



The Rev. Jasper Peters

Understanding “New” Expressions of Civil Rights Movements

Video presenter (6:54): The Rev. Jasper Peters, founding pastor of Belong Church, a diverse, inclusive, justice-oriented congregation in Denver

The Rev. Jasper Peters is the founding pastor of Belong Church, a diverse, inclusive, justice-oriented congregation in Denver. He is a graduate of the University of Colorado at Boulder and Iliff School of Theology. He is passionate about bringing the real and relevant blessings of church to traditionally marginalized communities. His ministry focus also includes helping white Christians understand and support movements, such as Black Lives Matter, which reflect and address the concerns of people of color.

Understanding “New” Expressions of Civil Rights Movements

Preparation

Select a room or location to offer the study. Every session needs a room that has the capability to access the video via the Internet and to project the video for groups of various sizes. Check to be sure equipment is working properly. *This video can be found at www.gcorr.org/series/vc3.*

Preview the video. Read through the lesson plan. Have for display or sharing a covenant of care for the session. Think about asking members in the session to read the Scripture(s).

Listen to the songs, “Love Can Build a Bridge” by The Judds (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSEJYLvv8Pc>), and “Bridge Over Troubled Water” by Simon & Garfunkel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjNgn4r6SOA>). Write down words or phrases that stand out for you (i.e., love will build a bridge don’t you think it’s time; when you are weary, when you need

a friend I'm sailing right behind; when all your hopes are sinking let me show you what hope means; when we stand together it's our finest hour). Be prepared to connect these words and your reflections on the songs with visions of ministry and church that Jasper Peters has.

Gather the following materials:

- Bible for reading the Scripture: Acts 2:1-8
- Listening and Looking Guide (one for each person or project on a screen)
- Construction paper, 11 x 17, assorted colors of brown, beige, peach, white
- Large "Post-it"-style notes, lined (4 x 6 size)
- Pens, pencils, and markers, assorted colors
- Blue painter's tape
- Scissors

You will also need to prepare:

- Three sheets of newsprint with one of these questions at the top: What is the "gift" of the Holy Spirit? What does it mean to be colorblind? What does it mean to decentralize whiteness? (For "Posting Perspectives" activity.)
- Trace your feet and cut out foot patterns (write a different word on each pattern to indicate a skill, a gift that you can bring to build a multicultural, multiethnic church) as a sample for the exercise, "Bridge of Footprints" in this session.
- Study the room space and decide where you can create the "Bridge of Footprints"

THE STUDY SESSION

Get Started [10 minutes]

Welcome everyone to the session [take care of housekeeping matters – bathrooms, etc.]. Read statement of purpose (or recruit a volunteer to do so): "The General Commission on Religion and Race presents *Vital Conversations* to help start the dialogue on subjects that may sometimes be difficult to approach. We are all part of the beloved community, and we welcome perspectives that bring enlightenment and understanding."

Begin the study session by having participants sit in a circle if possible and answer the following questions. (Ask members to keep their responses under two minutes.)

- What is great about your church?
- Describe the most diverse worship experience that you have been a part of. What made it diverse for you?

If desired, share Jean's story (not her real name) about her diverse experience in worship:

It was a cold, rainy day in Chihuahua, Mexico. In fact, it had snowed – the first snow there in decades we're told – but quickly changed to rain. We were part of a mission trip and had been out meeting with church leaders all day. I was tired. Then the young man driving our bus asked (through our interpreter) if anyone wanted to be picked up to go to Bible study. Everyone was silent. Not wanting to hurt the driver's feelings, I volunteered. Later that night, I sat in Bible study conducted totally in Spanish – no one spoke English. Yet when they began to sing the song "Cristo Eres Bello" ("Christ, You are Beautiful"), I was able to hear the words phonetically, make meaning from my limited Spanish, and sing along to the tune ... a song that I committed to memory. I asked someone to write the words for me, and I still sing it today, a full twenty years later. That was my Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit in my life.

Introduce yourself and say a word about why you have accepted the role of facilitator for this session, what visions you have for the time together, and describe a time when you experienced cultural diversity in worship.

Read or ask someone to read aloud Acts 2:1-8. Ask the group to respond to the Word by sharing briefly what they feel when they hear this passage. Ask them how it connects with their worship experiences. What is similar? What is different? What is a little scary?

Invite someone to lead the group in an opening prayer. If no one volunteers, open with a prayer of your choice.

Review and post your group's covenant and highlight the key components: confidentiality; everyone's voice matters; disagree with care/do not attack anyone. Invite those present to add thoughts and ideas to the covenant.

Introduce the video presenter for the evening (explaining that you will show the video later during the session): Jasper Peters is a United Methodist pastor who has been assigned to create a new interracial fellowship in Denver, Colorado. He is committed to helping white Christians understand – and support – movements of people of color, such as Black Lives Matter – that clarify the concerns and challenges of their lives and their community.

Distribute the Listening and Looking Guide. Explain that this is a resource to help them capture thoughts and ideas from the video presentation and to make note of visions they have for ministry. Allow time for them to scan the questions and statements to help focus the viewing and listening process.

Play the Video [20 minutes]

Encourage participants to jot down short notes on their guide but as much as possible remain attentive to listening to and experiencing the presentation. At the conclusion of the video, allow five to ten minutes for the group to add more information and answer questions on their Listening and Looking Guide. Tell the group that there will be opportunities to add more information to the sheet and to reflect upon their notes. (If time permits and the group agrees, show the video a second time.)

Posting Perspectives [10 minutes]

Direct the group's attention to the newsprint posted on the wall. The words there were shared in the video by Jasper Peters. Distribute Post-it notes and ask the group to use them to write a comment or answer to each of the questions and place on the newsprint: What is the "gift" of the Holy Spirit? What does it mean to be "colorblind"? What does it mean to "decentralize whiteness?"

A Bridge of Footprints [20 minutes]

Ask the group if anyone knows the Wynonna Judd song, "Love Will Build a Bridge." Have an impromptu sing-a-long and/or share some of the words. Do the same thing with the song "Bridge Over Troubled Waters" by Simon & Garfunkel. Relate the lyrics to each song to Jasper Peters' question: Are we ready to build bridges? Are we ready to bear one another's burdens? Are we ready to take risks?

Distribute construction paper and scissors. Ask each person to trace their feet (with or without shoes) and cut them out. Then have people write an idea, a dream, or a commitment to creating the “Acts 2” church – multicultural and multiethnic. Ask them to place words of action and inspiration on the foot patterns. Then, using painter’s tape, affix the foot patterns in the form of a path on the floor/carpet.

Reflect and Share [10 minutes]

Allow time for members to do a reflection walk around the room, reading the notes on newsprint and paying attention to the words on the footprints. Allow time for them to add additional notes on their guide and to complete their vision, their commitment, and draft their social media share.

Closing Devotions [10 minutes]

For all who are able and willing, ask them to remove their shoes and go stand around the footprints forming a bridge, two lines facing each other – each one with a partner. Extend hands overhead – palm to palm – and connect with the partner across from them. Then invite everyone, beginning from the back – one or two at a time – to walk under the bridge of hands, placing their feet on the footprints (if walking one at a time, have them reconnect with one’s partner on the other end of the line). As people are walking the “bridge,” let a song emerge, singing a familiar hymn or song (i.e., “Precious Lord, Take My Hand,” “Amazing Grace,” “Marching to Zion”) – or someone may start singing “Bridge Over Troubled Waters.”

Closing Prayer [3 minutes]

Offer this prayer (or ask a volunteer to pray): Lord, we so desire to be the church of the future. You have shown us our inheritance from the Day of Pentecost. Let it be our future. Help us become a more diverse and inclusive church, where we see our colors, we sing music that appeals to the variety, where our mission choices and giving supports the well-being of all. Help us accept the need to be a community where the burdens of the few are carried by many. We offer our gifts, Lord. Take them and use them. Amen.

Listening and Looking Guide: The Rev. Jasper Peters

What is meant by the “gift” of the Holy Spirit?

What does it mean to be “colorblind” with regard to racial identity? Is that a good thing?

What does it mean to “decentralize whiteness”?

What impact would the “decentralization of whiteness” have on your life? Your church?

Mr. Peters talks about the need to build bridges. Identify the location and characteristics of your favorite bridge in your community or somewhere in the world. Describe a time when you witnessed a bridge built between people of differing cultures or races.

Cultivate a new vision: Jasper Peters cautions us to not limit or draw too small our circles of care and concern. He concludes by talking about the beautiful vision of church in Acts 2. Think about your life and ask, “How far can my parish go (not where it ends)?”

Make a commitment: _____

Tweet This/Post on your social media: _____

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