

# THIS IS OUR STORY, THIS IS OUR SONG

A SMALL GROUP STUDY OF  
CROSS-RACIAL/CROSS-CULTURAL  
MINISTRY FOR CONGREGATIONS

Produced by the General Commission on Religion and Race  
of The United Methodist Church



**RELIGION & RACE**  
The United Methodist Church

## INTRODUCTION

Imagine a community of faith where, by the saving grace of Jesus, all are “filled with his goodness and lost in his love” (UMH 369 vs. 3) across racial and cultural boundaries, reflecting the Kin-dom of God right where we are! A special group of courageous and faithful clergypersons, called by God to serve in cross-racial and cross-cultural (CR/CC) appointments, are working to bring to reality just such a community of faith. In the Book of Discipline, cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments are described as follows (¶ 425.4 2012):

“Cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments are made as a creative response to increasing racial and ethnic diversity in the church and in its leadership. Cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments are appointments of clergypersons to congregations in which the majority of their constituents are different from the clergyperson’s own racial/ethnic and cultural background.”

It is important, however, to note that the cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments and ministries are not some new 21st-century phenomenon in America. If we examine the scriptures, this has been God’s way of working ever since God called Abram and Sarai out of their homeland to live in a strange land among people who are different, all the while giving witness to God. There are a countless number of faithful persons throughout the Bible who responded to God’s call to go across the racial and cultural boundaries in ministry. The pastors appointed to serve in cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments are continuing the legacy of faith to advance God’s work in the world today.

Contained herein are their theological reflections and personal stories, offered to the church as a gift to build up the faith community and its ministry. However, these stories do not only belong to those telling them; rather, they are “our” stories and “our” songs, lifting up the Holy Spirit working in our midst to build up the realm of God where “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!” (Colossians 3:11 NRSV)

Throughout the Bible, we witness God at work bringing all people

together and helping people overcome self-imposed boundaries along racial and cultural lines. The stories in this collection lift up God's faithfulness in the midst of the struggles, challenges, and creative responses of these pastors, as they serve in cross-racial and cross-cultural ministry.

This collection series is offered in hopes that it will serve as a catalyst for the church to reclaim its mission to be inclusive of all God's people in ministry in our diverse neighborhoods and increase the vitality of the body of Christ. Also, this collection will foster a deep understanding of cross-racial and cross-cultural pastors and inspire appreciation and cooperation to build up the ministry and, ultimately the Kin-dom of God. Apostle Paul encourages the church, "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." (Colossians 3:12 NRSV)

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## SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

This collection series is designed for congregations, for either small-group study or individual reading and reflection, to help raise awareness about the benefits and challenges of serving in or being part of a cross-racial and cross-cultural ministry. There are six sessions with theological reflections on cross-racial and cross-cultural ministry, the writer's personal experiences in such ministry, and a set of questions at the end of the reading to guide reflective conversations.

This series is recommended for laity-led teams in your congregation, including the Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC), Administrative Council, Trustees, Worship Committee, or other groups. The learning engagements are instructive for both congregations who already have a pastor in a cross-racial or cross-cultural appointment, or for church experiencing cross-racial and cross-cultural clergy assignments for the first time. This resource may also be used in congregations who are contemplating cross-racial/cross-cultural ministries in the future.

The addendum, "How to use this resource," with detailed information on facilitating lay-led small groups, may be found on page 44.

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## SESSION 1: MOVING TO THE MARGINS: WHITE PEOPLE LEARNING TO LIVE INTO CRCC MINISTRIES

The Rev. Dr. Jerome “Jerry” DeVine

*Mid-Michigan District Superintendent, Michigan Conference; Director, Native American Course of Study, an Extension School related to the COS of Ohio*

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Matthew 15:21-28 NRSV

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

This passage from the Gospel of Matthew, and the similar one in Mark’s Gospel (Mark 7:24-30), has always troubled me. As the story plays out, it creates an image of Jesus that is incongruent with my experience of grace. It seems contradictory to the very purpose of the Word becoming flesh and moving “into the neighborhood” (John 1:14, *The Message* by Eugene Peterson). Not only does this Canaanite woman remain nameless, she is also initially ignored by Jesus and is quite clearly unwelcomed by his disciples. Then it gets worse. Jesus intimates that she is like a dog who does not deserve the food on the

table. In order for this woman to gain access to the essential resource she needs for her daughter, she has to have the strength to endure shunning, rejection, and insults, all based on historical cultural biases and gender norms.

I cringe when I hear an interpretation, either in commentaries or in sermons, that Jesus treated the Canaanite woman in this manner because he wanted to make a point to his disciples. Frankly, why would a gracious God misuse a human being to take the enculturated cataracts off the eyes of non-understanding leaders? How would it change our experience and understanding of this encounter if what were really taking place was that the implicit biases that Jesus and his disciples were raised with were now being revealed? In the Nicene Creed we affirm that in the Incarnation Jesus Christ became fully human. In his humanity, he faced the struggles that we all face, including the kind of preconceived perception about “other” kinds of people and customs that permeated his time and place. In Hebrews 4:15 (NIV) we read, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”

In following his divine nature, Jesus wrestled through to new openness and understanding. I take great hope that this story is more about God moving someone in from the margins in order to awaken the eyes and enculturated values of those at the center. This is a story that confronts narrow understandings of who we can be in relationship with and who is worthy of the immense healing grace that flows from God through Jesus Christ. It is a story that reminds us that new life and truth often come from unexpected sources and relationships. It is a story that challenges me, and hopefully, you to ask what implicit biases may be a part of our worldview and subsequent responses.

The disciples assumed they had the normative, “correct” culture and the normative “correct” narrative for how to deal with “others.” This woman from the margins was not woven into their worldview in any significant way. They viewed her and her situation through their biased lenses rather than standing where she stood and looking back at themselves. Yet, she was the one who stirred Jesus in such a way that he proclaimed, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.”

Pagura with music by Homero R. Perera. The words ask us to believe this: “In hope we are forever celebrating, with courage in our struggle we are waiting, in trust and reassurance we are claiming: this is our song of freedom for all people.” (“Tenemos Esperanza” is found in the songbook by the same name, featuring 20 hymns and songs from Latin America. Visit [www.umcmmission.org/store](http://www.umcmmission.org/store) to order it online.)

### **PERSONAL CR/CC EXPERIENCE:**

I self-identify as a white male clergyperson who has been in ministry in the United Methodist Church for almost 40 years. Nearly half of those years have been spent in annual conference and/or general agency responsibilities. This has taken me to 45 of the 50 states in the U.S. and 12 other countries on five continents. While in those roles, I have had significant opportunities to work alongside and in close collaboration with multiple racial-ethnic leaders, committees, and agencies. For the past 25 years, I have worked most closely with Native American Indian leaders. Through that journey, I became the adopted brother of two Native American sisters from two different tribal heritages. For clarity, these adoptions are cultural and relational, and happened in my adulthood. More recently, I accepted the role of Director for the Native American Course of Study Extension School. Fifteen years ago, I wrote the original design and proposal for the school, based on many conversations with indigenous United Methodist leaders on what the vision should be for this effort. It has been a slow, deliberate journey of needing to move from my assumed enculturated center to the social margins to unlearn and learn anew. In moving to the margins, I then discovered a new center, one that is much richer, broader, and deeper. So, my reflection is especially geared to white clergy serving in either CRCC congregations or in communities of racial-ethnic diversity where effective ministry requires learning to move into deeper relationships with persons in that community. It may also be of help to laity in leadership in predominantly white congregations being served by pastors of color.

I draw from the story of Jesus and the Canaanite woman not only to reveal the cultural biases that shape behaviors but also because the

identification as Canaanite has a much longer and deeper presence and conflicted role in the Biblical narrative.

In Exodus 3:17 (NRSV) we read, “I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.” Dr. Robert Allen Warrior -- an Osage scholar and Hall Distinguished Professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of Kansas -- reminds us that immediately following the Exodus story of liberation from oppression, is the story of Hebrews’ conquest and subsequent oppression of the original inhabitants of that land, the Canaanites.

Warrior reminds us that as an Osage, a Native American Indian, he views that story through the lens of the Canaanite. His essay, “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today,” was first published in *Christianity and Crisis* in 1989 and has subsequently been published in other scholarly works. In it, he acknowledges that many people want to be involved in the struggle for justice and equity, yet he offers an important caution:

“Christians, whether Native American or not, if they are to be involved, must learn how to participate in the struggle without making their story the whole story.”

I share this in order to reflect on what may be required for white people seeking to be in authentic cross-racial/cross-cultural ministries with people of color. Such authenticity requires joining the struggle for justice and equity with the work of building a vibrant and healthy, diverse community of faith. For those of us from a dominating culture of power, the journey toward and into intercultural ministry must begin with absolute cultural humility and pursuit of deep relationships. It begins with critical self-examination, both of ourselves and the systems that keep our center in place. “Our story cannot be the whole story” as we enter into CRCC ministries. Our perceptions cannot be forced as normative for all; they are but one part of the wider community truth and narrative.

The journey into CRCC ministry also begins with a vision that God is seeking to expand the circle of belonging and the understanding that



those on the borders of the existing circle will often lead the way. If you are white, I encourage you to look at the story of the Canaanite woman and recognize that, whether you realize it or not, you and I are those enculturated disciples in most situations. We have been raised to think that white, U.S., Eurocentric culture are the norm, that our values are the norm, and that our preferences are the norm. Anything beyond our realities has been cast as “other,” or even just plain “wrong.” We have not been taught to know the many other authentic and valued life narratives and cultural lenses that are parts of God’s intentional tapestry. Moving into relationships with those pushed to the margins may help us begin to remove the cultural cataracts that would prevent us from seeing God’s vision for beloved community.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. What insights have you gleaned from Rev. Dr. DeVine’s reflection and personal story?
2. How does this story help you to understand CR/CC ministry?
3. Identify a recent experience that has similarities with the story of the encounter between Jesus and the Canaanite woman. What behaviors impeded new relationships from developing? What, if

anything, brought about a breakthrough where grace could flow?

4. Reflect on your experience described in Question 3. What was your role? In what ways did you feel personal or spiritual growth? What would you do differently if the opportunity presented itself again?
  
5. In your current ministry context, what relationships need to be explored and nurtured to develop a vibrant intercultural community? What is your vision for such a community?
  
6. What intercultural competency work might you need to do personally to grow the relationships you identify in Question 5?

## SESSION 2: GOD'S CLASSLESS KINGDOM

The Rev. Alena Uhamaka

*Monrovia United Methodist Church, Monrovia, Calif.*

**As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners”**

**Matthew 9:9-13**

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

In this passage, Jesus dined with tax collectors and sinners—those whose social classes were deemed undesirable by the Pharisees. Jesus fraternized with everyone, regardless of social rank. Christ came to suffer and die for the remission of all sins—not merely the sins of those from the upper echelon of society but also for those at the bottom, at the margins, and everyone in between. As Christians, we must internalize His example of healing the spiritually sick and making an exceptional effort to reach out to every member of society, especially for those who choose to dine with Jesus.

Also important for understanding this passage, we must remember not to conflate Jesus’ tolerance of sinners with a tolerance for sin. Jesus loved and ate with sinners because He knew God’s love was the only remedy for the sinners’ failing spiritual health. More importantly, Jesus —“God with us” —is the remedy for sin. “For the wages of sin was

death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Jesus pre-exempts eternal death with His prescription for life. He embodies the role of doctor, pharmacist, and medicine. One can surely practice two professions (i.e., doctor and pharmacist), but only Christ can also embody and personify the medicinal healing properties to remedy eternal death.

For Christians to fully be the Body of Christ, each of us must expand our networks to include people from all walks of life, regardless of race, class, ethnicity, or socio-economic background. We would be sorely missing out on fulfilling life experiences if we limited our interactions only to those familiar to us. Our congregations and local communities benefit from a variety of experiences and backgrounds, and we would do well to expand more fully some of our narrower perspectives of the world.

Furthermore, Jesus, in this story, cites a passage from Hosea 6:6, in which God condemned Israel for incessant relapses to idol worship. He commanded the Pharisee to learn what is meant by “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.” Here, Jesus declares himself as God in His reference to Hosea, and he admonishes the Pharisee to recall that God wants to dole out mercy rather than collect sacrifices. Jesus dismisses these sacrifices as meaningless performances from people playing a role. Instead, He felt it necessary to offer healing and mercy to those who answer His call and accept His mercy.

While most diverse communities are described as a melting pot, I would say we are less like a melting pot and more like an international green salad—that is, we aren’t merely tossed into a pot where we melt into and become the same exact thing. All of us constitute the various toppings at a salad bar. The foundational greens that shape the salad represent the gospel around which we all gather. Some of us are the hard-boiled eggs and cheeses that symbolize the richer and finer aspects of the gospel that add necessary depth and dimension, while others are the crunchier components that add the composite texture representing the hard-and-fast commands from God, and still, others represent the smooth dressing that binds us together much like God’s love. The components that make up a salad bar vary in form and function, none more important than the other, but when

combined can turn a somewhat bland bed of greens into a vibrant, colorful, and tasty salad.

I truly feel that the cross-racial/cross-cultural (CRCC) ministry in the United Methodist Church reflects the broader dimensions of diversity among church members and potential members. I personally have witnessed the exponential growth of congregations, ministries of presence and caucuses like my own Tongan and larger Pacific Islander members throughout the mainland United States and Hawai'i.

I am proud to say that my own congregation in Monrovia is incredibly diverse. Our multicultural and diverse socio-economic congregation hails from many different countries and all walks of life. We have members who migrated from Indonesia, Mexico, China, Korea, and Iran, and who share their vibrant cultures and testimonies through their various talents and delicious foods. We also have retired teachers, practicing doctors, construction workers, nurses and caregivers, airport workers, party planners, security guards, talented musicians, and homeless members. They regularly attend Sunday services and other ministries throughout the week.

Our mission at Monrovia UMC is to spread the good news of the gospel and to serve as an example of God's love to all God's people, regardless of race, gender, or economic status. We take seriously Jesus' charge to feed the hungry through our weekly dinners made possible by generous donations from our congregation and community. Our thrift store also gives us the opportunity to cater to those struggling with financial hardship as we answer Jesus' call to clothe the naked. Much as Jesus told the Pharisees in Matthew, we are in the business of healing the sick. Our work embodies the spirit of the CRCC ministry, and we strive to fulfill our mission to spread the good news through our proclaimed words and our actions.

### **PERSONAL CR/CC EXPERIENCE:**

I grew up in a small village in the Kingdom of Tonga, more affectionately known as the Friendly Islands. To some, the Kingdom of Tonga is merely a speck on the world map but, growing up, it was my whole world.

Relative to the rest of the world, I see the Kingdom of Tonga, the other islands in the South Pacific, and the seven continents that make up the world as a sea of islands, as poet and scholar ‘Epeli Hau’ofa describes them, rather than merely islands (or continents) in the sea. Rather than viewing oceans as that which separates us, Hau’ofa encourages us to internalize the idea that all lands are connected by the sea. This shift in perspective from meaningless separateness to sincere connectedness mirrors my understanding of the gospel. To my mind, the gospel works to connect seemingly disparate, suffering peoples around the globe under the auspices of God’s divine and powerful love.

Although I maintain that the Kingdom of Tonga is the most beautiful country in the world, I also identify something I struggled with growing up. To this day, Tonga remains the last surviving monarchy in the South Pacific, and with that monarchy comes an almost impermeable classist social structure. When I moved to the United States with my husband and young son in 1983, I believed that my new homeland would be a place teeming with opportunities for anyone willing to work hard. However, after I arrived, I quickly realized that Americans also have a classist system. To the rest of the world, the United States boasts an unbiased land of equal opportunity for all and the “bootstrap” method for success. I witnessed invisible lines drawn between economic classes. I have experienced first-hand the disparities that penalize those dwelling in the lower tiers of society. A major reason I answered the call to ministry was that I discerned God’s calling me to help bring about justice and equity God showed me then—and daily reminds us all—that each person, no matter how insignificant their social status, was equal in the sight of God, just as indicated above in Matthew 9:9.

My husband and I left comfortable government-sector jobs in Tonga to migrate to the United States in pursuit of the idyllic American dream. Prior to his government employment in Tonga, my husband worked as a calculus and statistics professor at ‘Atenisi University in Tonga, so we understood the value of higher education and wanted to set a standard for our children here in the States. We struggled to support our growing family as we moved from Hawai’i to southern California, with basically nothing after we lost most of our belongings in a house fire. At the time, we weren’t sure what God had in store for

us, but he ultimately led us to a community of Tongans in our area. They shared our Methodist faith and identified with our experiences of migration, itineracy, and settling in a new community. Pomona and Ontario's diverse communities enabled us to access resources that helped us navigate the American higher education system. God set me on a path for academic success and spiritual nourishment as I journeyed through the University of La Verne and Claremont School of Theology.

My introduction to multicultural communities occurred when my family and I moved to America. Although I was exposed to people from different socio-economic groups in Tonga, I grew up in a monolithic community, both racially and religiously. Everyone looked and worshiped like me. When we moved from Tonga to Hawai'i, the surrounding community was shockingly diverse. However, it was our move to California that introduced me to a flourishing multicultural and socially diverse community. That diversity not only bred solutions to overarching systemic problems in academia, but it also bred mutual respect among many of us dealing with similar challenges. We were in the trenches together, and the bonds forged from this struggle are ones I still cherish today.

Many of the friends I have made since moving here over 30 years ago have become like family, and I know it's because we agree that we should love one another, just as God has always loved us. I believe multicultural and diverse socio-economic communities have the capacity to produce spiritually vivacious congregations. The most basic building blocks for establishing meaningful connections with others must begin with mutual love and respect. It is our job to ensure that we're setting the standards for our homes, churches, communities, cities, counties, states, regions, and countries by insisting that we, first and foremost, lead with love and compassion for everyone around us.







## SESSION 3: FORETASTE: CROSS-RACIAL & CROSS-CULTURAL MINISTRY - AN APOLOGY FOR CROSS-RACIAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL APPOINTMENTS

*The Rev. Dr. Charles S. G. Boayue, Jr.*

*District Superintendent Greater Detroit District, Michigan Conference*

**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

**John 1: 1-14 NIV**

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

John's gospel tells the birth of Jesus story in unique fashion and simple style. Unlike Matthew, Mark, and Luke—the synoptic Gospels—which tell the nativity story in intricate detail, John's gospel cuts through the chase to zoom directly upon the divine nature and mission of God: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (John 1: 14 NIV)

These opening words of John's Gospel expose the true nature and purpose of God's mission: to enter the human experience, establish user-friendly relationships, and save us. Cross-racial and cross-cultural ministry exposes the inadequate nature of human identity and invites us into a saving relationship with God. To "become flesh" is to enter an experience outside the realm of one's own, to share in mutual vulnerability with others, and to rehearse for the coming day of redemption. The experience of other cultures helps to expose our cultural inadequacies and prompts in us a hunger and thirst for justice and righteousness. When God became flesh, God expanded existential experience by opening the door to eternity. The incarnation connects the temporal to the eternal, links the perishable to the imperishable,

and directs the sinner to his or her ultimate salvation. Cross-racial and cross-cultural ministry stretches the limits of human experience and expands our capacity to yearn for that which endures forever. It simply helps people to understand that Christian discipleship is essentially a rehearsal for eternity.

Perhaps this message is what Charles Wesley meant in his hymn, “And Can It Be That I Should Gain” (No. 363, The United Methodist Hymnal) when he writes, “He left his Father’s throne above; so free, so infinite his grace. Emptied Himself of all but love, and bled for Adam’s helpless race.” Cross-racial and cross-cultural ministries beckon us to empty ourselves of “stuff” that taint our self-image and inflame our prejudices against others from “Adam’s helpless race.”

Christian mission in a fallen world is less about cognitive assent than volitional activity. Yes, we must accept the precepts of faith and salvation. But we must also engage in action – voluntary action to live out the demands of the Gospels – leaving behind momentary “privileges” of exclusion to reconcile the creature to its Creator. Ultimately, cross-racial and cross-cultural ministry forms community out of hostility, breaks down dividing walls, erects vistas of hope and equity, and enables sinners to be saved. It creates the kind of community to which all humanity is invited. At the end of our earthly journeys, all human beings will face the ultimate judgment of God. That judgment will confirm our destiny. Whether our destiny is heaven or hell, it is bound to be inclusive because there are only one heaven and only one hell. Those who have not learned to live peaceably with others here on earth, will be unprepared to live with them in heaven.

Christian ministry is a foretaste – a foretaste of our coming destiny. Let us rehearse well. Let us rehearse realistically. Let us rehearse repeatedly and consistently. Let us rehearse until we have mastered all that is needed for that day when our rehearsal shall become our reality. This foretaste inspires hope, attracts imagination, establishes community, enables freedom, offers reconciliation, and assures every repentant sinner who truly believes the pardon of a loving and gracious God. Let us rehearse well so that when the roll is called up yonder, we will be ready to answer, “Yes!”

## PERSONAL CR/CC EXPERIENCE:

I came to the United States in August 1983 as a transfer student from the University of Liberia to United Methodist-related Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach, Fla. Although my sponsor and president of the university, Dr. Oswald P. Bronson, Sr., and his family did everything they could to acclimate me to this new country, I found myself dealing with a level of cultural shock for which I did not adequately prepare. Everything seemed different. The way other students and teachers spoke, thought, and understood everything seemed characteristically different than the way I thought, spoke, and understood the same things. It seemed as though we were living side-by-side in parallel worlds. And those encounters became for me and, presumably for others, frustrating experiences. Although I came for school and was a good student, I couldn't accomplish my academic goals successfully without adjusting meaningfully to my new context.

I lived in Bronson Hall on campus and ate my meals in the school cafeteria. Even eating was a struggle for me. The way the food was prepared, the spices and seasonings used, the presentation, and even the service were all strange to me. My taste buds had been cultivated in the West African culinary traditions of hot peppers, worlor powder, oregano leaves, pounded sesame seed, kittely dust, and palm oil. Rice (the staple food), or cassava and fufu were eaten with stew, sauces or greens made with mixings of fish, beef, goat, chicken, dried bonnie, and shrimp. The shift from one diet to another was abrupt, and so was the shift in worldview, culture, and lifestyles. My struggle to understand my college teachers and fellow students was difficult for them and me. When singer Michael Jackson's popular album "Bad" was released, I didn't understand how he could claim to be "bad" until an American friend helped me understand that, in the case of that album, "bad" meant "good."

After several weeks of school in fall 1983, I came to class one day just to find myself arriving at each class one hour early. My confusion continued for three classes that day until a teacher helped me understand that the class time had changed by one hour because of daylight savings and would change again by one hour in the spring. I left that experience

puzzled that Americans could authorize themselves to change time. I grew up in a place where time was always in God's hands.

My culture shock continued when, upon my request, friends directed me to a Chinese restaurant where I could find enough rice to eat. Upon entering the restaurant, I saw a sign that read, "Wait here to be seated." So, I walked over to the sign and waited there to be seated. After a few idle minutes of waiting with no attendant around, I began to sit down right next to the sign. Suddenly, a Chinese-American woman came rushing toward me, "Don't sit there," she said, "I will seat you now." So, I stood back up. Then she asked me, "Smoking or non-smoking?" Confused by the question, I asked her, "What?" She responded, "Do you want to sit in the smoking section or the non-smoking section?" After a quick reflection on her question, I decided to stick to my original plan and not allow her question to change my purpose. So, I responded, "Eating. I came here to eat and so I want to sit in the eating section." "I know you want to eat" she said. "Then put me in the eating section. I do not smoke and don't plan to start now" I retorted. Obviously frustrated, the attendant said, "Come with me." I followed her to a seat in the non-smoking section and sat where she directed me. Before long, a man seated across a dividing partition next to me, lighted a cigarette and puffed off a ball of smoke that came directly into my nostrils. I walked across the room directly to the attendant and asked why there was smoke coming into my face in the non-smoking section? She took a deep breath and moved me further away from the smoking section and went back to her station, often staring at me. These experiences exposed me to the intricacies and underlying realities of life in cross-racial, cross-cultural and multicultural contexts.

I left that first restaurant experience with more questions than answers. My experience represented a prism through which to view and assess the multifaceted cultural and racial contexts in which we live. Meaning and purpose are essentially derived, not merely from intellect, but also from context and experience. Hence, the church's disciple-making task in the world should take seriously these underlying aspects of human experience and formation. Until we can effectively communicate the gospel to people of all ages, nations, and races, we will continue to





## SESSION 4: YOUR PEOPLE MY PEOPLE

*The Rev. Carol Lakota Eastin*

*Kaskaskia River District Superintendent, Illinois Great Rivers Conference*

Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor." She said to her, "Go, my daughter."

So, she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, "The Lord be with you." They answered, "The Lord bless you." Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "To whom does this young woman belong?" The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, 'Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.' So, she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment."

Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn." Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?" But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!"

Ruth 2:1-12 NRSV



## THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

The phrase, “Your people will be my people,” clearly describes the separation between groups, in this case, the Moabites and the Hebrews, two cultures with a historical enmity, a conflict over territory. Ruth, a Moabite woman, is left a widow after her Hebrew husband’s death and chooses to return with her mother-in-law, Naomi, to the Hebrew lands. Rather than remain with “her own people,” she will live with historic enemies because of a love, loyalty, and call to support Naomi. These two women, both widows and childless, are the poorest of the poor. When Boaz offers protection to Ruth, she asks, “How is it that I’ve found favor in your eyes?... I’m an immigrant.” Boaz replies, “Everything that you did for your mother-in-law... has been reported to me: how you left behind your father, your mother, and the land of your birth, and came to a people you hadn’t known before. May the Lord reward you for your deeds.” (Ruth 2:10-12)

The call to ministry is one in which we are motivated to leave what is familiar and travel to unfamiliar places, among new people. Pastors in itinerant ordained ministry take a vow to “go where we are appointed” by our bishop. It is an act of surrender to say “yes” to this vow, which requires humility and tremendous trust. Wherever pastors are sent, they are likely to encounter cultural differences that challenge them. When pastors are sent to a congregation of a race or culture other than their own, they leave their support community and may experience loneliness and a loss of identity. They also discover new kinships and opportunities to share their uniqueness.

Ruth’s experience was that when she married a Hebrew, Naomi became her family. She was loyal to her new family. As Christians, we recall that at our moment of baptism, we became part of a new worldwide family of believers. “Once you were no people, now you are...” recognizes the transformative power of our choice to be a Christian. For pastors, that choice leads to new priorities in affiliations, friendships, and family life decisions.

## PERSONAL CRCC EXPERIENCE:

Having been raised in the inner city as a mixed-blood Native American, answering the call to ministry in a predominantly white church meant leaving familiar people and places in order to receive education, and then to my first clergy appointments in small rural congregations where I met people whose life experience was very different than my own. As a young pastor, culture clashes challenged my abilities to serve. I felt isolated and made a decision to leave the local church ministry. I pursued studies in pastoral counseling and served in ministry beyond the local church for several years. During that time, I developed a clearer sense of identity, theology, and call.

Next, I had the blessing of serving as a pastor in my own home city and planting a church for the Native American community. During those years, I enjoyed the freedom to develop worship that was meaningful to the Native community, including myself. I was actively involved in the pow wow community and traditional Lakota spiritual practices and built relationships with many people who were not a part of the church, sharing Christ, and creating a new kind of church with them.

Later, I was appointed to a predominantly white and African-American congregation. It was a rewarding ministry where I was able to share some of the uniqueness of my Native American spirituality but quickly learned that building trusting relationships had to come first. The receiving congregation may want to get to know you, but they may not understand or be particularly impressed by what makes you different. It is important not to impose these things, nor to expect them to change, but to share parts of my unique self with them as a gift, in time.

Just as the Moabites and Hebrews had historical conflicts over territory, so do Native American people have such conflict with the majority culture in the Americans. Just a few miles from where I was appointed was a sign in a shop window that read, “No Indians.” It was a community where there was an ongoing land dispute with a tribe. There was also ongoing tension around a much-loved Indian mascot.

Like the Biblical Ruth, I had to learn that people would be touched

when they saw what I was willing to do for them as their pastor. There is a time of developing mutual respect that comes through acts of mercy and love. As a pastor serves the people in their daily lives and crises, they come to know one another. Cross-cultural sharing can later be built on that foundation. Fortunately, I was also able to gather a small, supportive circle of Native Americans, with whom my congregation met monthly for mutual support and encouragement. Through this fellowship, members of my congregation began to meet and experience American Indian neighbors they did not even know they had. They learned parts of U.S. history they had never known and participated in an Act of Repentance service. There was growth in grace and love.

My next clergy appointment was as a district superintendent working with more than 90 congregations and a diverse group of pastors and laity. Theological differences abound in United Methodist churches and I have been grateful for the cross-racial and cross-cultural experiences I have had, which have helped to equip me for the challenge of finding unity in diversity. As an intertribal pow-wow director, I have learned to navigate many tribal differences. As a pastoral counselor, I have learned to guide people to make life changes within the framework of their theology and beliefs, not my own. Today, I serve a diverse theological community, seeking to be a loyal presence for a people with whom I do not always agree, but whom I love and respect. Like Ruth, I choose to journey with them, often into strange new territory. It is in this journey that I experience God's presence and often discover that Christ is revealed to me through people I did not know before.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. What insights have you gleaned from Reverend Eastin's reflection and personal story?
2. How does this story help you to understand cross-racial/cross-cultural ministry?
3. In what ways might this story help you to empathize with your pastor and family as she/he/they have left their support community to serve new people in new places?





## SESSION 5: GOD USES FOREIGNERS AS BRIDGES OVER TROUBLED WATERS

*The Rev. Dr. Sungho Lee*

*Concord United Methodist Church, Concord, Calif.*

Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; and, through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.” So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.” Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.”

(Ruth 4:11-18 NRSV)

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Immediately before the Book of Ruth, are the stories of judges and the law of self-rule among the people of Israel. “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes” (Judges 21:25). It is the last verse of the book of Judges. It summarizes the characteristics of the times succinctly. There was NO KING in Israel! In fact, God was the king of Israel. Increasingly, however, the people conducted themselves as if there were no guiding principles from any sovereign. They forgot who delivered them, and just did what was right

in their own eyes. They did not care for God's will and God's purpose. It is at that point that the story of Ruth begins.

Because the people did not pay attention to God's Word, certain things happened. First, there was a famine in the land. The irony was that the name Bethlehem is a combination of two Hebrew words, "beth" and "lehem," which means "house of bread." The land God gave the Hebrew was supposed to be filled with bread!

However, because of disobedience to God, many of the Israelites had to leave their home town to find bread somewhere else. Many of them decided to go to Moab, the one place they did not want to go. Deuteronomy 23:3 clearly says, "No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord." Considering such animosity between the Moabites and the Israelites, the latter had to be desperate to go to Moab.

Also, the Moabites worshiped their gods Chemosh and Malik or Moloch), while Israelites worshiped YHWH. However, because the Israelites seem to have strayed from God—and because they were starving—one could say that religion did not matter to them, even those who were to become Jesus' ancestor, namely Elimelech (whose name mean, "God is the King) and his wife, Naomi ("joy"). When they became a husband and a wife, they combined those two sentences: "When my God is the King, I have Joy." But even with those blessed names, their cultural practices and their circumstances had brought them to a place of joyless disconnection from God.

The names of the two sons were also significant. Mahlon means "sickness," and Chilion means "destruction," which foreshadowed the bleak future of the family and a threat to the continuing lineage. First, Elimelech died; next, the sick and weak sons died. Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband in a foreign land, cut off from her past. When her husband died, she did not have any present resources. When her sons died, she lost her future. She had nothing but two foreign daughters-in-law. One was Orpah, which means "turning back." The other was Ruth, which means "friend." Did Naomi realize that she had at least one friend? She decided to return to her home.



Orpah and Ruth wanted to come with her, because they too had been left widowed, defenseless, and without resources. However, Naomi tried to send them back to their hometown, fearing the Moabite women would not be welcomed in Bethlehem. Naomi pleaded to them to go back to their hometowns. Orpah went, but Ruth clung to Naomi. The Bible makes no judgment on either of them. However, when Ruth made her choice, she chose to renounce the gods of the Moabites to serve God, saying to her mother-in-law, “Your people shall be my people and your God my God.”

At this point, no one else realized that it was God who had chosen Ruth. Ruth thought that she made her decision, and Naomi helplessly accepted her decision. Naomi did not know God’s plan, either. When Naomi returned to Bethlehem, people still called her Naomi (“joy”). However, she refused to answer to her former name, and asked instead that she be called Mara (meaning “sorrow”), because, as she says, “[I] went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty.” Naomi did not yet realize that Ruth was a significant part of God’s plan for her life.

Because of her ethnicity, the only survival means open to Ruth was to glean from the fields of the wealthy, picking over whatever Israelite workers left behind. She risked going out alone among sometimes hostile strangers to serve and support herself and her mother-in-law. Ruth said to Naomi, “Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor.”

Gleaning was a traditional practice for Naomi’s people, a culturally acceptable way of caring for the poor and marginalized people among them. “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am the Lord your God,” reads Leviticus 23:22.

In following God’s plan, Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz all made personal sacrifices. Boaz was known as a powerful man in his community, having financial resources, social status, and respect. Yet, he was willing to risk his reputation to pursue a relationship with Ruth. After seeing her glean in his fields, he instructed his farm workers to leave extra

grain for her to gather and to protect her from harm. When Naomi heard about his kindness towards Ruth, she planned ahead for Ruth. In that culture, Naomi could demand that Ruth stays as the widow of her deceased son. She sacrificed her rights as a mother-in-law and allowed Ruth to marry. Ruth could have returned to her homeland and fallen in love with a young man. She sacrificed the possibility of young love to honor Naomi. In this way, Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi formed a “caring triangle.” They formed their new identities as caregivers for each other, overcoming their egos.

When Boaz and Ruth married, all the witnesses in town blessed Ruth, a Moabite. She was blessed as being like mothers of the twelve tribes, Rachel and Leah. This was a significant change in people’s perspective. When Ruth came to the town, she was basically nobody. Now she became somebody who was compared to the foremothers of Israel. She, Naomi, and Boaz had created a new, caring community, without realizing the future implications for God’s people and God’s whole world. It was akin to planting an apple seed. We do not know how many apples are in one apple seed. Only God knows.

Because of this way of being, Ruth went down in our Biblical history, named in Matthew 1, in the genealogy of Jesus! Ruth is one of only two female characters named. Her story is one where people from different classes and cultures built a caring community. Thanks be to God!.

### **PERSONAL CR/CC EXPERIENCE:**

When I was appointed to my current church, the members sent the lay leader to the bishop to rescind my appointment. I knew nothing of this until some members confessed this after I had served as their pastor for three years, and was being honored by United Methodist Women with their mission-recognition. They had said to our bishop, “How dare you appoint a pastor with a Korean accent to our great church!” The bishop asked them to let me stay for one year because it was already too late to make the change, and he promised them to appoint a new pastor the next year.

And so I began my ministry —a nobody like Ruth, rejected as a foreigner. I started visiting elderly members who had not been able to come to worship for a long time. Because I did not know them well, I invited two other members to visit with me. Because I did not speak English well —and my members did not speak Korean —I spent most of the time just listening to their stories and nodding my head. At the end of each visit, I prayed for them. Somehow people liked my visits. They said that I listened to their stories with curiosity and interest. That was a new experience for them.

I had learned the violin when I was 40 years old. I practiced at home by playing church hymns, but I did not know what I could do with them until I was appointed to my current church. Because my English was not very good, I decided not to speak much. I played hymns for church members when I visited them in their homes, in the hospital, or in nursing homes. When I played hymns in health facilities, other residents and patients would come to listen, and I prayed for them also. In this way, I spent one year. To my surprise, as the year ended, the church members actually asked the bishop to reappoint me as their pastor. I have now been serving my current church for ten years.

I still speak English with a Korean accent. I am still a Korean man called by God. To connect with my white parishioners, I have followed Ruth's example, gleaning grains from the Bible and feeding my congregation. I say to them, "If you do not understand my sermon, just assume that I am saying that God loves you. God has forgiven your sins and saved you. You matter to God. You are a valuable child of God."

Now, my elderly congregation takes good care of me, as Naomi did for Ruth. They speak well of me to the bishop and cabinet. Praise God!

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. What insights have you gleaned from Reverend Sungho Lee's reflection and personal story?
2. How does this story help you to understand the challenges and opportunities of cross-racial/cross-cultural ministry?
3. Who in your congregation might join with the pastor to form a "caring triangle" for ministry, sharing the gospel and breaking down barriers of race and culture, in and beyond your congregation?



**SESSION 6: “IT’S ALL GOOD!”***The Rev. Dr. Ken Walden**President-Dean of Gammon Theological Seminary  
Atlanta, GA.*

**God created humanity in God’s own image,  
in the divine image God created them,  
male and female God created them.**

**God blessed them and said to them, “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground.” Then God said, “I now give to you all the plants on the earth that yield seeds and all the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it. These will be your food. To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground—to everything that breathes—I give all the green grasses for food.” And that’s what happened. God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good.**

**(Genesis 1:27 – 31 CEB)**

**THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

As a young child, I was keenly aware of both academic and societal grading. I usually thought someone was always grading other students in school and me. I thought it was significant to have routine report cards that assessed your academic progress (or lack thereof). At an early age, I categorized other students, including myself, as either “good” or “bad,” because those were the designations used by most of our teachers. To my little eyes, teachers knew everything. I am not sure if I was always a “good” student, but I never wanted to be identified as a “bad” student. I wonder how much other people’s perceptions influence and impact our perceptions of ourselves in productive and unproductive ways?

The initial chapters of Genesis primarily focus on God's creations. It is fascinating that God creates without labeling certain groups as better / best / bad / lesser than / not worthy / worst. In fact, Genesis conveys to us that God considers all creation as good. This fact should not be too surprising, because all creation is in relation to God. God and good are closely related. Devaluing God's creation is devaluing God. All of humanity reflects God. All humans are made in the image of God. Certain people have used an enormous amount of resources to separate specific peoples from a divine connection with God. Genesis makes it plain that all of humanity ultimately belongs to God.

God blesses everyone. The church should make it a priority to emphasize that not one person or group of people are cursed, abandoned, or unloved by God. I know there are many local, national, and global news outlets, but people are still in need of the good news of God's unfailing and unwavering love. Are you excluding certain people from the family of God by excluding them from your worship, your fellowship, your mission partnership, and your concern? What people(s) are you not including in God's sacred creation?

Humans habitually categorize, compare, and contrast everything. There are some benefits to those kinds of contemplations. However, there are also some downsides to those analytical practices. Comparisons tempt us to label certain groups of people as better, best, bad, lesser than, or unworthy. People typically make comparisons and judgments about other groups quickly, often subconsciously, and without considering our shared divinity that comes from the God who loves us all. The same behavior occurs in church communities, even though God declares our shared humanity from the beginning of time.

Genesis informs us that God desired humanity to have dominion on the earth. The divine plan was for humanity to be stewards of the beautiful gifts from God. Humanity was created to care for and enjoy the gifts of God for fulfillment. In the same way, God should exclusively have dominion over humanity. Too often, though, humanity is controlled by distractions in the form of technology, greed, drugs, unhealthy relationships, etc., and splintered by social classifications.

The geographical area currently known as the United States of

America was dangerously controlled by cultural classifications from 1619 to 1970 in numerous ways. People of specific races, nationalities, religions, and other demographics were denigrated in almost every aspect of their daily lives. For the past 400 years, since 1619, it was mostly illegal for people of African descent to read, write, or utilize public hospitals and public colleges. People living in other countries across the globe, on almost every continent, had similar historical discriminatory experiences. Nowhere in God's creation story did God ordain or implement prejudicial practices pitting humans against one another.

We humans too often find ways and justification for including our group and excluding other people. The primary purpose of congregations should be to help people foster a meaningful relationship with God. Too many people feel isolated, lonely, and disconnected. God claims all of creation as a sacred extension of God's self. It is a relief that God does not disown us, deny us, or hinder us from connecting to the divine love that is always offered to us all.

### **MY PERSONAL CR/CC EXPERIENCE:**

I am glad that an increasing number of religious communities now require Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) for candidates seeking to enter ordained ministry. I took CPE course at a local hospital while I was in seminary, and it was a wonderfully intense, educational, and practical experience. I served as a chaplain intern who provided pastoral care and counseling to patients and medical staff of many different races, ethnicities, and nationalities.

As an Air Force Chaplain Reservist, I received a lot of cross-racial and cross-cultural pastoral experiences. I learned to offer preaching, pastoral care, counseling, and visitation to people from different cultural contexts in the military. I wish all ministers could experience military chaplaincy for its diverse community, strategic planning skills, and discipline of military chaplaincy. Fortunately, many skills acquired during my military chaplain role were transferrable to my civilian ministry within the United Methodist Church. Cross-racial/



cross-cultural ministry usually requires a substantial amount of determination, aspiration, and strategy. As the adage goes, “if it were easy, everyone would be doing it!” God does not call us to do what is easy. God calls us to do what is important.

My first full-time pastoral appointment was cross-racial. I became the first full-time African-American associate pastor of a large white congregation that celebrated three worship services every Sunday. My seminary did not offer any classes on cross-racial ministry. To my knowledge, none of my professors had had any pastoral experiences in a full-time cross-racial pastoral appointment. With my wife, I took a leap of faith into a cross-racial religious experience that would be a first for both of us and a blessing for us, and the congregations we served. God has been faithful.

I eventually became the first full-time African-American Senior Pastor of a Caucasian Congregation in Southern California. I remain thankful to the mentors who advised me, counseled me, and prayed for me during all my cross-racial/ cross-cultural appointments. The United States of America is becoming increasingly culturally diverse on multiple levels and the world needs religious leaders who are competent along the lines of race, ethnicity, nationality, and beyond. The future of religious communities will depend upon their abilities to embrace God’s diverse creations in the form(s) of all people(s). It is not easy, but it is important. The book of Genesis reminds us not to label people as better / best / bad / lesser than / not worthy / worst.

I wish all United Methodist seminaries would incorporate stellar academic courses and practical programs to help prepare students for cross-racial/or cross-cultural ministry. Too many seminaries focus almost exclusively on preparing students to lead congregations still functioning in homogenous and communities that defined the U.S. Christian landscape of the 1950s. Those days are gone! We now much preach and live the gospel in a world where people can and do connect across continents in mere seconds! Graduate theological education is relevant only if we prepare faith leaders for current realities and future trends to meet people wherever they are emotionally/ relationally/ and spiritually located.

In my current role as president-dean of Gammon Theological Seminary, I inform my students about my desire for them to be competent religious leaders in any cultural context. I am intentional about facilitating cross-racial internships for my students. I am also deliberate about sharing lessons from my cross-racial and cross-cultural pastoral experiences with my students. Some people believe that experience is the best teacher. I always attempt to share my experiences for the betterment of the community.

I believe in the importance of cross-racial/cross-cultural ministry, because God's creation, which includes us all, is good. I wrote the book, *Practical Theology for Church Diversity: A Guide for Clergy and Congregations*, to help religious communities be intentional in developing inclusive practices and behaviors. I am intentional to refrain from needless and unnecessary comparisons of cultures and races, which could prevent me from giving my best pastoral leadership. God gave us the best, such as the sun, moon, stars, flowers, plants, and other unique elements on earth. Our response should be to reflect our best service in ministry to all of humanity.

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. Name one or two insights from Dr. Walden's reflection and personal story.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How does this story help you to understand the role of cross-racial/cross-racial ministry?

3. What racial or cultural biases are at work in your congregation? What personal biases are you addressing as a person of faith?
  
4. What challenges do you perceive your congregation may or have experienced in cross-racial and cross-cultural ministry?
  
5. How do effective cross-racial and cross-cultural ministries reflect the sacredness of God?
  
6. How can you support cross-racial or cross-cultural ministry in your congregation and community?
  
7. How do such ministries benefit your church? Your community? The world?

## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE?

This resource was written primarily to engage congregation and laity in leadership in in-depth study about the challenges, possibilities, opportunities that come with cross-racial and cross-cultural ministries. It is designed for six sessions of 40-60 minutes, each with reflection questions for group discussion or individual reflection.

In each session, the writer presents a theological reflection and a personal experience in cross-racial or cross-cultural ministry. While members of your study group may do an advanced reading of the material, it is not required. Reading and conversation may take place at your regular gathering.

To use this study for a small group, consider the best timing for your church or ministry. If you are welcoming your first clergyperson or leader from a different race or culture than your congregation, you might invite representatives from the staff-parish relations committee, administrative council, worship committee, or board of trustees. If you are already engaged in CRCC ministries in and beyond your church, you may gather a group of interested laities to participate.

You may use this as a seasonal study during Lent or Advent, launch it as a six-night study, or use it in Sunday school beginning on Pentecost. The sessions could also be used at the beginning of a committee or team meeting.

Here are suggested flow of the sessions including some tips: (Minutes indicated are for 40 mins/60 mins sessions)

### **1. Gather and Pray (5 mins/10 mins)**

After participants have gathered, the facilitator prays or invites someone to pray

### **2. Read Theological Reflection and Personal Experience (10 mins/15 mins)**

Facilitator may assign the reading in advance, ask participants to read aloud in a circle, or invite participants to read the passage silently.

### **3. Reflection Questions and Group Discussion (20 mins/30 mins)**

Facilitator may ask another person to monitor the time, so that the facilitator may guide the conversation and encourage full participation. Participants may take turns reading a question and inviting another person to answer. Facilitator should also plan a brief conclusion and make sure that no one person monopolizes the conversation.

### **4. Closing Prayer (5 mins/5 mins)**

Facilitator may ask for a volunteer to close the session with prayer OR the group can close with circle prayer where each person prays “one sentence” until everyone had a chance. The last person closes the prayer saying, “We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

## **ROLE OF FACILITATORS LEADING THESE SESSIONS:**

- 1. ADAPT AS NECESSARY.** Feel free to adapt this resource to the needs of your group; for example, depending on the need or desire of the group, the engagement time can be 40 minutes, 60 minutes, or longer. Depending on the group and conversation, the facilitator may need to choose pertinent questions for discussions.
- 2. CREATE SPACE FOR DEEP SHARING.** Each group’s size should be no less than six (6) and no more than twelve (12) persons for intimate sharing. Find a gathering space that is as quiet and comfortable as possible for the group to convene.
- 3. PREPARE BEFORE THE SESSIONS.** To facilitate rich conversations, the facilitator should read and reflect on the questions beforehand.
- 4. PRAY IN PREPARATION.** The facilitator and participants are encouraged to prepare for these small-group gatherings with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to be present in your midst.

## 5. INVITE PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE THROUGH:

- PRAYER. Ask God for wisdom on who and how to invite.
- OPEN INVITATION. Invite and encourage everyone in the congregation to join in these sessions to share and learn together God's plan for the church through cross-racial and cross-cultural ministry.
- EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION. Make the information and invitation available to all using as many avenues as possible, including written invitation, email, announcements during worship, phone calls, and notices on the church website and in the worship bulletin. If more than 12 persons are interested in participating, consider creating more groups to allow all participants to enjoy an intimate and open conversation.
- Encourage the use of **“RESPECTful Communication Guidelines”** in the sessions:

R - Accept RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others.

E - Listen with an EMPATHETIC heart.

S - Be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles.

P - PONDER on what you hear and feel before you speak.

E - EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions.

C - Keep CONFIDENTIALITY.

T - TRUST ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong.

(Adapted from “The Bush Was Blazing But Not Consumed” by Eric Law pg. 87)

## HOW TO FACILITATE SMALL GROUP SESSIONS:

Facilitators, please remember—

- There are no right or wrong answers in reflection sharing.
- The aim of the sessions is to reflect and engage in conversation, not debate or have arguments.
- It is important to hear from everyone.
- Be patient. Allow participants time to pray and reflect before they answer, and respect the right of some to listen without speaking.
- Be flexible. There is no need to be rigid in addressing every reflection question. Follow the leading of the Spirit while listening to people in the group.
- Trust in God. Be assured that group members are on a continuing journey toward understanding God's work in the community.



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