We decided that it was time to reach out into the community. With the help of some suburban volunteers, we began an after-school tutoring program for children with learning disabilities. The Presbytery of Boston gave us a grant for supplies and snacks. A downtown congregation supplied us with books. A local public

nized that congregations were often hesitant to get into community organizing for fear of losing badly needed leaders from the parish. Appreciating this concern, with guidance from a GBIO staff person, we launched a six-week leadership-training program to expand our leadership pool. The goal was to invite and involve a wider circle of congregation members in leadership roles by providing practice in leading, and offering communal support in the learning process. Integral to the process were weekly one-to-one conversations with other participants. In our case, the one-hour group training was held after church on Sunday for six weeks. Following a quick lunch of soup and bread, we used the same structure each week: words of welcome, a faith reflection, an overview of our leadership campaign and the numbers involved, our goals, a leadership learning presentation, one-to-one visit selection for the upcoming week, announcements, a closing prayer, and an evaluation of the meeting. This unchanging structure created a sense of familiarity and security for those trying out front-of-the-room leadership for the first time.

The participants represented half of the congregation; many were not then in positions of leadership. We were intergenerational, with some of our teens demonstrating great gifts as leaders. To our surprise and delight, we always had more than enough volunteers to lead each segment of the training. On many

Our covered-dish supper after that heritage service reflected the many cultures from which we had sprung: Boston baked beans and apple pie were set alongside curried goat and meat pasties and fried plantains on the serving table.

tice before worship. We were earnest but not much else. Then one Sunday early in 1997, Julie arrived. A Quaker, she was bringing her newly-arrived-in-town Presbyterian father to the only Presbyterian church for miles. Julie and her family never left. A public-school music director, she soon offered to help us out on Sundays. A real choir was born! We realized then how important a choir's leadership is for meaningful worship.

During our 1995 celebration of Presbyterian Heritage Sunday, it dawned on us that few of our members had much connection with a Scots heritage. Our roots were Moravian and Baptist and Methodist and Catholic and Episcopal and Pentecostal. Our birthplaces were Jamaica and Nigeria and Cameroon and Barbados and Cape Verde, as well as the United States. No more than five of those in our midst were "cradle Presbyterians." So our covered-dish supper after that heritage service reflected the many cultures from which we had sprung: Boston baked beans and apple pie were set alongside curried goat and meat pasties and fried plantains on the serving table.

Reaching Out

As a new pastor, I invited some church leaders on a community walkabout. We discovered that the church's location,

elementary school and two parochial schools sent us our first students. We were becoming visible. As a result, we received unsolicited grants; we were given computers for our program by people in the community and beyond.

At about the time I arrived in Boston, an interfaith group of clergy began to look at the possibility of congregations' doing community organizing together. Over the next three years, through thousands of one-to-one conversations among laypeople and clergy of every race, culture, and creed, the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization was born. Several leaders from Hyde Park joined me in laying the groundwork of that organization, soon called GBIO. We

We were intergenerational, with some of our teens demonstrating great gifts as leaders.

learned to reach far beyond our neighborhood boundaries to work for the common good, with major victories in the areas of affordable housing and public-education budgets.

Building Leadership

One of the side benefits of our work with GBIO was the emergence of a new emphasis on leadership development within the congregation. GBIO recog-

occasions we found ourselves applauding and cheering and marveling at one another's talents.

Through the one-to-one conversations, each participant got to know others at a deeper level. Since many members worked six days a week, most one-to-one conversations were scheduled on Sunday mornings. From 8:00 A.M. until worship at 10:30, every room in the building was abuzz with talk as

Perhaps the most important benefit was the discovery that though a congregation may see itself as warm and friendly, the members may not really know one another well.

people paired off to share their stories over bagels and coffee. At the outset of the program, we created a display board picturing our church. Labeled arrows pointing toward the church indicated countries of origin. Each one-to-one conversation was represented by a small paper figure of a person. By the conclusion of our six-week training the display-board church was covered with 300 “paper people.”

Out of those meetings, fresh leadership did indeed emerge. New elders and deacons (congregational caregivers) were nominated from among those who took the training. An educational initiative with the local high school was planned. A desire to support families with children materialized as a “Baby Basics” program that offered disposable diapers and friendly consultations to working families not eligible for WIC² assistance. The teenagers organized an interchurch basketball league. Perhaps the most important benefit was the discovery that though a congregation may see itself as warm and friendly, the members may not really know one another well. Out of all those conversations and shared growth, a new sense of connected community blossomed.

A Time for Change

Six years passed. The budget had balanced for two years in a row. African American members of a dissolved congregation added to our diversity. The size of the worshipping congregation had quadrupled, with 60 or more adults and children in the pews. (Many of those who faithfully attended and contributed financially were not members. We called them “congregation friends.” I have observed this same phenomenon in other urban congregations.) Session slots were filled, and deacons were active.

Wednesdays were bustling and busy with tutoring, Baby Basics, choir rehearsal, and a Taizé service. Youth were involved in their own version of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization. The congregation’s relationship with the presbytery had been strengthened through enthusiastic support of the church’s mission.

We were all becoming too comfortable with a pastoral presence that could not become permanent, according to church polity. In many ways what we had experienced was new-church devel-

opment, although we never called it by that name. The church was approaching the ability to call a pastor as stewardship increased and congregational size became vigorously viable. Difficult as it was to make the decision, it was time for me, as stated supply, to move on. Soon afterward, the congregation took a deep breath, stepped out in faith, and invited a fine young pastor to serve among them. He and they are thriving. ♦

NOTES

1. In Presbyterian churches, a “stated supply pastor” is a minister appointed to serve in a congregation not seeking an installed pastor.
2. WIC is the abbreviation for the Women, Infants, and Children Program, administered by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), a federal agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

WHAT I LEARNED

This experience and other urban pastorates have taught me these lessons:

- ♦ A part-time pastor works full time if a church is going to grow.
- ♦ A secretary is worth her or his weight (and the pastor’s) in gold. I didn’t have one.
- ♦ The church needs to be open during the week to increase community visibility and interest; therefore, a responsible person needs to be on the premises.
- ♦ It is possible to get support for outreach programs from larger churches, as well as from others in the local community—but not for internal nuts-and-bolts needs.
- ♦ Congregational stewardship is critical. Many members and “friends” were uncomfortable with the notion of filling out a pledge card. Persuading them took much patient education.
- ♦ A multicultural congregation is not static. Many young professional couples moved back to Hyde Park and nearby neighborhoods as housing became prohibitively expensive closer to downtown Boston. Consequently, we became more economically diverse.
- ♦ Growth in a multicultural congregation will more likely be gradual than explosive. You can almost always tell who will return for another visit. Those who stay have a special, expansive vision of who and what the church is meant to be.
- ♦ Ideally, a multicultural congregation is a neighborhood church. Those who live where they worship have a commitment beyond the walls of the sanctuary.



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Race Initiatives

The Third Rail of Denominational Politics

IAN S. EVISON

At the time of the O. J. Simpson trial in the winter of 1995, a wave of concern arose for the continued racial divisions in the United States and for the sharply differing ways that those divisions were seen through black, brown, or blue eyes. For some communities, such public focus on the issue has not occurred for a generation—not since the civil rights era in the 1960s. People remembered W. E. B. Dubois' statement that the problem of the color line is the problem of the 20th century. In the mid-1990s, newspapers were full of accounts of the separateness of black and white society. People formed interracial discussion groups.

Yet the focus of concern in 1995 was different from what it had been a generation earlier in the 1960s. In the civil rights era, the energy for change had been directed outward (toward visible and legally sanctioned racial division) and directed at a specific region of the country—the South. In the post-O.J. era, the energy was directed inward, toward self-questioning.

A number of mainline Protestant denominations—among them the Presbyterian

Church (U.S.A.), the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, and the Unitarian Universalist Association—have launched prominent initiatives concerning race in the past decade. The focus of these initiatives has been to move beyond division, to create the internal conditions of welcome and to reach outward across racial and ethnic boundaries. These initiatives have included extensive training, interventions with ministers and other congregational leaders, and comprehensive training of denominational executives and other staff. Ongoing commissions or task forces monitor the work and advocate for its importance, and provide support for those involved. To move beyond division, denominations have mandated or strongly encouraged local congregations to reach out across divisions and—most especially—to examine their own hidden assumptions and biases.

Unique Denominational Dimensions

Building leadership adept at working creatively across cultural boundaries and with cultural change is now a key strategic issue in congregations and for the entire continent. Mindful of this development, the Alban Institute launched its Negotiating Cultural

Boundaries Project under the leadership of Jacqueline Lewis. In support of this initiative I have held conversations with people from a variety of denominations; I have recently begun to extend these into a series of interviews.

The issue of cultural boundaries is complex, with unique dimensions in each denomination. The United Methodist Church is concerned for its relationships with the three black Methodist denominations. The Episcopal Church is recognizing the increasing contribution of people from other parts of the world Anglican Communion, such as the Caribbean and Africa. In the ELCA there is the more recent experience of congregations serving first as a bridge to American culture for immigrants (from countries like Germany, Norway, and Sweden) and sometimes helping to preserve their identities during periods of considerable hostility and persecution—especially for Lutherans of German descent.

These differences among denominations make generalization difficult. The issue has many dimensions, each of which needs to be explored. Yet in my discussions so far, I believe I have detected a pattern that I would now like to test.

A Triangle of Positions

While initiatives continue on the issue of race in many denominations and successes are reported, a pattern stands out: There is a broadly perceived feeling of blockage in the initiatives, with the energy of the blockage focused in three groups in each of the denominations:

- ◆ *The advocates*—“leaders of color,” and to a certain extent the social-justice advocates;
- ◆ *The doubters*—generally the large-church ministers; and
- ◆ *The denominational executives*, who stand between these groups and whose role it is to lead the denomination ahead on the issue.

While this pattern applies most centrally to mainline Protestant denominations, it also appears to have surprising parallels in other groups, such as Roman Catholics and white evangelicals.

One remarkable similarity among all the interviews I conducted on race initiatives is the level of concern about confidentiality from people from all three groups. People from each group expressed great initial reluctance to talking about race at all, for fear of escalating conflict. Advocates stressed that I needed to

understand that many in their denominations did not wish them well—rather, wished them gone. The doubters were similarly cautious. One large-church minister said, “Whenever I speak in public about the issue of race in our denomination, I feel I must start with my résumé—all the marching I have done.” A denominational leader described the issue of race in his denomination as the “third rail” of denominational politics. If denominational executives side with the advocates, they are seen as arbitrarily imposing an initiative on congregations. This alienates congregations, especially the large ones. If denominational leaders appear too understanding of the doubters, they raise questions about whether they support their own initiative and whether they are acceding to the power of large churches. If denominational executives avoid taking sides, they risk being seen as avoiding the issue. Yet once beyond an initial reluctance, many from each group wanted to talk and revealed considerable depth of thinking and reflection beyond their public personas.

The **advocates** were most likely to object to the notion that there is blockage in their denominations’ diversity efforts, pointing to recent denominational policy statements and initiatives. Yet, whatever hopeful signs of change they saw, they did acknowledge that the road was long—longer and harder than they had realized at the beginning. They often expressed frustration, anger, and honest bafflement about lack of results and a feeling that, basically, nothing changes. This torpor they ascribed to tenacious racism and guarding of privilege. Open racism may never be spoken, but in consequence it only becomes more insidious. Many said they were tired, and that they doubted whether their denominations were worth the energy and the spiritual and psychological toll that the work has taken.

The **doubters** felt caught. One female minister said, “People say or imply that I am a racist for voicing disagreement with what the denomination wants us to do. I know this congregation. I know this program wouldn’t work here. If I really were against it, I would say, ‘Sure, let’s just run the program.’” A number of the doubters said that the groups organizing the denominational program seemed to have little idea of how congregations—especially large congregations—work,

and had shown disorganization in advance planning, clear communication, or arrangements. Some commented that the people organizing the work in their denominations seemed not to “get” congregations and tended to ascribe problems with the initiative too quickly to the resistance or apathy of the congregations.

Those in the third corner of the triangle, the **denominational executives**, expressed a range of views on their own denominations’ initiatives, from advocacy to doubt. Yet denominational leaders from across this spectrum expressed frustration at the no-win nature of the debate. It was an issue that they could not move forward and could not back away from. Many expressed frustration that they did not have better tools to offer their congregations, and sadness that their generation might be squandering its opportunity to tackle the race issue the same way the opportunity was squandered in the late 60s and early 70s.

Some noted that the total of the three groups involved in this debate is small, while far larger is the “silent majority”—which is appealed to, diagnosed, or accused. An older minister observed that while the passion of congregations for the issue of race in the civil rights era had dissipated quickly enough, the post-O. J. passions had proved even more fleeting. The apparent low interest, and ebbing interest, of most congregants and most congregations weighs heavily on the discussion.

In this triangle, the middle-judicatory executives—such as bishops, district superintendents, conference ministers, executive presbyters, and district presidents—play a difficult role, somewhat akin to that of a responsible eldest child in a troubled family. In mainline Protestant denominations, the initiatives on race have become especially difficult instances of more general trends. National executives feel that there are initiatives in which they must engage congregations broadly and that middle judicatories must assist. Middle judicatory leaders are close to congregations and have credibility with them. Yet middle judicatory leaders have diminishing power to mandate initiatives, especially to large congregations, and most especially on this issue. Congregations want to select from a range of resources that

best fit the specific nature of local situations. At least by their lack of response, most congregations have made clear that they want something more and something different from the current denominational initiatives.

A blocked discussion such as this tends to narrow and harden how each group in the triangle—advocate, doubter, and executive—publicly presents its views. Each group is hesitant to express the complexity of its views, especially the dynamic, creative edge of self-doubt and new ideas. The tension of the disagreement sends each group into a false unity. A large-church minister commented that it is pretty hard to get large churches to agree on anything, but the way the denomination single-mindedly pushed the initiative did a pretty good job of creating unity. An advocate observed how the nature of the issue had submerged differences—and disagreements—and played back into the same old prejudice that “we all look the same.” A denominational executive expressed the view that his church body’s only chance of making progress required that regional and national staff of the denomination speak with a unified or, at least, coherent voice.

A Way Forward?

Is there a way forward for these denominations to a time when Sunday morning worship is not the most segregated hour of the week? Any full answer to this question would require exploring other dimensions of the issues of race and racism, including the demographic patterns revealed by the U.S. Census for 2000. Yet, if the pattern described here in fact exists, it suggests a clear diagnosis for why the discussion is blocked: none of the groups can display publicly the range and creativity of its thinking. This diagnosis opens a vision of two possible—though not easy—steps toward creating movement.

First, safe places need to be created where each group individually, and finally all the groups together, can express what they cannot or do not express publicly. These safe places might be within denominational groups. Holding these discussions within individual denominations would avoid the discomfort of publicly airing family discussions. Such a discussion might proceed better if people were assembled from different denominations and given a meeting place in more neutral territory. However the

discussion is organized, the challenge is to have a new kind of conversation extending beyond well-mapped territory and venturing into the most creative—and also the riskiest—part of each group’s thinking.

Second, attention should move quickly to the current adaptive challenges of congregations, with time allowed for discussion of *how congregations themselves experience these challenges*. Both large-church ministers and denominational executives observed that this issue of race-related initiatives has become another incident in the ratcheting down of the power and authority of denominations that risk losing prestige both when they act and when they do not. Some felt that the denominations were reaching back for the heroic moment of the church’s involvement in the civil rights movement. Denominations don’t have the resources they had a generation ago—especially since the dot-com bubble burst and the national economy has weakened.

This second step toward creating movement is a big one. The focus on the challenge

to adapt to change creatively and faithfully and on the congregations’ experience of these challenges in their own situations will lead toward fundamentally different thinking about the relationship of the local to the national. One minister observed that, if he could speak honestly, he and his congregation were unlikely to follow with energy any national initiative on such an issue. His congregation had become involved in a local initiative on fair housing, and his energy was more likely to go there—both because that was where the passion of his people was and because the effort had caused real community change. For this congregation and many others, the best possibility for action and effectiveness seemed to be in local or regional efforts. Such congregations are likely to energetically engage a denominational initiative only in the context of its connection with such local work. To serve these congregations, denominations need to go beyond explaining initiatives—they need to provide connection with a range of resources for doing what congregations are called to do in their local communities. ♦

RESOURCES FOR CLERGY AND CONGREGATIONS

- ♦ **Barndt, Joseph R.** *Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America.* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1991). The point of view that Barndt articulates is central to two major organizations that have worked with mainline denominations in their initiatives: Crossroads Ministry in Chicago and People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond in New Orleans.
- ♦ **Franklin, John Hope.** *The Color Line—Legacy for the Twenty-First Century.* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1993). Franklin brings up to date W. E. B. Dubois’ observation that the color line is the basic question of the century—of both the 20th and the 21st.
- ♦ **King, Martin Luther, Jr.** “Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution,” sermon preached at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., March 31, 1968. Full text is online: www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/sermons/680331.000_Remaining_A_wake.html

This is the source of the much-quoted “most segregated hour” quotation and the vision for moving beyond it.

- ♦ **Niebuhr, H. Richard.** *The Social Sources of Denominationalism.* (New York: New American Library, 1929). This is the classic statement of the argument that the basic divisions between denominations in the United States derive more from social factors such as race, ethnicity, and income than from differences of belief.
- ♦ **Yancey, George.** *Beyond Black and White: Reflections on Racial Reconciliation.* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1996). This is a basic statement of the racial reconciliation approach that has been popular in evangelical Christianity and groups such as Promise Keepers.

For sample web links to denominational race initiatives, go to www.alban.org/journal and click on “Current Issue.”



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Role Confusion

The Quiet Saboteur of Church Effectiveness

DEBORAH L. KOCSIS AND SUSAN A. WAECHTER

Not long ago, in a congregation not unlike yours, there was an elder named Mark. Mark was serving in his second full year as one of the lay leaders elected to the governing body of the congregation, and in this second year he began to experience new spiritual dividends from serving the church. These were somewhat unexpected for him. When he had originally accepted a nomination to the governing council he had done so out of dedication to his church. It was the right thing to do, he had decided—to align his discretionary time with his values as a person of faith.

Now into his second year of service, Mark was finding that the discussions in council meetings and the spiritual grounding at the start of each meeting were stirring a desire to develop a deeper personal spiritual life. Among other things, he committed himself to regular attendance at the church's Sunday adult education offerings. So, in his second term as elder, Mark found himself

hungry for spiritual growth and more active in the educational programs of his church.

The first six-week education series that Mark attended was invigorating! He heard a depth of discussion that he had not experienced previously. Ready for more, he began attending a second educational series and had high expectations for his growth journey, but for some reason this second series seemed flat. Mark didn't find the discussions invigorating, and the study questions didn't reach into the deeper areas that he so enjoyed.

Though disappointed, Mark was not discouraged. He approached Rachel, the church staff member responsible for adult education, and shared his opinion of the second series with her in a respectful way. Mark explained his responsibilities on the council and his concern about the quality of the education curriculum. He then left Rachel with some curriculum descrip-

tions he had found on the Internet and asked her to consider one of his choices for the next series.

The next week, Rachel found herself thinking about her meeting with Mark and becoming more troubled about what her response to his request should be. She clearly respected Mark; his reputation on the council was excellent. She wanted to acknowledge his requests for curriculum selection, but she was committed to another direction in curriculum.

Those new curriculum plans were the product of a lot of work that had been done the previous summer. The curriculum selection project had been initiated by the pastor, shaped and approved by the council, and concluded with several staff implementation meetings. The end result of this strategic focus on

The absence of role clarity—or role confusion—produces conflict, diminished effectiveness, and wasted effort, so role clarity is directly linked with the ability of our churches to fulfill their missions.

spiritual development was a cohesive, churchwide theme for the year. The pastor and the staff had carefully crafted a plan for the educational offerings at each age level. Each part of the curriculum had been carefully chosen to offer a variety of styles, formats, and levels, all centered on the chosen theme. To depart from this plan would not be inconsequential for Rachel. She was caught between the deliberate processes of the staff—as guided by the pastor and the council—and one influential council member. She felt that either choice would create a difficult situation for her and for the church.

What led Mark and Rachel to this small but potentially dangerous moment was a confusion of roles. Role confusion is in part the result of the variety of gifts that we bring to our churches. From our experiences, education, and preferences we bring a wide variety of assumptions about how work gets done and where authority is held.

Role clarity “brings energy and freedom to individuals as well as organizations,” write Robert C. Andringa and Ted W. Engstrom in *The Nonprofit Board Answer Book*.¹ The absence of role clarity—or role confusion—produces conflict, diminished effectiveness, and wasted effort, so role clarity is directly linked with the ability of our churches to fulfill their missions.

To establish a clearer understanding of the roles within the church, let’s begin with the role of the council.

The Council is the Governing Body

The council, of which Mark was a member, is the governing body of the church. Each church has its own name for its governing council: board, session, or council of elders. What these governing bodies have in common is their legal and ethical responsibility for the church. Each council ensures that the

mission of the church is carried forth. The council is responsible for the fiscal health of the church and is the steward of the church’s physical property.

What is unique about the council, or any other governing board, is that its role and authority is in group action. The council’s authority is held by the group. That group exercises its authority when it convenes, with advance notice, and meeting its quorum requirements. Then and only then is the governing authority for the church exercised. When the group is not together, nor in sufficient numbers to meet quorum, then there is no governance authority held by any one of the members.

The key distinction in this role is that no individual member of the council has the authority for decisions governing the church.

Neither Mark nor any other individual member of the council has governance authority on his or her own. Mark’s wisdom, discernment, and faith serve in the leadership of his church through the council.

Most of us are like Mark in that we are used to jumping in and helping with jobs around the church. The trouble arises when we think that because we have been given a role in the governance and leadership of the

church we can use that role whenever we are doing church work. Not true! There are two other roles that are present in a functioning, effective church.

Committees Serve Under the Council’s Authority

When the church functions effectively, it’s from real work, not only from policy and strategy. Church councils need ways of getting the work done. One common approach is the use of committees. Committees are one central mechanism for getting done the practical stuff of the church. These committees need leadership, and typically those leaders are chosen from the individual members of the council.

We’re guessing that there’s no need to explain church committees to you. However, it’s important to understand the subtle but real role shift for the leader of a committee. An elder, as she serves as a leader of a church committee, now has the role of implementation. No longer is she in the role of governance. Instead, she now serves under the authority of the council. Her job is to implement the decisions of the council in a way that allows the church to function effectively. The committee leadership role is one of individual action.

In committee leadership we are working in the role of implementation. The governing body has delegated one of its members to act on its behalf—to manage the building and insurance coverage, for example. This delegated authority is not automatic. The delegated authority needs to be the result of formal action on the part of the governing body—in this case, the council. We get into trouble in this role when we start to act as if the governance role is interchangeable with the implementation role. As committee leaders, we implement; we do not revise policy or create new policies. Our implementation role is distinct from our governance role.

Lay Volunteers Undergird the Church

Lay volunteers comprise a third main role in the church and this role must also be understood if role confusion is to be avoided. A committee that expects to accomplish anything of value needs lay volunteers. As part of the life of every church, lay volunteers serve in worship, as teachers, caregivers, and workers beyond the walls of the church. Lay volunteers undergird the church. Their accountability may be to a staff member, the pastor, an elder, or the council. Volunteers in the church are directed by other leaders within the church. In the role of lay volunteer, an individual has no authority in the role of governance. The lay volunteer role is one of individual action.

In the volunteer role we are always accountable to another person: the pastor, a staff member, or a committee chair. We are not working under the authority of the governing body. Instead, we are working under the authority of an individual. Even if we have some authority from a title or position elsewhere in the church, while we are volunteering we do not have that authority.

Elders in particular, when they volunteer to help staff and committees fulfill the mission of the church, need to resist the temptation to start managing the staff or the committee. The staff cannot and should not serve two masters: the governing board and an individual.

How This Plays Out in Reality

Perhaps by now you can tell that much of the confusion and misunderstanding of roles has to do with authority. Problems arise when staff members and elders confuse their roles. This tends to

Elders in particular, when they volunteer to help staff and committees fulfill the mission of the church, need to resist the temptation to start managing the staff or the committee.

happen because roles are not understood automatically. The distinctions are subtle and usually not articulated, and the same people often switch roles within the same meeting! When these switches take place but are not acknowledged, it's hard to remember that the roles are not interchangeable.

Using this framework of roles and role clarity, let's take another look at the story of Mark and Rachel.

Mark, as an elder of his church, is in the role of governance when he is convened with the rest of the council. In that role he participates in fulfilling the mission of the church. Mark, along with the rest of the council, assists in choosing thematic areas, in hiring staff, approving capital campaigns, and setting stewardship goals. He has the authority to participate in these decisions when the council is in session.

As a participant in the church's adult education series, Mark now has the role of lay volunteer, but in this second role Mark doesn't look any different, doesn't speak differently, and doesn't think differently. That's why it's hard for Rachel to see Mark as a lay volunteer when he comes and sits across the table from her. Instead, as they

talk about choices for the next adult education series, Rachel sees him as an elder governing the church.

Both Mark and Rachel have role confusion. It's this role confusion that sets up the situation for potential conflict and leaves Rachel feeling troubled.

Other instances of role confusion occur when staff members want to influence a decision of the governing body. This is appropriate and desirable, but it can perpetuate role confusion if the staff member attempts to work through one elder rather than working with the entire group convened in governance. The staff member has confused the role of the governing group with the implementation role.

The third possibility for role confusion exists between the volunteer role and the implementation role. Consider a volunteer editing a Web page for the church. She reports to the staff member in charge of communication and publications, most often the pastor or associate pastor. The programmer is not working under the authority of the governing body; rather, she is working as an extension of the staff. In reporting to the pastor she maintains the volunteer role, while the pastor maintains the implementation role. Neither stray into the governance role!

So What?

Is this much ado about nothing? No. Shared understanding of the roles of lay leadership and participation is essential to the effective church. When the roles are understood the church can more readily fulfill its mission and involve its members and their gifts. This, after all, is the intended purpose of the church from the start.

Preventing Role Confusion

Understanding the events that led up to an uncomfortable situations created by role confusion is one thing; knowing what to do about it is another. As with most human interactions, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of intervention. Here are some ideas for preventing role confusion among the leaders in your church:

- ◆ Realize that role confusion is typical. New leaders will not necessarily understand the subtle role shifts of governance and volunteering, so orient them about the role of governance and its dependence on group action when they first begin to serve. Help them understand how roles shift in committees and general participation in the life of the church. Name the role shifts aloud during meetings so that people hear the transitions even when they cannot see them.
- ◆ Periodically discuss, as a council, how easy it is to slip into role confusion. Cite the examples in this article and have elders share personal examples of role confusion and how it hindered their work. (If you use actual examples from your own church, take care to protect confidentiality. Before

discussing a situation that involved role confusion, check with those involved to make sure it's okay with them that you do so.)

- ◆ Conduct periodic self-evaluations of the council that include examination of the clarity of roles in the church. Ask members to explain the differences among the three roles. Describe a situation and ask members to identify the roles being played in the situation. Ask church elders and members of the staff about their perceptions of how well roles are being managed, ensuring that their responses will remain confidential. Have someone who does not already have a role of authority in the church conduct the evaluations.
- ◆ Train staff on the church's various leadership roles and the difference between governance and implementation. Help them be alert to identifying instances of role confusion, and give them tools for diplomatically handling those situations.

While all of these will not prevent every case of role confusion, they do set the tone and lay the foundation for good governance and a countability.

How Did the Story of Mark and Rachel End?

Here's an example of a pound of intervention: The week after Mark had made his request, Rachel realized that his request was an example of role confusion. She recalled a discussion the staff had had on the topic over a year before, and immediately felt relieved to have a name for her discomfort. She then developed a plan, shared it with the pastor, and put it into action.

Rachel's plan began with thanking Mark for his input and asking him to meet with her once again. At the follow-up meeting, Rachel explained the intention of the current curriculum and how Mark's feedback would be used to improve the series descriptions. With improved descriptions, lay volunteers would gain a better understanding of how each series was deliberately chosen and was part of the whole. With these descriptions, each person's interests, learning style, and depth of inquiry could be better matched with the offerings in adult education.

Mark left the second meeting feeling that his input had been validated by Rachel, and that the adult education curriculum had been well-planned by both staff and the council. He realized that he had put Rachel in an uncomfortable situation because of his role on the council and vowed to clarify his role and his approach when-

ever he interacted with staff and committees.

Your church most likely has many examples of role confusion, and at the same time has many examples of successful role management. Think on these things and find your own examples. Affirm those who understand their roles and make them clear to others, and continue to reinforce the foundation of good governance and accountability. ◆

NOTE

1. Robert C. Anderson and Ted W. Engstrom, *Nonprofit Board Answer Book* (Washington, D.C.: The National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1997).

GRANTING PASTORS A TIME APART

Through its **Sabbatical Grant for Pastoral Leaders** program, The Louisville Institute seeks to provide the time and occasion for pastoral leaders to devote an extended season to prayer, study, and reflection for the renewal of their vocations.

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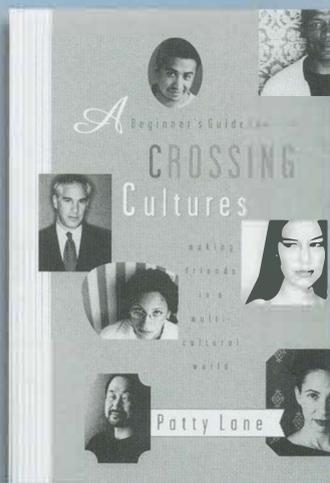
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Crossing Cultures

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO MAKING FRIENDS IN A MULTICULTURAL WORLD

Patty Lane
Downers Grove, Ill.:
Intervarsity Press, 2002



review book Cross-cultural specialist Patty Lane has written a helpful, practical, and engaging handbook for persons of different cultures who find themselves in a relationship with each other. This handy, well-researched, and accessible book is informed by cultural anthropology, and moves deftly between the theoretical and the practical, with exercises at the end of each chapter that encourage application of the material the author has presented. In summary, *Crossing Cultures* addresses:

- ♦ the importance of understanding how one's own culture affects one's behavior and theology;
- ♦ critical keys to understanding culture and its impact on relationships;
- ♦ how to nurture relationships with persons from other cultures; and
- ♦ a theological frame for understanding God's purpose for cultural diversity.

In Part I, Lane offers a very helpful overview of what she calls "the stew" that

is American culture. Terms like these are clearly defined as she builds a vocabulary for the newcomer to cultural studies and reminds others of the meaning of concepts like objective and subjective culture; assimilation and acceptance; culture of origin and third culture; ethnocentrism and segregation; and stereotypes and archetypes. This first section is a well-written primer on culture, with notes that direct the reader to additional sources and to an analysis of their own cultural self-understanding. As a preface to Part II, Lane argues that the Christian Church has not taken enough of a lead in endorsing the acceptance of other cultures. I agree, and appreciate her frankness and the practical remedies she develops in the next section.

In Part II, Lane asserts that in order to cross cultures, one must understand his or her own cultural lens and those of others. To this end, she suggests that there are six lenses through which one can understand cultural differences: the importance of context; what drives a person—being or doing; the understanding of authority; sources of identity; the way time is understood; and differences in worldview. I found this section very interesting. Readers are given several ways to access an intelligent analysis of these critical concepts. For example, when discussing cultures that place a high value on context—the environment, process, body language, appearance—in contrast with cultures that place a low value on context, Lane delineates the assumptions in each culture, and then illustrates the theory with stories and examples. Terms are redefined and, once again, exercises that she calls "connecting" end each chapter. These exercises invite the reader to examine his or her own worldview, sense of time, sense of identity, and drive, as the first step to understanding the other.

In Part III, Lane lays a foundation for dealing with conflict caused by cultural differences. I agree with her that misattribution is the greatest cause of conflict and misunderstanding when cultures mix. Again, stories illustrate theory

throughout this section. Readers will recognize themselves and their experiences in these pages that illustrate alternate means of dealing with conflict. Lane then moves towards the theological implications of diversity and states clearly her position: God's creation is diverse, and God expects us to see God in the other, and to affirm that diversity. Lane believes that "the multicultural nature of the United States is a tool that can speed the spread of the gospel throughout the world" (p.144).

The additional tools Lane provides for the reader include a very clear analysis of culture, quotations from various sources that reveal a broad appreciation for wisdom from diverse cultures, incredibly helpful resources in the appendices and throughout the book, and a passionate voice that advocates crossing cultures as a witness to God's work in the world. I recommend this book with enthusiasm.

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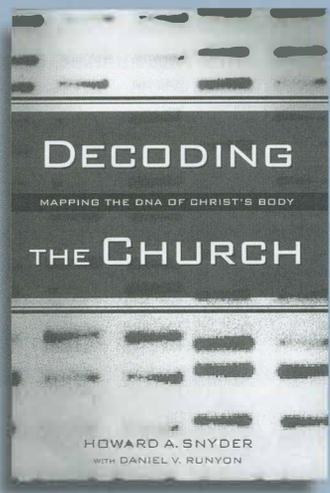
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Decoding the Church

MAPPING THE DNA OF CHRIST'S BODY

Howard A. Snyder and Daniel V. Runyon
Grand Rapids, Mich.:
Baker Book House, 2002



point for all ecclesiology” (p. 44).

As a specialist in interim/transitional ministry, one of my primary tasks is to facilitate reflection on the identity of a particular congregation. There are many resources for Christians that address identity in some form: *LifeKeys*, *Healthy Congregations*, *Temporary Shepherds*, *Power Surge*, *The Inviting and Engaging Church*, and *Leading Change in the Congregation*, to name a few. Each articulates the value of identity discovery for faithful Christian living. *Decoding the Church* should be included in that list because Snyder and Runyon have developed a theologically detailed text concerning the basics of identity for the Church, employing identity concepts that other resources only touch on. Although the book contains very little new material, the authors have created an excellent framework for discussion of faithful identity.

This framework incorporates many biblical references for more in-depth study, discussion questions for group or individual reflection, and easily referenced summary points. An interesting feature of the text is the story of a fictional congregation called Heartland Evangelical Church that is wrestling with issues of identity. Though somewhat contrived, the narrative can help readers imagine a faithful discussion of identity in a congregation.

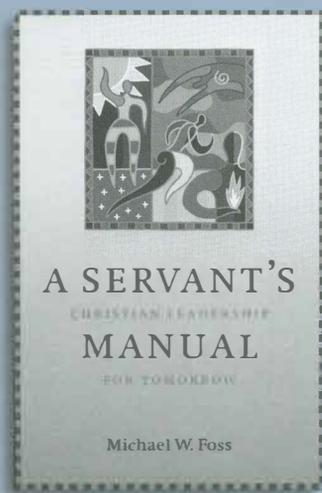
The real benefit of this book is the way it will inspire discussion. Snyder and Runyon are not bashful about criticizing patterns of congregational life that are not reflective of true church DNA. For example, they question the megachurch model for church identity, the use of business models in church planning, and hierarchical church structures. By discussing the idea of a DNA of the church, they provide a more faithful imagining of the body of Christ.

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A Servant's Manual

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP FOR TOMORROW

Michael W. Foss
Minneapolis:
Fortress Press, 2002



In *A Servant's Manual: Christian Leadership for Tomorrow*, Michael Foss outlines his ideas for how clergy and laity can envision Christian leadership for the future. He asserts that “discipleship is the single goal of ministry” (p. 86) and that clarity about this mission helps focus leadership. Foss presents a list of his thoughts and observations on the shortcomings of the church and its leadership today, with the purpose of challenging what he calls “old ways of thinking” (p. vii).

I struggled with this book. Foss presents his material so disjointedly that it was not easy for this reader to integrate the concepts from chapter to chapter. Much of the book is a hodgepodge of ideas with no organizing structure, which made it difficult to grasp the key points or to follow Foss' thoughts. Further, Foss insists on a metaphor of “DNA looping” to convey his thoughts, but without adequate explanation the comparison only distracts the reader. For instance, Foss states that “the DNA of the church is mission” without bothering to justify

review book

DNA and the science of genetic structures have been unfolding mysteries. With the mapping of the human genome, these mysteries have trickled from isolated laboratories into popular discourse. At any given Internet bookstore, one can find over 1,000 titles that mention DNA, and many of them are not from a scientific point of view. Recently the structure of DNA has traveled out of the sciences as a metaphor for describing the fundamental composition of other complex organizations, including congregations.

The authors of *Decoding the Church* seek to uncover an organizational identity that is uniquely ecclesiological—something that cannot be offered by any other identity project. The authors hope to “use the image of DNA here deliberately, not incidentally. It is more than an illustration. The DNA analogy fits, for the primary biblical images of the church are organic, not static or institutional” (p. 14). “[The church] is the body of Christ, the community called into existence by the mission of God. This is the starting

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the metaphor. Does he mean that mission, like DNA, is inherited and passed on? Sometimes triggered by interaction with the church environment? Coded and structured for exact duplication? Shared by others of the same "species"? A way of defining a natural identity? Similarly, in the chapter titled "De-institutionalize the Institution," he says, "When ministry grows, it becomes mitosis. Tasks and opportunities are seized by whomever is closest" (p. 61). Well, if mitosis is the division of a cell that results in two cells with the same number of chromosomes as the parent cell, does growing ministry somehow become two distinct entities? What does this have to do with seizing tasks and opportunities? The continuous use of such metaphors was disconcerting because I failed to make the connections. Perhaps, if Foss had laid a better framework about the Human Genome Project and DNA looping, and its association with the Church and Christian leadership, I would have been better able to focus on Foss' vision for Christian leadership.

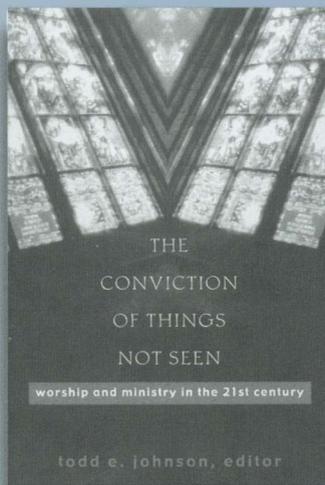
Foss also presents a number of disparate concepts—ranging from the aging church constituency (chapter 3: "Moving from Point A to Point B"), to the church becoming a learning organization (chapter 3 and chapter 2: "De-institutionalize the Institution"), to knowing your followership style (chapter 5: "Leaders as Followers")—but does not effectively relate these concepts to a central theme or purpose. I suppose these are all interrelated ideas about the need for change in the church leadership, but a reader should not have to resort to such conjecture. In the end, the book succeeds merely as a rambling on what is wrong with Christian leadership today—hardly a helpful way address those problems. As the opening chapter of the book asks, "What's the Point?"

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The Conviction of Things Not Seen

WORSHIP AND MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Todd E. Johnson, ed.
Grand Rapids, Mich.:
Brazos Press, 2002



review book Robert Webber, theologian and prominent authority on worship, once wrote, "Christianity is like a diamond. To see it in all of its fullness and beauty, we must see it from all of its sides." Accordingly, the 13 essays in *The Conviction of Things Not Seen*—a homage to Webber's work and legacy—examine the many facets of church life in the postmodern era. Bringing thoughtful and scholarly analysis to topics as diverse as the pedagogical function of visual art, multi-ethnicity, music in worship, denominationalism, and the function of ritual, the authors provide fresh and well-informed perspectives.

The book's last chapter, which discusses the man and his teaching and writing, might be a useful starting place for those unfamiliar with Robert Webber. His thinking about the role and value of worship serves as a jumping-off point as well as a unifying factor for the remaining essays. Each has its own distinctive personality, and each is relevant to Christian

congregations in the 21st century. Despite the variety of views and ideas, the book has a cohesiveness that may well be its own paradigm for today's Christianity.

Kathy Black's examination of "The Promises and Problems of a Multiethnic Church" resonates with the ideas in John D. Witvliet's "Beyond Style: Rethinking the Role of Music in Worship," and certainly with Robert K. Johnston's "Visual Christianity: The Peril of Pleasure and the Value of the Experience." Rodney Clapp opens "On the Making of Kings and Christians: Worship and Culture Formation" with the words "Worship is a waste of time" (p. 109) and goes on to examine the value of liturgy and ritualistic practice. These ideas are explored in other contexts in William H. Willimon's "Ritual and Pastoral Care" and Ruth A. Meyers' "Journeys of Faith: Current Practices of Christian Initiation."

At the heart of this dense and scholarly gem of a book is an examination of Christianity in a new century. The opinions offered are many. As Gilson A.C. Waldkoenig writes in "Denominations in the New Century," "Prepare in a specific tradition, but with readiness to adapt and change" (p. 162). It is the nature and scope of that change that this book explores.

Many thoughtful and crucial questions are raised in this book. While each chapter stands alone, they are all closely linked in their common quest for a future that includes and nurtures meaningful, vibrant Christianity.

The book's comprehensive footnotes are a valuable resource, providing the reader with a road map to further exploration. A bibliography of the works of Robert Webber also is included.

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NOTE

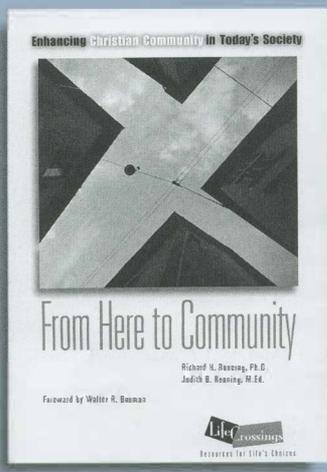
1. Robert Webber, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church* (Waco, Tex.: Word Publishing, 1985), 12.

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From Here to Community

ENHANCING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN TODAY'S SOCIETY

Richard H. Reuning and Judith B. Reuning
Columbus, Ohio:
LifeCrossings, 2002



review book

I recently participated in a retreat with some of the other women at my church. Not your typical hired-speaker, craft-tables, recipe-swapping retreat, the weekend provided rich fellowship and fantastic stories of faith with just the right dash of fun. Our worship services included dance, dramatic readings, music, and visual arts. The testimonies were startlingly honest—a refreshing change.

Some women, like the two planning their later-in-life weddings, came to the retreat rejoicing, and we couldn't help but bubble over with them. Others, like the woman who lost her young daughter just one month ago in a car accident, needed a different form of love from those around her. Tears streamed as we watched survivors of cancer, abuse, and near-death trauma celebrate with the Creator of the Universe. Many remarked that this was the most genuine group of women they had ever been a part of. As I reflected on the interactions with and stories of this group of nearly 100 women,

I couldn't help but dream of a future where they would be empowered to be the hands, feet, and even the heart of Christ—not just in the “safe place” of a church retreat, but while with their friends and neighbors back home.

From Here to Community by Richard and Judith Reuning is a tool for this kind of empowerment. This study guide thoughtfully leads us to the understanding that “the formation of the supportive, nurturing groups that we are part of . . . is a work and a gift of God” (pp. 76, 88). The Reunings serve as tour guides on a thought-provoking 12-session journey, the destination of which is nothing less than “the transformation of local Christian churches or study groups into more vibrant communities with an enhanced understanding of, and commitment to, living as a Christian community in American society” (p. 5). With weekly topics such as “Session 3: The Culture of Separation,” “Session 4: Social Capital,” “Session 7: Expect to be Different!” and “Session 11: Working for the Common Good,” the authors guide participants toward a healthier balance of individualism (enhancing personal gifts and talents) and common good (using those gifts and talents to serve others).

Each 60-minute session, designed to be used by small groups or Sunday school classes, is broken into sections like “Food for the Journey” (prayer and Bible verses), “Encounters” (stories, dramas, readings, and questions for discussion), and “Re-Entry” (reflection and homework). Each “Encounters” section is rich with the reflections of theologians, historians, biblical scholars, and other great thinkers. One of my favorite quotes is from Thomas Merton: “The ultimate thing is that we build community not on our love but on God's love, because we do not really have that much love ourselves. . . .” (p. 92). Isn't that the truth?

This guide is not your everyday fill-in-the-blank Bible study. Rather, it is a thoughtful journey toward the goal of dreaming about our own churches and small groups becoming significant contributors to the “common good . . . of the larger community” and of taking action to

“implement that vision” (p. 92). Any church or small group looking to further investigate their “front door [as] the frontier into mission” (p. 41) would benefit from this LifeCrossings offering.

If you, like me, are looking for ways to empower your neighbors and friends, pick up a copy of *From Here to Community* and join me in this prayer: Creator of the Universe, who dances with all, “help us to see ourselves as the yeast that will leaven our Christian community to work together for the common good, both within and beyond our own community” (p. 74).

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RESOURCES ON CULTURAL BOUNDARIES FROM THE CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE GUIDE

Barndt, Joseph. **Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America.** (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991). Defining racism as “prejudice plus power,” Barndt asserts that efforts against racism have often been incorrectly focused on minority populations rather than the majority. “The cause of racism is in the white society. The effects are felt in the communities of color,” he writes. “Rather than attempting to soften the effects, we need to attack the cause.”

Blount, Brian K. and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale. **Making Room at the Table: An Invitation to Multicultural Worship.** (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). This collection of 12 essays from professors at Princeton Theological Seminary explores how to make worship more inclusive of youth, ethnic minorities, and other persons who are frequently marginalized. The book includes several essays on biblical and theological themes that ground this agenda in Scripture and traditional Christian thought.

Emerson, Michael O. and Christian Smith. **Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America.** (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Sociologists Emerson and Smith conducted extensive research to develop this discussion of racial division and the theological worldview of evangelical Christians. So far, there has not been a similarly thoughtful discussion of racism and the worldview of contemporary mainline denominations.

Foster, Charles R. **Embracing Diversity: Leadership in Multicultural Congregations.** (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 1997). Asserting that the notion of a single model for multicultural congregations contradicts the very notion of diversity, Foster examines leadership dynamics in congregations that embrace racial and cultural diversity. He invites readers to explore the dynamics of “difference” at work in the leadership of their own congregations.

Gaede, Beth Ann, ed. **Congregations Talking about Homosexuality: Dialogue on a Difficult Issue.** (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 1998). A helpful resource for assisting congregations that seek to engage in dialogue

about one of the most difficult faith issues today, the book does not take a theological stand. Instead, it draws on the experiences of others who have struggled with how to address this issue from a position of respect for all views.

Nieman, James R. and Thomas G. Rogers. **Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-Cultural Strategies.** (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001). The authors weave the voices of preachers with insights from psychology, sociology, and historical analysis to present a practical theology for preaching in multicultural contexts. Preaching in a multicultural context is ultimately about “making serious engagement” with the particular setting in which the preacher lives and works.

Rendle, Gilbert R. **The Multigenerational Congregation: Meeting the Leadership Challenge.** (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 2002). Rendle asserts that in the 21st century, multigenerational congregations can be successfully countercultural and serve many persons. To do so, they must understand their assumptions and develop new skills to capitalize on their potential for health. Using real-life examples, the author delineates a process for approaching multigenerational understanding.

Sanders, Cheryl J. **Ministry at the Margins: The Prophetic Mission of Women, Youth and the Poor.** (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997). This challenging book demonstrates how ministry can be updated and revitalized. Sanders shows how ministry might be carried out by historically marginalized groups like women, minorities, and children. Christian mission can come alive when it is not only ministry to, but ministry by, marginalized people seeking justice.

Webb-Mitchell, Brett. **Unexpected Guests at God's Banquet: Welcoming People with Disabilities into the Church.** (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1994). Beginning with Jesus' parable of the banquet, Webb-Mitchell provides a vision for including persons with mental, emotional, or physical disabilities in the life of the local congregation. The book's discussion of including vital members who have particular gifts and limitations features ideas for religious education and worship.

Dealing with Resistance

Q: We are undertaking a capital campaign to finance the renovation of our synagogue's 35-year-old sanctuary and the building of new classroom space, changes our board recently decided were necessary for our growth. But some members of the congregation are very angry about this plan. They see no need for more classroom space and they love the sanctuary as it is. How can we convince them they are wrong without losing them as members?

A: There are a number of things to keep in mind in this situation. First of all, change is very difficult for many people, and change in their religious institution is even more so; there is often much emotionality attached to a house of worship. Second, there is no growth without change, and no change without conflict, so the question becomes how to handle the conflict and resistance that arise when our institutions need to change. Two axioms that may be helpful in these situations are "patience and perseverance" and "embrace the resistance."

Patience is needed to go slowly in introducing the change, and perseverance is necessary to keep from losing the focus of why you want to make the change. The board members are way ahead of the congregation in thinking through all the issues about renovating the building. They have been talking about it for months and are familiar and comfortable with the costs and the benefits of the project. By the time it is introduced to the congregation, the board is ready to go. The congregants, however, are not in the same place and need time to absorb the necessity for the changes, their financial implications, and, most importantly, the emotions accompanying the changes. Consequently, a lot of communication and patience are necessary.

Resistance appears when people are in different stages of understanding the need for and the details of a change. This is where it is helpful to recall the second

axiom, "embrace the resistance." As hard as it might be, it is necessary to respect those who resist, and to listen to their concerns with an open heart and mind. One of the reasons this is so difficult is that it is counterintuitive. What you want to do is avoid those who don't agree, but if your goal is to build commitment for the capital campaign and the changes to the building, you need to know what might prevent you from getting that commitment. Who opposes you? What is their opposition? Are there ongoing animosities toward the board? Without exploring the resistance, you can only guess at the barriers to commitment to the change you are proposing. The voice of resistance tells you what's wrong. Once you know the concerns people have, you have an opportunity to find common ground.

Support for change is the opposite of resistance. The board and the capital campaign committee need to do what they can to show the resisters what the change will do for them. "What's in it for me?" is an important question to answer.

Relax and Focus

Dealing with resistance is draining, so it is important to relax and stay focused on your goal—easy to say, hard to do when people are attacking what you hold dear. Sometimes they show no respect for you. They shout, they use innuendo, and in general just don't "get it." But the best results can be gained by remaining calm and receptive. The Chinese martial art of tai chi teaches this in a very physical way.

Opponents begin to spar by pushing. As one pushes, the other pulls when the natural inclination is to push back. When you pull back, you yield, giving nothing to resist. So stay relaxed, calm, and engaged. This does not mean giving up. It simply means staying present to what people are feeling and saying without actively opposing these feelings or opinions. In order to build support, think about the possibility of combining the question "What's in it for me?" with "What's in it for them?"

As you explore resistance, listen for common fears and common interests. Listen for ways to join in a common vision. Although the goals of the parties may differ, the solution should attempt to capture the concerns of all those affected—in the above scenario, perhaps there are compromises that can be made that might not be too offensive to the new design, that people can live with, and that can be redone at a later date. That said, there are some people who will never change their minds. Don't spend a lot of energy or time trying to convince them they are wrong. It won't help. In fact, it will probably cause them to dig in their heels and become more resistant. Stay engaged with them—as people, not in regard to the proposed changes. Say hello, ask how they are, have a light conversation. That way the chance of making an enemy of them is lessened. And who knows? In the long run, they might even like the changes.



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CONGREGATIONS is a quarterly publication of the Alban Institute, a nonprofit, interfaith membership organization founded in 1974 to provide a comprehensive range of resources to Christian and Jewish congregations. Our mission is to provide clergy and lay leaders with practical, research-based information and ideas for effective ministry as they grapple with an ever-changing environment.

The Alban Institute serves leaders – both ordained and lay – across the denominational spectrum through consulting services, education events, book and periodical publishing, and research. Our work is supported by membership revenue, grant funding, and the sale of programs, services, and publications.

The Alban Institute encourages dialogue with many faith traditions, people of diverse ethnicity, men and women, large and small congregations, and urban and rural congregations. We invite you to join in conversation with us by becoming a member or writing an article for CONGREGATIONS – or both! Please call us at 301-718-4407 or send an e-mail to membership@alban.org.

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