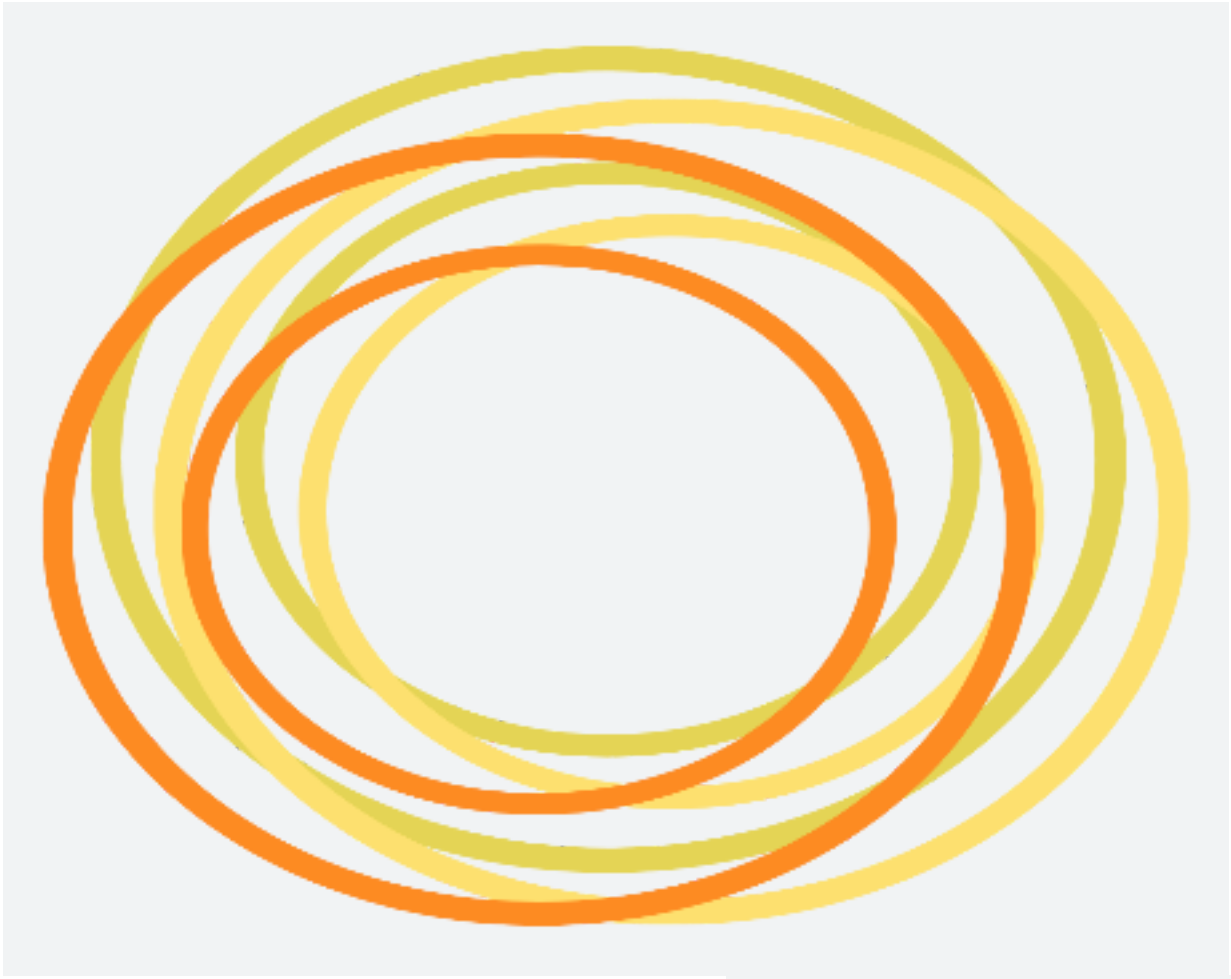
Intercultural Prelude

Stories and Conversations
from Separation to Belonging

by Kelly Chatman



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Forward

My story is just one that could be told by the more than 41 million African Americans who live in the United States. I decided to write this book in part because it is what I do--I position myself in places of power and influence in order that others who are more talented and outspoken than I might have access and be heard. My goal is to weave this pattern throughout the book.

I am a Lutheran pastor. I have worked for the church my entire career and my life has been an amazing journey including journeys in Africa, throughout Europe, and the United States. I come from a family of limited means and amazing parents who celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in the church where my siblings and I were nurtured in faith. Two of my siblings are pastors in the Lutheran Church. Anthony pastors a congregation in Houston, Texas, and my sister Babette is a campus pastor at Augsburg University in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I hope they might write a book someday as well.

I was inspired to write this book with accompanying questions and exercises because there are more than 41 million African Americans in the United States and our stories are too often told through the filter of racism and white supremacy. My story is not remarkable, it is simply a story about a child of God who early in life discovered his purpose when he wandered into an all-white Lutheran church and before he could exit experienced the radical gift of welcome. That welcome has served as the foundation to withstand the ignorance and rejection of racism, fear, and indifference.

In the course of my lifetime and ministry, I have discovered that the church is at its best when it is committed to delivering on three promises both in and outside of the church building: that all people are welcome; that all people feel safe; and that all people experience belonging. Churches that make good on this promise are churches that will stand the test of time. More important, churches that make good on this promise are churches that embody the promise of God.

Any church that does not make good on the promise that All are Welcome, All are Safe, and All Belong might not be able to offer a meaningful cultural experience. The church and witness I am referring to in this book is the church that witnesses to the God who chose to enter into the human condition and live in the tension of being human.

Introduction

This book is shaped around three practices to facilitate conversation: *forming*, *reforming*, and *transforming*. The practice of forming is to answer to reflect on and discuss the first time you noticed “difference.” There is no judgment to this, simply pay attention to what you noticed about difference. The second practice is called “reforming.” The practice of reforming is to reflect on the decisions you made about difference. What judgment did you begin to make about difference? The third practice is “transforming.” This is the practice of remembering a time when you experienced difference as having value and the benefit this made in your life.

The book assembles a number of stories from my life as a Black/Brown/Indigenous/Person of Color (BIPOC) leader. Since I was in 7th grade I have attended predominantly white schools and spent time professionally in white spaces. Throughout my journey, I have not only felt different, but I also faced the constant message that different was wrong. The result was, I tried to fit in. I tried to fit in by assimilating and not looking, talking, or thinking differently. The price for me to belong was to try to assimilate and not expose myself as different.

The challenge I share in my story is not unique. The price BIPOC people pay when navigating systems defined by white culture is the expectation to fit in, be quiet, and pretend to not be different. The alternative is the decision to reject the system of whiteness and not belong.

The aspiration for this book is to invite white people, those who benefit from the system designed to benefit whiteness to make a new choice. Look at difference as you first experienced difference. Different is simply different. Look at the decisions you were taught to attach to difference. Where do those judgments of difference come from? Who benefited from the judgment you made about difference? The history of slavery goes back to a time when people were forced to become free labor. In order to justify this those enslaved people were defined as “different.” That difference was dehumanizing and became the justification for treating those people differently. This led to segregation, Jim Crow, redlining, segregated schools, mass incarceration, and disparities in education, housing, employment, and the list goes on, and on.

Lastly, this book is built on the realization that still today white people and BIPOC continue to have lives defined by how we view difference. White people and BIPOC people continue to live segregated lives. We may work, attend school, shop, and live in the same spaces but lack authentic relationships with one another. Though we are in proximity to one another, we are not in relationship because work, school, housing continues to be defined by whiteness. In other words, if you are not white you are different, and different has an attached value. If you don’t agree with this statement, think about George Floyd, Brenna Taylor, Philando Castile, and a litany of others.

This book is not to inflict white, guilt, shame, or blame. The purpose of this book is to promote a time for reflection and conversation. This book is the opportunity for white people to speak openly with white people. In small and large groups begin by thinking about difference and how we see difference influences how we see BIPOC, GBLTQ, and others. Then we can begin a more authentic conversation about race, speaking with one another in our shared humanity and investment, co-creators for a new future.

Forming: Recognizing how we were raised

We begin with stories and conversations about Forming. We will explore times we first noticed difference and reflect on our own experiences. How did I feel? What did I think? We try to see difference as it is, in its innocence. As we go further in conversation, we will explore how we came to have the beliefs and values we have now. What has formed me into the person I am today?

We begin by examining where we are now. We aim to remain objective and let our feelings and thoughts be what they are, without judgement. This is where I am.

In this workbook, the heart of the matter is welcome, safety, and belonging. This is the core value I hope you will view as having the transformative influence to change systems. My life was changed when I experienced welcome, safety, and belonging through the church as a child. I internalized that experience of welcome, safety, and belonging so completely that any time I did not experience this in a church I visited, I knew it was not a reflection on me. It was their shortcoming. I also grew to understand how welcome, safety, and belonging are not confined to a church building.

I believe strongly that welcome, safety, and belonging are at the heart of the matter because I am a person of faith. I am a Christian, and my faith is built on the witness of a God who chose to incarnate and enter into the human condition. In other words, God could have chosen to phone it in to bring salvation into the world. Instead, God was born into a peasant girl, became a migrant, and hung out with oppressed and marginalized people, including stigmatized women. The bible is filled with accounts of how Jesus related to people on the margins, communicating that everybody is welcome, all are safe, and everyone belongs in the eyes of God.

I hope you will discover this to be at the heart of the workbook; this has become the heart of my experience as a pastor and leader in the church and the local community. Although I have worked with the church my entire career, there was a time, as a young adult, when I thought the Sunday morning church to be irreverent. I thought Sunday morning was more about the form than the function of the church. A wise pastor challenged me to see the church as the most powerful institution in the world. He helped me to see how the church, more than any other institution in the world, has the power to convene. The church is the only institution that says “You are welcome here, no matter who you are, or where you come from.” Now, I know not every church exhibits this practice. I also believe that churches that do not communicate that everyone is welcome, everyone is safe, and everyone belongs do not represent the church. Some churches have mastered the character of doing church, but if everyone isn’t invited to experience safety and belonging, they are doing something other than church.

In the book, you might also look for purpose and what I call the sweet spot. You might not want to look so much for the word as the aspiration. I pray that this workbook will bring people of faith to a collective understanding of power to witness that we can make a difference in the world. We can talk about racism and white supremacy without getting stuck in blame, shame, and guilt. Black, Brown, Indigenous, and People of Color need to share the oppressive reality of systemic white racism without white people making it about them retreating into shame and guilt. We need to practice having a brave and courageous conversation. We need to practice being safe and welcoming, belonging to one another. There are systems that, for centuries, have been in place to ensure that this does not happen.

Included at the end of each chapter are questions and exercises to help you internalize your own stories to process and share individually and in small groups. I pray that you will wrestle with the question, “What is at the heart of the matter?”

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

Describe an experience you have had with welcome, safety, and belonging. Try to be specific about the people, place, and actions you experienced.

What are some things you have done to create a place of welcome, safety, and belonging for yourself and others?

The Church as Complicit

By the time I accepted the call to serve as pastor in a church, I was nearly forty years old. The church was in Portland, Oregon, and of Swedish heritage. I had been recruited to be the assistant pastor, developing a ministry to at-risk youth. I was excited to serve both as pastor to the congregation and to lead outreach in the community. I had only been at the church a short time when the senior pastor invited me to meet with him in his office. I was always glad to meet with my new pastoral colleague and supervisor, so was surprised and disappointed when the pastor informed me that a couple of the older members in the congregation had informed him that they did not want me to call on them, should they need pastoral care. I was far more disappointed in the lack of leadership by the pastor than I was in a couple of older white members of the congregation not wanting me to be their pastor. This was my early introduction to what it would be like serving as a Black pastor in a white church.

To be sure, this was not my experience with the majority of the congregation. In fact, this beginning propelled me into the work I was doing in the neighborhood, where I knew my gifts were celebrated. I invested myself in building relational programs in partnership with the Black Ministerial Conference at Jefferson High School and Harriet Tubman Middle School. I initiated Saturday Out programs for local children. We established a children's choir in a congregation more ready to embrace the diversity of the community. One of the members of the congregation where I was a "pastor" shared her contact at a Five-Star restaurant. We developed a program for middle schoolers to be trained as waiters and waitresses, who would invite two people to the restaurant and serve them a three-course meal. I will always remember the parents who said to me as they were leaving, "Now, where is your church again?"

When I think about racism and white supremacy, I will forever remember that early conversation with the senior pastor and how I experienced racism, white supremacy and complicity in perpetuating that system.

The point in sharing this story is to demonstrate the pain of navigating racism and white supremacy, as well as how it limits the gifts we share as people of God. To this day, it is difficult to become excited about providing pastoral care to white people I do know. Are they going to want my pastoral care? Will I experience further rejection because of racial identity? Don't white people already have more than enough pastoral care and attention built into the church's system when it comes to who benefits from the church?

Connecting your story

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

When did you first have an experience of difference? What was your reaction?

Describe how you came to understand your own identity in terms of race. What did you learn and how did you learn it?

Culture and healing

What was your reaction to Kelly's experience being a new pastor in this congregation? What feelings does it stir up for you?

How would you critique the pastor's leadership in this story? What would a different type of leadership look like in this situation?

Broadening your experience

Reflect on the relationships you have and the gifts they offer you. In what ways might these relationships open up opportunities for young people to develop their potential?

Meeting Cheryl

I met Cheryl, my wife of thirty-one years, when I was living in Washington, D.C., and in my second go-around at seminary. The first time, I had dropped out of seminary after my first year. Before that year, however, I had felt excited that I had graduated from college and was ready to get back into action with the church. During the summer between college and seminary, I had had vivid dreams about having the opportunity to engage in ministry, especially since college and preparation for ministry had been overwhelmingly academic. I had taken classes in languages like Greek and German and philosophy, but the classes that really got my attention included a class in which I learned about the Muslim faith and Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. This was 1972-1973, so there was little depth of knowledge about Dr. King and his philosophy of nonviolent resistance. And even less knowledge of Muslims--or any actual embrace of the Muslim faith—existed at the time. I loved classes that felt more contemporary and less biased toward a monocultural appreciation of religion. In those classes, I was able to find more of myself, and discover how religion can serve to bring people together. That did not happen during my year at Seminex in St. Louis, MO, so I left the seminary behind. Temporarily.

In 1985, I was living in Washington, D, C, when I enrolled at the United Lutheran Seminary in Gettysburg, PA. It was an hour and a half commute from where I lived; fortunately, the seminary was part of a consortium of seminaries where students could study at any one of them. Among

those seminaries were Catholic Dominican Divinity, Franciscan Divinity, Howard Divinity, Wesley Methodist, Virginia Theological, and the Lutheran School of Theology at Gettysburg. The opportunity to study in Washington, D.C. was rich, and I took advantage of the opportunity to take classes at each of the colleges. I loved it.

Toward the end of my time at study, I received an invitation from Jean Martinson to attend a national Peace and Justice Conference in Washington, D.C. Jean was a national leader I held in high regard, and since I already lived in D.C., travel was not an issue. The conference was unique because most of the participants were people of color—a display of intention that was rare within the church in1984. Around a dozen people attended the conference, and one person in the group stood out. Her name was Cheryl Troutman, from Greensboro, North Carolina. She was lively, fun, engaging, and, noticeably attractive. Throughout the conference, it was clear that there was chemistry between us.

One evening after the group meal Cheryl and I took on the assignment of doing the dishes--we were like children, joking and teasing as we effortlessly accomplished our task. The next day, the entire group went out for dinner and fellowship. We went to the Red Sea, a well-known Ethiopian restaurant in the Adams Morgan neighborhood, a dining experience that was new to both Cheryl and me. Neither of us had ever eaten in an Ethiopian restaurant before, and Cheryl was not the type of person to eat food with her hands. The entire experience was blissful as we enjoyed the communal dining experience.

I recall driving home that evening and having a conversation with God. There was obvious positive energy between Cheryl and me, but I thought I was out of my league. At the end of the conference, Cheryl and I went our separate ways. There had been no kiss, no exchange of phone contact, just an amazing experience of connection.

Cheryl and I were from different worlds of “Black experience.” Cheryl grew up in the South, in Daytona Beach, Florida, as one of the pioneers in desegregating white schools. She and her five siblings all attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities, (HBCU), and all have college degrees, doctorates, or masters degrees. Directly across the street from the house, Cheryl lived in growing up is Bethune Cookman College, an HBCU institution—she grew up rooted in the Black experience and her primary relationships have always centered on her Black identity.

When I met Cheryl during the conference in Washington, D.C. she was in graduate school in North Carolina. She was very active in her congregation and she was an anchor in the congregation.

Cheryl and I met again five years later; I was living in Portland, Oregon, and Cheryl was still in Greensboro, North Carolina. We were attending a multicultural gathering in Chicago for leaders from across the church, and it might have been the second day of the gathering when I noticed

Cheryl talking with a small group of people. I immediately walked over to her group to reintroduce myself to Cheryl, not knowing if she would remember me. Though Cheryl will tell the story very differently, I remember that from that moment on, we were inseparable throughout the conference. I still played it pretty safe, until Cheryl asked, “Are you married or what?” She wanted to know why I was moving so slowly with expressing my intentions. Inside my head, I was saying to myself, “Yes!!!” We dated long distance for a year and got married at her home church in Daytona, Florida.

Connecting your story

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Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

Describe a relationship that’s important to you and how that relationship began. What were the cultural aspects each of you brought to your relationship?

How did your relationship impact your faith journey?

Culture and healing

How has the desegregation of schools impacted your life?

How has desegregation impacted your congregation’s history?

Broadening your experience

Explore the history of your congregation and neighborhood. Has anything changed over the

years, and if so, what was behind those changes?

How would you assess and compare desegregation in schools and inclusion within the church?

Waking Up to White Privilege

There is a difference between conflict and struggle. My high school years were a struggle for me but not a time of conflict. I loved my church, my family, and my neighborhood--I felt a sense of belonging. I was grounded and I had a sense of purpose and identity. However, being one of two Black students in a student body of 600 wasn't easy--I was struggling to navigate two cultures. And I will never forget the day I wanted to quit.

I was sitting at my desk when I overheard two of my white suburban classmates discussing what they did over the weekend. One of the students described how he had walked over to the mall to get a haircut, and that's all I recall of their conversation because at that point I decided to quit. When I heard that comment, I decided I could not take it anymore--it was time for me to give up.

I was ready to quit because I had realized that attending my high school was a setup for me not to succeed--that I was swimming in the reality of whiteness. I was attending an all-white college prep school in the suburbs, and everything was set up to advantage whiteness. The nice and comfortable homes where my fellow students lived were in the suburbs, as was the nice mall that families like mine drove miles to reach. The academic rigor I struggled to keep up with was a cultural standard in the suburbs, and hearing that all my fellow white students had to do to get a haircut was walk two blocks to the mall was the straw that broke my spirit. I was swimming in the sea of white privilege, and I felt like I was drowning. I was drowning because I was Black,

and for the first time, I was becoming conscious that I was battling the reality of white privilege and supremacy.

Each day when I prepared to go to school, I walked two blocks to catch public transportation and took a thirty-minute ride into a suburban reality. I struggled to keep up with academic standards I was not prepared to attain. I struggled when I returned home after school because I had little time for the neighborhood friends that loved and shaped me. When I did share time with childhood friends, I received comments like, “You talk funny.” That feedback was a reminder of how I was swimming in a world of whiteness. So yes, I was struggling. But I was not fearful of losing my Black identity. And I was not in conflict.

That day, when I overheard my two white classmates having their casual conversation, it struck me just how unfair racism and white supremacy is. Racism is more than people wearing white robes burning crosses. White racism and white supremacy is real estate redlining and the development of suburban communities; malls and college prep school; and policing to advantage white families. Racism and white supremacy was the post-World War I development of suburban communities with movie theaters, grocery stores, and churches that fueled white flight from neighborhoods and people who look like me. Racism and white supremacy looked like white families distancing themselves from migrants and from Black people coming from the agricultural and segregated south. I was swimming in a world of whiteness, and I was drowning.

When I overheard that conversation between my two white classmates and decided I would quit, I went to the principal's office to inform him of my decision. I shared with him my experience and that I was quitting--that what I was experiencing was unfair and I was quitting. To my surprise, his response felt to me like he had thrown me a life preserver. “If you quit, then they will win,” he said. “They will always assume that this world is theirs.” That made sense, so I remained in that school. And while I continued to struggle, I was not conflicted. My life had then, and continues now, to have purpose. And part of that is to not give in to racism and white supremacy. There is a difference between struggle and conflict.

After high school, I went on to attend Concordia College in St Paul, Minnesota. I had never lived away from home and had no awareness of what college would be like. What I knew of college was from watching sports on television, so that fall I arrived at the college early, to join the football team. I had played football for one season in high school, but the time commitment had been too much for my schedule.

At college, I wanted to become a defensive back, covering receivers--I was good at tackling people. The coaches, observing my speed, decided that I should be a running back. I recall that first week in uniform--I was surprised by how big the other players were. Most of them were white, big, and had literally come to school from the farm, and I didn’t know any of them. I’ll never forget that first week of practice when I was given the assignment of running back. During one play, I was running with the ball when the star player on the football team tackled me and I

went down hard. I mean hard. As I lay there on the ground, the reality of race hit me once again, as I asked myself whether he had tackled me that hard because he always hits that hard? Or, was it because I was Black.

Most Black people will reach a point in their lives when they begin to figure out what's going on--moments that will occur throughout their lives when they're not sure of a white person's motive. On my one and only day participating in college football, I knew that if it felt that bad being hit by my own teammate, there was no way I was going to subject myself to that question against another team. I turned in my uniform that day after practice and never looked back. The next day, I walked over to the soccer field and joined the soccer team, where I played varsity for four years.

My first year of college went well, socially. I got along well with my white peers but struggled to connect with many of my black peers, most of whom were from Minneapolis and rooted in their local community. I was also Lutheran, and many of the Black students had experienced the Lutheran identity to be alienating and dismissive. Many of my college relationships were white; in fact, I was voted the most popular male student on campus the first year.

But I gained another important insight about white supremacy when one of my white friends shared with several peers that I was a Black person she would not mind living next door to her when she got married. I was struck with even more racial reality when I thought about how young we were--early in our college careers--and already my "friend" was thinking about who

would be *worthy* to live next door to her. I was amazed to think that even as early as college someone would be able to feel and articulate that advantage--the privilege--of deciding who can live next door.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

Connecting Your Story

Where do you live? How did you come to live there?

Share a time when you became aware of white privilege. What was your reaction then? Do you see white privilege playing a part in your forming?

Do you connect privilege with a person's experience of welcome, safety, and belonging?

Culture and healing

What is the racial and cultural composition in your geographical location? How does your geography influence your participation in racial and cultural understanding? Who benefits from living in your geographical location?

Do you attend church? If so, describe the location and who benefits from participating.

Broadening your Experience

Check out these resources to learn more about white privilege

From Selma to Kingston, Jamaica - The Reality of Place

For my last two years of college, I transferred to a liberal arts “senior college,” located in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, and established by the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod to provide two years of seminary preparation. The senior college was a cloistered, academically rigorous community, where I was one of a few Black students. I recall the day my professor was taking class attendance, and it suddenly dawned on me that my name was the only non-Germanic or Scandinavian name in the entire class. I began to think about everything the white students were learning about themselves and people of their heritage through the textbooks we used. I realized it was different for me, and that this experience represented yet another example of how this education did not reinforce my existence. That’s when I began to think of the education I was participating in as “academic genocide.”

One of my greatest insights came from an experience I had during one of the January study opportunities I participated in; the first trip was to Selma, Alabama, under the supervision of my favorite professor and mentor, Pastor Holst. I had gotten to know Professor Holst when I took his Greek Study class--he got my attention when he described an injustice using language I didn’t expect to hear from a college professor, let alone a pastor. That’s when I knew this was not a conventional white man; this white man was emotionally accessible and displayed both

openness and transparency. Later, when I discovered that Bob and his wife, Lynne, had adopted a Black daughter, I felt connected beyond the white academic setting in which I lived at the senior college. I had never experienced such a witness and commitment to diversity before meeting Bob and his family--I had found a place of unexpected respite and wanted to be an extension of Bob's and Lynne's family. In fact, I often went to their house to babysit their three children. So, when the opportunity came for me to journey with Professor Holst on a January class trip to Selma, Alabama, and Kingston, Jamaica, I was all in.

The drive from Ft Wayne to Selma was uneventful. We arrived in Selma and stayed at a small Lutheran college, where the faculty and student body were Black--a place where I was instantly engulfed by a sense of community and welcome. When we drove around the city of Selma, I was struck by the signs of housing disparity in some of the neighborhoods. During that trip, we met with leaders and visited Civil Rights landmarks, including the Edmund Pettis bridge--the site of Bloody Sunday--and the jail where Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis, and so many others had been arrested.

I also had an experience in Selma that quickly brought reality home to me. One of my most cherished memories revolved around my mother's mother, who had a huge pecan tree in her backyard. Each fall my grandmother would send a package of pecans in the mail, and my mother would use those pecans to make the most delicious pies. That memory came to mind one evening as I walked alone near the college in Selma and discovered pecans just lying on the ground everywhere. Delighted by the prospect of bringing pecans home, I found a bag and began to wander along streets and through yards collecting pecans--the whole time I was thinking about my grandmother and my mother and their relationship with pecan pies. Lost in

reverie among the pecans, I was startled when a car screeched to a stop. From behind me, I heard someone yell, "Nigger, you better get out of those white people's yard before you get killed!" In an instant, that brought me back to the reality that I was in Selma, Alabama, and that I was ignorant of what life and conditions were like in the segregated south. I was thankful that the students who lived and studied at the college in Selma cared enough about me to protect me from myself. I was also thankful for that wonderful load of pecans I sent home to my mother in solidarity. That year, I felt blessed to be able to contribute to a time-honored tradition of pecan pies.

After Selma, our class traveled to Hialeah, Florida, where we visited with leaders from the Cuban community. I had never been to Florida before, nor did I have prior knowledge about the Cuban community in the United States. I enjoyed the culture and the food but much of the political significance went over my head.

Finally, our class arrived in Jamaica. We first traveled to Kingston, the capital of Jamaica, which was a fast-paced and busy city. The morning after we arrived, I was so excited to begin our journey in Jamaica that I was out and ready before the other students. As I stood near the curb watching rush hour traffic that looked like any other city, I noticed something different that truly hit me--the people on those buses and riding in those cars were the majority, and the majority looked a lot like me. It also struck me that those people who looked like me were the doctors,

lawyers, nurses, teachers, pastors, and political leaders. Until that moment, I had never even imagined the possibility that Black, Brown, and marginalized people could be doctors, lawyers, teachers, and political leaders.

I knew there were many Black people who grew up with a strong sense of possibility, but I didn't think I was one of them. And I know I am not the only Black or Brown person who has felt that way. I knew I had a love for God and serving people, but I did not necessarily know that being a pastor was the right path for me. The closer I got to seminary, the more I thought I was on the right path. The challenge was that the path seemed to demand I assimilate and adapt more and more to serving a white culture. Could I become a pastor and still retain my Black culture and identity?

The culture and world view I grew up in did not instill in me a sense of what was professionally possible; the world I grew up in taught me that those leadership and professional roles were reserved for white people.

Connecting your story

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

What were your notions of what was possible for you when you were young - where you might go in your life, what profession you might have, who you might become?

Think about the people in professional roles (your doctor, attorney, pastor) or positions of power in your life. What do they look like?

Culture and healing

Where did your notions of possibility - professional or otherwise - come from? Were there doors that seemed shut to you? Who encouraged or discouraged you?

Name some experiences that shaped the assumptions you grew up with regarding race and cultural difference.

Describe an awareness in which others' limiting beliefs impacted your vision of the future.

Broadening your experience

Did you ever doubt or imagine that people in professional roles or positions of power would not look like you?

Ethno-relativism

Ethno-centrism and

Ethnocentrism is the collection of beliefs handed down to each person by parents and elders. They inherited their beliefs and from their parents and elders. Ethnocentrism reflects things as simple as foods, music, and how we value time. Ethno-centrism tends to communicate a strong sense that there is a "right" way to do something because that is how parents were taught by their parents, who were taught by their parents that it is the way it is supposed to be.

Examples I have experienced ethno-centrism in the church is church council. I have experienced leaders who are elected to join church council and immediately resort to Roberts Rules of Order, or ways of governance that may not be useful tools in a congregation. Those leaders are often thinking about the leaders they looked up to when they were growing up in the church. Ethno-centrism influences us to hold onto old ways because of the deep and

unconscious love and loyalty for those who positively or even negatively impacted our lives. In many ways, Worldview and Ethnocentrism go hand in hand.

Let's look at Ethno-centrism and Sunday morning. People have been worshipping for more than two thousand years. The framework for worship is known as liturgy. What are the elements a worship service includes?

- What time does the service begin?
- What songs will we sing?
- What will worshippers wear? What will the leaders wear?
- What will the prayers be? Will they be written down, if so? Why?
    - Will there be a sermon? If so, who will give it? How will you determine if its value or not?

Some liturgies include Passing the Peace, where people greet one another. How extensive is your greeting?

The most substantial experience of worldview and ethnocentrism I know is on Sunday morning when people gather from different world views and unconscious ethnocentrism. For more than 2,000 years, Christian worship and liturgy have invited people into a shared community experience.

That shared experience of community, at its very best, is the communication that each person is welcome, safe, and belongs. At the heart of this experience, worship (liturgy) is an Ethno-relative experience. Worshipers experience the movement from ethnocentric to ethno-relative community. This could also be understood as the movement from a centric (me) experience to a thou (God) encounter.

The church's challenge and opportunity are to recognize worship and Sunday morning as the radical vision God has for the world. At its very core, worship is the invitation from God who gave his life to say everybody is welcome, safe and belongs. This is the church's radical

witness and what it means to worship the God who became incarnate. God did not answer the phone in the promise of salvation. God took on human flesh and entered into the human condition. In the person of Jesus Christ, God embraced humanity and shared relationships with people caught in cycles of oppression. Jesus demonstrated to marginalized people that they are welcome, safe, and belong in the promise of God.

The church's movement goes from worship, ethnocentric to ethno-relative, and how we gather, to out and beyond the walls of the church where welcome, safety, and belonging happens in daily living. The church is following God's movement into the neighborhood where yes, Black lives matter.

Connecting your story

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

How and why do you value time? How did you come to think this way?

Describe the music that you listen to. Why do you choose to listen to that music? What music

do you choose not to listen to, and why?

How does where you work or worship reflect ethnicity?

Culture and healing

Name something you have inherited as a belief that is difficult to imagine differently. For example, the kind of music you listen to, the way you worship, etc.

How is your investment in something a barrier to your relationship with other people who value it differently?

Broadening your experience

How do you react when something does not begin or end on time? Why does it matter to you?

How might your community, church, or business look and feel differently if time and music were a negotiated value which reflected the values of everyone who is assembled?

World Views

During seminary, I took a Clinical Pastoral Education course (CPE). This was a required unit, during which seminarians interned for ten weeks in a hospital or institutional setting. My CPE assignment was at Washington Hospital Center in Washington, D.C. This was a new experience for me because I had not spent time in a hospital setting, working around doctors, nurses,

medical professionals. I learned a ton.

One day I was surprised during my visitation rounds when the patient in front of me was a man I counseled when he was homeless. He had been in a serious burn accident and I was not sure if he was going to live. At that moment, I was confronted with an awareness of my vulnerability. I was no longer the director of a nonprofit; I was confronting the reality of human mortality and the thin line between life and death. All I had to offer him was comfort and prayer. Each day in my pastoral clinical internship I was confronted with the challenge of responding to medical emergencies and lives in crisis.

During the CPE experience, I was also required to attend a learning seminar presented by Dr. Edwin Nichols from the National Institute of Health. During his presentation, Dr. Nichols began to talk about social science with an explanation about worldviews in the United States. He shared with us research that explained how, in the United States, people operate out of three basic worldviews. He taught us about how Black, Brown, and Indigenous people in the U.S. operate out of the world view of relationship. Lightbulbs began to go off in my head as this reinforced experience in my family and community of origin. Although he didn't know it, Dr Nichols was providing information during that one-hour lecture that helped me to understand the journey I had been on throughout my life. He shared social science and research describing how Black, Brown, and Indigenous people operate out of a sense of value and self-worth that is rooted in relationship. His lecture made immediate sense to me because my family and community I come from are rooted in the value of relationship. I am rooted in a sense of relationship. Dr. Nichols was also clearly stated that one world view is not better than another world view--they are simply different, and each worldview is important.

Dr. Nichols went on to describe research about two other worldviews in the United States. He shared that the worldview among Asian, Pacific Islander is respect for the elder, conformity, and speaking with one voice. . Over and over, he clarified that this research is found to be true in the United States and that one world view is not better than another world view.

Dr. Nichols really had me sitting on the edge of my seat when he began to describe the world view out of which white people operate. He stated that the dominant world view for white people in the United States is the acquisition of objects. Dr. Nichols then explained that the white worldview is reflected in the acquisition of time, money, and education. "The more we accumulate, the higher our self-worth." During this one-hour lecture, it felt like the multicultural worlds I had been navigating was coming together and making sense.

I had been navigating between two world views, relationship, and acquisition, since seventh grade. And nowhere was this reality more true than in the church. From the time I wandered into a Lutheran church at the age of 12, I was on a journey to acquire more knowledge about God and how to talk about God. I was also learning about God within a white worldview influenced by accumulation. As an example, there is the value of time as a commodity you do not waste. In the Lutheran church, the service (liturgy) is compact and rigidly held within an

hour. There was no class to teach this, yet everyone seemed to understand. The music that was sung required the use of a hymnal and relied on the acquired knowledge of reading music. The sermons were reinforced with knowledge gained in Sunday school and confirmation, and the catechism. After worship on Sundays in the Lutheran Church on my way home I would often worship in the Black Baptist church a block away from my home. I experienced wholeness in my combined worship experiences and it was reinforced in Dr. Nichol's lecture on worldviews.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

Connecting your story

Culture and healing

Broadening your experience

The Work of the Church

My life journey has affirmed for me two things: I love God and I love people. This has been true from the time I was a child. And while the white institutions I have attended and worked for—including high school, college, graduate school, seminary, and the church—didn't always seem to reciprocate that love, I am not complaining. My experiences have been a blessing to me. And therein lies the problem: I grew up in a world "blessed" with experiences that were too easily about me and how I was different. Too often when I looked around the classroom, I was the only one who looked like me. When I looked around the board room, I was the only one. When I looked around at clergy and professional gatherings, too often I was the only one. Now, sixty years later, I look around the room and not much has changed.

Over the years I have come to the realization that simply being in the room is not enough. As a Black leader assimilated to and navigating within a white monocultural world, I have learned to "shut up and dribble . . . not make waves . . . fit in." I learned *not* to bring attention to myself because I might then become a target. The truth is, I will never fit in—a goal I gave up long ago. Instead, I offer the stories of my journey—one that many Black, Brown, Asian, gay and marginalized leaders share. I aim to illuminate what it means to grow up Black and to lead as a Black man in America who believes we can heal as a church and beyond through love and relationship.

My awareness began to emerge early in my life—as I'm sure it did for many Black men my age--when Martin Luther King, Jr. became an important part of the picture of what it looks like to be a serious Christian. Before I had formed an idea of what church was or what it meant to have a meaningful relationship with people who gather each week in a building to sing songs, listen to a sermon and share their financial resources, I saw Martin Luther King on television. I saw a Black man standing up for human rights. I saw a Black man speaking out against injustice, and I saw a lot of people responding who looked like me. Before I knew what the church was, I saw what the church stood for, and I was on board with that. As I progressed in age, our parents escorted us to church on Easter Sunday, when we attended church as a family. When we returned home those Sundays, I had little recollection of what I had experienced. Quite often after those services, the adults went downstairs for a meal and we children remained up in the sanctuary pretending to play the piano. But the experience of Martin Luther King somehow stayed with me.

As I grew up, I tried to understand the world that was evolving. I was observing Dr. King and the civil rights movement happening on the nightly news. I observed clergy, women, men, and children being beaten and attacked with dogs--arrested and beaten by police. Above the violence and abuse, I saw the witness of the church aligned with Black and Brown people calling out for justice and equal rights for all people.

Meanwhile, in school, students were taught to memorize the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. Beginning as early as second grade, we were taught to stand and begin each day by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. The American ideal was instilled in us with words like, “One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”. Although we experienced racism, discrimination, and injustice daily, we were taught to believe in the great American ideal that was sure to overcome racism. We held onto the ideal that all people are created equal. I was taught to believe that better days would be coming. And I invested in that ideal.

I protested for those ideals when I was in college. I marched at the University of Minnesota in protest against the Vietnam War. I joined the bus ride from St Louis, Missouri, to Boston, to protest against school segregation. In Washington, D.C., I marched in the Poor People’s Campaign, and in the daily protest against Apartheid in South Africa. I flew from Chicago, Illinois, to Washington, D.C., to be a part of the Million Man March. I believe in the great American ideal. It is what I was trained to do--to *never* give up on the American dream.

Recent events during a turbulent 2020 remind me of something I heard about the civil rights movement and three key parts of the strategy that made it successful: to organize, agitate and raise white consciousness. I believe the murder of George Floyd has had the greatest impact on white consciousness of my lifetime. Watching a white police officer suffocate a Black man to death--with three fellow officers observing--is the agitation for our time. Capturing on camera a Black man dying while subject to a police’s knee on his neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds is a haunting wake-up call for white America. Racism and white supremacy are real and no longer just hiding in the woods. It’s time to organize, agitate and raise white consciousness, and we are seeing evidence of that strategy all around us.

Eight years ago I became concerned that the ideal of America I learned to pledge allegiance to might have been an illusion. I began to believe that this might be so after we elected our first Black president. I became concerned when people began to wear guns to public gatherings, and “good” citizens seemed to be okay with that. I became concerned the first time I saw a president of the United States speak before the congress as a congressman yelled out “liar!” I saw the evaporation of the American ideal. Still, and in spite of America’s imperfection, there is a pledge to the ideal, which I believe we must remember. Because without an ideal, I do not know for how long it will be worth fighting for, marching for, or protesting for America.

Another memorable and powerful moment that shaped me in whiteness was a board experience. I was serving on a large social service board where, once again, I was the only black-bodied member. As I looked around the room, I asked myself whether I had become a sell-out . . . had I become what we referred to back then as an “Uncle Tom?” As I thought about the years of assimilating, attending a white church and white schools and learning to fit in and play the game, I came to an important conclusion. I acknowledged and reaffirmed my commitment to opening doors within the institutions I navigate so that other leaders more radical than I am might come through in order to advance the cause of liberation. Perhaps by telling my story, I can help open those doors.

If those doors don’t open, there will be little for me and other champions of diversity to gain or do by serving a church rooted in the past. I have tasted the wonder and beauty of our theology. I have experienced and sipped from the well of the church’s welcome and power of belonging. I believe the church is served best when our focus faces outward and into the diversity and messiness of the world. I believe this is a truer picture of the story of God. God emptied God’s self by entering the world and hanging out with people who were stigmatized and vulnerable--people who might have been surprised that God would dare to come to them first with a message of salvation.

Church, we still have work to do.

Connecting your story

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

What is your experience with race and cultural difference?

What changes have you noticed regarding race and difference during your lifetime? What events have affected your consciousness the most?

How have you experienced the church in relationship to race and cultural difference?

Culture and healing

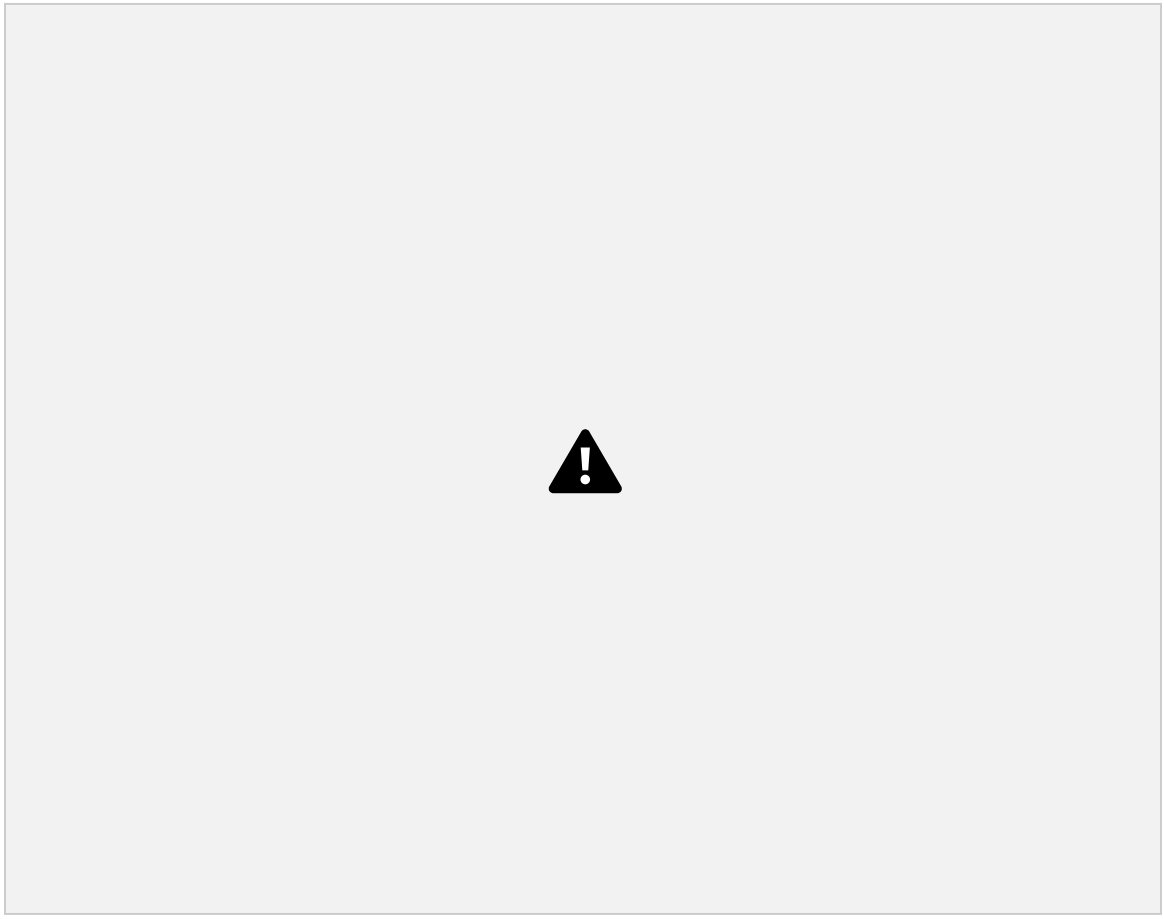
What does your church stand for and how does the neighborhood and beyond know this?

What is the work for you to do in relation to race and cultural difference? ***Broadening your experience***

Reforming:
Moving beyond guilt and shame to action

We now move into stories and conversations of Reforming. We will explore times where difference was a limitation. How did I feel? What did I think? We will ask new questions too. What decisions did I make about difference? Who benefits from how I came to see the difference?

Reforming happens inside us even as we work to reform the world around us. We continue to attend to where we are now - our thoughts and feelings - even as we imagine what Reforming ourselves and our world might look like. As we say, “be the work.”



Racism and Indulgences

In the 16th century, Martin Luther looked at the world around him and wrestled with the relationship between religion and its impact on people in their daily lives. In particular, he decided to confront the exploitive practice of indulgences. Martin Luther saw that the institution of the church was complicit with the empire. The religious system had become compromised, and Martin Luther lit the match that ignited the Reformation's flame. Here we are, 15,000 years later, and, in the voices and cries of George Floyd, we hear the call for reformation.

I believe racism is the indulgence of our time. White racism is the continuation of the same system Martin Luther confronted during the Reformation, with a different target: Black, Brown, Indigenous, and marginalized people. Indulgence was the system constructed by religious elites to exploit people for economic and political gain. Indulgences became an idolatrous system where people could view themselves closer to God than others, based on the ability to pay. It was a "pay to play" scheme--the more you paid, the closer you understood yourself to be to

God.

Racism is a kind of pay to play scheme. The whiter you are, the closer you are to God. Perhaps better said, the closer God is to you. The challenge I see with indulgences and racism is that this is not an individual problem because it has been institutionalized. White racism is systemic, and it is in our policing, politics, employment, incarceration, and health care, and it is in our churches. So, what might we learn from the Reformation? Martin Luther, John Calvin, Phillip Malanthan, and a host of 16th-century revolutionaries began to look critically at systems through the lens of, who is safe and who belongs. In the production and promotion of art, music, and culture, the question was, “who benefits and who belongs?” During the 16th century, Christendom was the institution through which people experienced belonging. Indulgences, like racism, corrupted the system. And revolutionaries like Martin Luther led the movement to give God back to the people. They began to systematically dismantle the system of indulgence and give art, music, and access to God back to the people.

We are in the 21st century, 500 years later, and white racism challenges us to answer the question, “who benefits?” What and where is the framework for white racism, and where do we begin to dismantle the structure? The critical question is this: If racism communicates that the more “white” you are, the closer to God you are, then where do we begin to dismantle that belief? What are the practices supporting that belief?

This book aims to build on the fundamental belief that every person is safe, and every person belongs. This belief is counter to the idea that some people are more important in God’s eyes than others. The foundational belief that every person is a child of God is to dismantle the belief that white is superior to Black, Brown, and Indigenous. In solidarity with Martin Luther and the Reformation, this witness holds our modern-day church, policing, politics, education, and health institutions accountable, without exception.

Connecting your story

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

What makes a person feel “closer to God”? Does quality of life - material possession, education, professional success or status - influence an understanding of the nearness of God? Does an absence of success or status influence an understanding of the distance of God?

Culture and healing

How do you answer Kelly's question: "If racism communicates that the more "white" you are, the closer to God you are, how might we begin to dismantle that belief? What are the practices supporting that belief?"

Broadening your experience

How might you expand and share this conversation with a more diverse group of people?

Transcending the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Culture

I was living in Portland, Oregon, where I was happy and content teaching and working as dean of the boarding school at the Oregon Episcopal School (OES). I had recently graduated from seminary and was looking to engage in a ministry when friends who were formerly on my staff and had found jobs at the school invited me to visit. The school had just experienced a terrible tragedy when six students and a beloved teacher died during a hike on Mt Hood. While I was visiting my friends in their apartment at the school, I could imagine the pain and healing the school would be going through in the upcoming year. I imagined the opportunity to provide a pastoral presence at the school and shared the possibility with my friends

After I returned to D.C., I received the invitation to work at the school, serving as chaplain, religion teacher, and board school advisor. The offer sounded like a wonderful opportunity that matched my talent and interest. But there was one major hurdle I had to address--I had never worked in a wealthy community. The idea was way beyond my comfort zone. I was not raised around wealth and I lacked confidence that my skills would be enough for me to be an effective leader. It was time for me to have a serious conversation with God. That's how I pray.

In my conversation with God, I recounted how I had been successful throughout my life. I had the love and support of my family, my neighborhood, and the privileged suburban white high school I attended. I had experienced success at college, where again, I assimilated and learned the rules and what success looked like in that milieu. I had transitioned to Washington, D.C.,

where I directed a nonprofit and found myself on boards and around leadership tables where I was the only Black person in the room. I struggled and asked myself, once again, if I had become a sell-out. I was aware that I was invited into those “white spaces” because I had learned how to talk in a way that was easy for whites to hear.

So again, I had a conversation with God. In my years of education in a white suburban school, membership in a white church, acquiring a middle-class vocabulary, I had learned to fit into white spaces. I asked myself, was the fact that I continued to be the only one who looked like me a sign that I had lost my identity? Was I a sellout? Was I what we called back then, “Uncle Tom?” I came up with the answer, and that answer was “no.” I was in those rooms for a reason, and that reason was that my life has purpose and I am in those places of privilege to provide opportunities for people more radical than I am to come through those doors. The purpose of my ministry is to open doors for more radical voices to be heard where marginalized voices are less likely to be shut down. From that conversation with God, I knew that my life had a purpose and I had a clearer picture of what my purpose was. My purpose is to open doors for leaders with more radical voices to be in positions of power and influence. This story is also in another chapter, so you’ll need to decide where it fits best.

When I received the invitation to work at Oregon Episcopal School it was a huge challenge because I wasn’t sure whether I was ready to live into my purpose. Never in my life had I imagined that I might someday work in a context of a wealthy community. Attending the school

was some of the wealthiest families in the Pacific Northwest. Enrolled in the boarding school were students whose parents worked in international oil—some were trust fund babies. Some of the students there were privileged families from the United States, Japan, Indonesia, Korea, Germany, and Britain. My identity had been shaped as a child of parents who migrated from the segregated south and fought hard to raise a family in an industrialized neighborhood in Detroit.

So, what did I do with the challenge before me? I had a conversation with God. It was out of that conversation that I came to the resolve that I would accept the challenge to go. I went to work in a context and community that was way beyond my comfort zone to answer a defining question: Does the gospel really transcend boundaries of race, class, and culture? If I were to be successful in that experience, I would know that the Gospel is true and really does transcend the boundaries that limit us.

As it happened, I had four wonderful years at Oregon Episcopal School. People are people. I learned how privilege applies itself to the advantage of the privileged, not necessarily to hurt others, but because privilege is used to advance those who are already advantaged. I have experienced the success of what happens when we invest in people and treat them with compassion and respect, and I have found that they tend to reciprocate. I learned so much to be thankful for in experiencing the good news of the gospel and its truth.

It is one thing to talk about God and the gospel. It is easy to talk about God in the comfort of our ideas, with people who think like us, talk like us and live like us. During those four years, I

learned that it is more challenging to actually allow ourselves to be in places and situations where we actually rely on God. I grew up in a large family from the south, where my parents had lived under segregation. I have done weddings at a castle in Germany, an island in Hawaii at the same location where Bill Gates got married, in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, and in California's wine country. I have traveled throughout the United States, Africa, and Europe, following my purpose. That purpose is to open doors, doors of possibility. Where racism and white supremacy say “no,” God says it is possible. I hope that at the end of the day people will see this as my testimony. God’s love transcends the boundaries of race, class, and culture.

Connecting your story

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

Have you ever moved beyond your cultural comfort zone? Why - how did you think it would benefit you? What happened?

Imagine the board room scene Kelly describes. Who do you identify most with and why?

A. The white majority around the table
B. The single Black man with the purpose of opening the door to someone more radical
C. The radical someone outside the door hoping to get in

Culture and healing

There is an increasing desire (or external pressure) to have more diversity on corporate and non-profit boards. Sometimes the focus is on merely ensuring a “count” to achieve a diversity quota versus sincerely wanting marginalized voices to count. What are some ways to ensure marginalized voices are included in leadership settings?

Broadening your experience

Examine the leadership of organizations that you benefit from - city government, business community, church, school, etc. What do you see? What is your hope for leadership diversity going forward?

How might you take steps to communicate to these leadership teams your thoughts and hopes for diversity in leadership?

Mistaken for the Valet

There are and will continue to be roadblocks. Racism is set up that way. Racism is set up to say to Black, brown, and marginalized people that life in all its fullness is not possible. I have faced plenty of roadblocks along the way, systemic roadblocks. However, my purpose is not to look back; my purpose is to look forward.

One of the very first weddings I performed was in Seattle, Washington. The wedding was for two of my former students and it was in a downtown restaurant at the top of a downtown building. Cheryl and I had a wonderful time and I was feeling really honored to have served as the official for the wedding. The dinner was still going and it was time for Cheryl and me to depart for the four-hour drive back to Portland. I was dressed in my good-looking suit and tie and marveling at how I had arrived as a professional having officiated for an amazing wedding event. I stood there waiting, while Cheryl continued to socialize and say goodbye. I had given the valet my ticket and was waiting and waiting for the valet to return with my car. All of a sudden, out of

nowhere, a young white man walked up to me and attempted to give me the keys to his car. He had assumed that I was the valet.

Just moments before, I was standing on top of the world. Then, in the flash of a moment, that man's ignorance and racism brought me into the valley of resignation. I did not have the heart to share with Cheryl what had just occurred because I did not want to take the powerful earlier experience away from her, too.

As a pastor, I have experienced similar occasions and similar indignities. One incident happened at the church where I served as senior pastor for twenty years. I was on the steps of the church speaking with the young white intern, who was working under my supervision. A white man walked up to us and began talking to the young intern, totally ignoring me and my presence. He began asking the intern a question, as he assumed the younger man was the pastor. Sadly, my intern was complicit (?) simply because he was white and the beneficiary of that white man's assumption. Sadly, this happens all the time.

Connecting your story

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

Name a time when you were embarrassed due to a comment or situation involving race. Were you the person who made the embarrassing comment or the recipient? How did you navigate the situation?

Where do these limiting beliefs about people of color or marginalized people come from?

Culture and healing

Share a time when you felt positive about an encounter revealing race and or cultural

awareness.

Share a time when you encountered someone you thought to be different, but discovered an authentic relationship.

Broadening your experience

When you visited a church where you were a stranger, how did it feel to not be known? How might it feel for someone of a different race or culture to visit your church?

How might you feel tension in welcoming someone different into your church, on your job, or into your neighborhood?

Lionel and At-risk Youth

I found the work I was doing at the Episcopal school to be satisfying and rewarding. I had been promoted to serve as dean of the boarding school and everything was going quite well. At night I kept seeing on the evening news how a few miles away from the wonderful privileged school where I was working, youth of color were dying due to gang violence. I felt conflicted about working at a place of privilege while young people of color were dying in the city. I felt a pull to invest myself in the challenge to save youth from violence so I studied how gangs had begun to attract kids and incorporate them into their plans to sell drugs.

Gangs established a system following the Highway 5 corridor. All along Highway 5, starting in Vancouver Canada, to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento, Portland, Vancouver, Washington, Portland, Tacoma, and Seattle, gangs set up houses where young people felt a sense of belonging. Their organizations expanded as they used young people to sell drugs. There was a time when, instead of gangs, churches, boys' and girls' clubs, Scouts and other civic organizations supported and encouraged children and youth. Those organizations abandoned the cities in flight to the suburbs.

As much as I loved my experience at the school, I felt the pull to work with young people in the city. So I accepted a part-time role as pastor at Augustana Lutheran Church, to develop an outreach to "at-risk youth"--a label I apologize for, as all youth are at risk. During my time with Augustana, I established a number of programs to connect with young people. Many of them had parents who were incarcerated or absent due to drugs. I met many faithful grandparents who were suddenly raising grandchildren. The program became a big success and I was honored to have received an award as Portland Public Schools and Mayor's Volunteer of the year.

The Augustana ministry was a partnership with my wife, Cheryl, and many others who became family to the children. One year we raised enough money to charter a bus and take children and youth to Disneyland for a week. Another favorite experience was the time we took our neighborhood children's choir to Holden Village, a well-known Lutheran retreat center, located in the mountains above Lake Chelan in Washington. A boy named Lionel joined us for that trip. Lionel was in 6th grade and had grown up in extreme poverty--a child who moved from house to house, including our home. Lionel was in the choir and participated in all our program activities--we all knew we had become Lionel's lifeline.

On the first day of that trip, we completed the four-hour drive to Lake Chelan, where we made arrangements to sleep in a church before embarking on the two-hour ferry ride to the mountain, where we would then take an hour-long bus ride up to Holden. The next morning, after everyone had boarded the ferry and we were on our way to Holden, I noticed I had not seen Lionel in quite some time. I asked if anyone had seen Lionel and began to panic because no one knew where Lionel could possibly be. That sent me racing up to the captain's room, where I was surprised to discover Lionel sitting with the captain, pretending to be steering the ferry. The

captain had Lionel sitting in his chair. This was a powerful moment for me as I observed Lionel and the captain of the ship exchanging the gift of relationship. Every hour of planning, fundraising, and sleeping overnight on a church floor was rewarded in that moment. The light of God was shining on Lionel, even as he faced every possible challenge in life.

The next day everyone was settled into Holden in the middle of the Chelan Mountain range. Holden had a special room where the children spent time doing crafts. Later that day, most of the children had completed their time in the craft room—everyone but Lionel, who remained in the room for a much longer time. Suddenly, Lionel came out of the craft room wearing a large cloth around his shoulders, in solidarity with a pastor leading worship—he had woven that cloth

himself.

I think about these Lionel stories because they inspire me to remember the power of our collective witness, which includes boat captains, choir directors, and people opening homes and hearts to others.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

Connecting your story

Have you known any Lionels in your lifetime?

Are there "boat captain" moments you have observed or experienced?

What does it mean to give a "collective witness"? What are examples of collective witness you recall in your life and ministry?

Culture and healing

Where are places where young people in your community experience belonging? How might your congregation facilitate experiences of belonging?

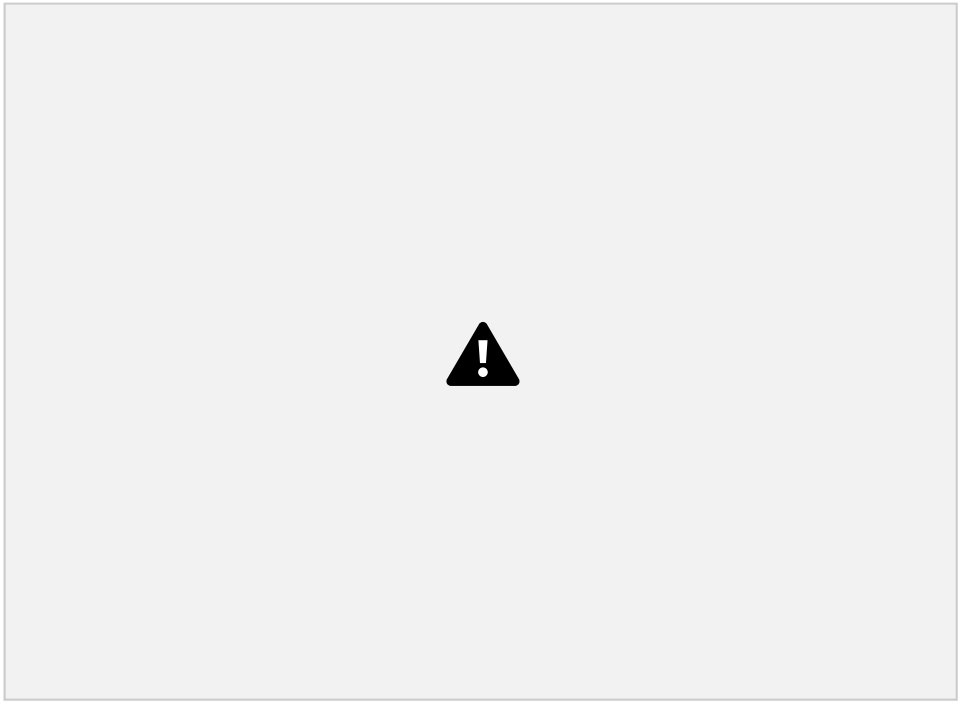
Broadening your experience

How might the "Lionels" experience belonging and encouragement as a normal part of life?

Cycles of Oppression

In 1991, I was living in Portland, Oregon. I was invited to be on the diversity training team for the Inclusivity Organization. In the process, I learned a number of processes that I have been able to translate into my theology and practices in ministry. This is particularly helpful to me because over my forty-plus years of ministry the church diversity and inclusion has not been a focus within the church. During my career, I have been the dean for Diversity at a Lutheran College, Director for Youth Ministries for our denomination, pastored a wonderfully diverse congregation, and placed-based nonprofit. My diversity and inclusion training served as a valuable supplement to what I learned in seminary. To say that I learned nothing about inclusion in seminary would be an understatement. During the last thirst years, I have introduced to the church diversity processes including, Power Shuffle, World View, Ethnocentrism and Etnorelativism, and Cycle of Oppression. The Cycle of Oppression is a helpful tool to facilitate discussion and a particular picture of how God is disembodied in the person of Jesus. What does it mean that God took on bodily form and entered into our human condition? Please be sure to read this chapter to capture the biblical understanding and application.

I was introduced to the Cycle of Oppression by Harrison Simms in 1991. The Cycle is a circle that begins at the top with labeling or **“targeting**” an individual or group. The next step of the circle goes counterclockwise to the midpoint of the circle where we attach **Mis-information** to the person or group. The misinformation is the result of targeting or labeling. The bottom of the cycle follows targeting, misinformation, and based on misinformation is the **justified mistrea**t of the person or group. The completion of the cycle is midway after justified mistreatment and is called **Internalized Behavior**. The explanation I give for internalized behavior is if I have a dog and I hot the dog every time it does something wrong. Sooner or later I will approach my dog and though it did nothing wrong, it will a



ct like it did something wrong.

I invite you to work through the Cycle but remember that to participate in this cycle you told to read a book, listen to a tape, or prepare in any way. This is based on the knowledge and experience you already have. Here we go.

Walkthrough the Cycle and discuss the example of women as the targeted group? What is

misinformation about women? Your assignment is to actually walk through the Cycle. What is some misinformation about women drivers?
What then might be justified mistreatment of women drivers?
How might women internalize the behavior?

What is misinformation about women in the workforce? What do we say if a man is assertive in the workplace? What do we say if a woman is assertive in the workplace? What might be justified mistreatment for women who are assertive in the workplace? How might women internalize the behavior based on targeting, misinformation, and mistreatment?

Look at the magazine racks we see in the grocery store. What do the women tend to look like? What is the justified mistreatment when women do not look like the projection in the magazines? Think about the relationship between anorexia and bulimia as internalized behavior.

Discuss the Cycle, utilizing the example of GBLTQ as targeted groups.

Discuss the Cycle, utilizing the example of BIPOC youth in the examples of the classroom, policing, and

How does one disrupt the cycle of oppression? The Gospels give us stories of Jesus deliberately coming alongside people who are targeted for oppression - lepers, tax collectors, people with “unclean spirits” - and treating them as God sees them, as worthy of God’s love.

A biblical understanding and application for the Cycle of Oppression is the invitation is to reflect on how God and salvation entered into the world. God became one of us. God chose to enter into the human condition. Jesus, the Son of God, enters into the world and shows us what and who God cares about. The biblical witness of God offers pictures of how God stands for and with people caught in cycles of oppression. Jesus was more than a nice person. Jesus is the Son of God, in relationship with marginalized people.

The stories of Jesus in the bible are stories about Jesus confronting Cycles of Oppression. Read again, the story about the woman at the well and how God intervenes. Jesus is the Son of God, welcoming people with God’s message of safety and belonging. **T**

The woman caught in adultery (john 7:53-John 8:11

Woman of Samaria (John 4:7-30)

Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:2430)

Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52)

Children (Mark 10:13-16)

The woman who anoints Jesus feet (Matthe 26:6-13)

Discussing Jesus and Cycles of Oppression

How does the person fit the cycle?

What does Jesus do in the encounter to disrupt the cycle?

Think of times or examples when you have have or witnessed others breaking the cycle.

Connecting your story

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

How did you experience the killing of George Floyd? How was this a reflection of targeting and misinformation? How might Derek Chauvin have felt justified in his mistreatment of Mr. Floyd?

In the example of George Floyd, what disrupted the cycle of oppression?

Name some specific messages you have received about a "target group". What effect have these had on your thinking and behavior?

Culture and healing

How are we complicit in perpetuating the cycle of oppression?

How do the stories of Jesus disrupt the cycle of oppression? Where might you see examples of this disruption happening today?

How is God with us when we disrupt the cycle of oppression?

Broadening your experience

Each time we worship we celebrate that God is with us in the message of welcome, safety, and belonging. We carry that witness with us into the world among those places where we work, play, and study. How can we increase our awareness of the cycles of oppression? How might this deepen our awareness of God present and at work in those cycles of oppression in our everyday lives?

Reform and Revival

Since the death of George Floyd, I have had conversations with a good number of white Christians seeking to have discussions about race. I celebrate the desire for those conversations--in many ways, they are well overdue. Someone told me there is research that concludes that each time a Black person is killed unjustly by police, a window of opportunity opens and white people become open to racial justice conversations. The killing of George Floyd appears to have opened the window more broadly. In many ways, that opening is the inspiration for this workbook.

The hope for this workbook is to ignite dialogue, largely in white congregations on the topic of race. I say dialogue among white congregations because Black people have been talking for a long time, but largely to ourselves. The racial needle has not moved. But that is not the purpose for this workbook. This book is to encourage white congregations to practice having the conversation concerning race and justice. This is not a book about what white people should do; I pray that will come as an outgrowth of the dialogue.

The dialogue is to prepare white people to move beyond the guilt, blame, and shame of being complicit with white systemic racism. As a Black leader, too often I have witnessed white people using the excuse of shame, blame, and guilt as the excuse for not addressing racism. White guilt, blame, and shame serves no positive purpose. Healthy, honest, and whole conversation can serve as the building block for white people to address white systemic racism as a matter of white self-interest.

At the root of this workbook is my unapologetic belief in the church as a powerful institution in need of reform. I believe the church is the most powerful institution in the world. No other institution exists for the purpose to convene. The church, as a worshipping body, extends the invitation that says, no matter who you are, where you come from, you are welcome and safe to belong. The welcome does not begin with or come from us. The welcome begins with and comes from God. If anyone does not believe me, read the book.

The church convenes. The church extends God's welcome and the invitation to experience safety and belonging. This convening begins in the sanctuary and in the church building, moving out and into the neighborhood, and into the community. This is where I believe the church is challenged to reform, or revive. In every neighborhood, there is likely at least one church. Neighborhoods are also rich in cultural diversity.

The second purpose for this workbook is to connect congregations, (churches), with their neighborhoods. Sacred Spaces is a national organization working with churches across the United States. Sacred Spaces research states that six out of every ten people entering the doors of the average congregation are non-church members. That is to say, six out of every ten people who enter the doors of a church are from the neighborhood. Why do they not count as part of the church story? Is it because they are not church "members?" is it because they do

not tithe? What if those six out of every ten people entering the doors of our congregations connected to the church's message of welcome, safety, and belonging?

Finally, this book is not an answer book. This is a workbook and a catalyst for conversation. The hope is that the conversation will meet you where you are, and encourage group dialogue and movement. The Intercultural Development Inventory offers a continuum across which people may be assessed from mono-cultural to intercultural. Organizations like churches, synagogues, and mosques are designed to convene and gather people. Those organizations also have the power to create social change. If just one congregation will utilize this book and commit to becoming a welcoming place of safety and belonging, that will be a success. Imagine if every church commits to take seriously God's promise of welcome, safety, and belonging--then, not only will the pews be filled, but our neighborhoods would experience revival.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

Connecting your story

What has been your experience of guilt and shame in the issue of racism? How do you compare this with guilt and shame in other areas of life?

Culture and healing

What has been useful for moving beyond guilt and shame? What can the church offer to people in this movement? [resources for truth and reconciliation, confession and forgiveness]

What relationships in your life can you begin or strengthen to further racial healing and reconciliation?

Broadening your experience

Richard Beck - antiracism as a spiritual practice….

Read/watch/listen to some stories of reconciliation.

- Bryan Stevenson's "Just Mercy".
- Nelson Mandela and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation process - Onbeing podcast - Derek Black and Matthew Stephenson

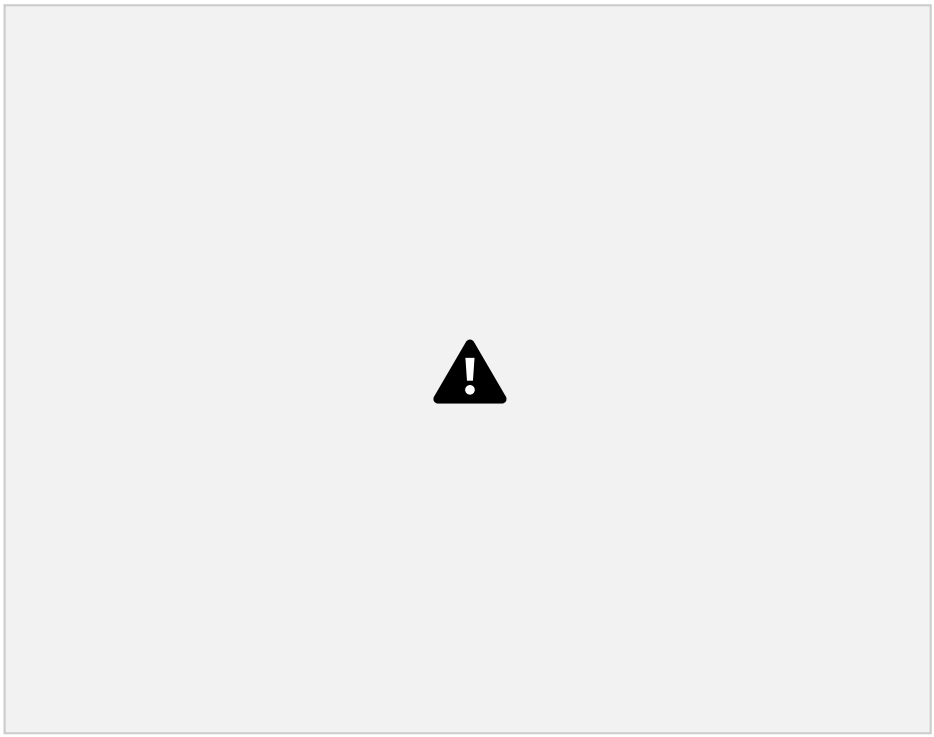
Reflect on what was required for reconciliation to happen in each of these stories.

Transforming: Living in true relationship with our multicultural neighbors

Having spent time reflecting on our Forming, begun the work of Reforming, we now move into stories and conversations of Transforming. We will explore times when difference was not a limitation but a gift. We will hear stories from *different people* who have experienced Transforming in community. We will ask new questions - When did I experience difference as a gift? How did this contribute to how I came to see the world?

Transforming is where we want to be. It is aspirational, even as we catch glimpses of transformed community in these stories. If we are honest, we don't have many examples of

what living in multicultural community. Therefore, we continue to attend to where we are now - our thoughts and feelings - even as we imagine what Transforming ourselves and our relationships can look like. As always, we aim to “be the work.”



Diversity

A Church that Embraces

It was during some of the first worship services at Redeemer that I experienced how the congregation would begin with a time of prayer. The pastor would pass the microphone around and invite people to share their prayer concerns. There were only a handful of people, and I became alarmed at some of the things people shared during that time of prayer and praise. For example, one man shared that he had been on the internet overnight, providing counsel to young boys. As other prayers were being lifted up, I saw red flags everywhere. All I could think was, “Oh no!” and “This cannot go on!” I thought about how we could establish a time for such prayers at a different time, a private time. And I thought about white men, in particular, and their possible discomfort with public expressions of feelings, especially during worship. I was concerned with how to grow a church that had so much potential for dysfunction. After the first worship service, I decided that I would change the time of prayer and move it to another time

during the week. After all, I was the pastor; I had been trained and was expected to be the worship expert.

With that in mind, I made an appointment to meet with an established Black leader in the community. When I shared with him my decision to eliminate the time of prayer and praise during worship, he began to share his own knowledge of the congregation. He stated that a number of the people who were members were attached to the mental health system, and that the part of that service when they speak into the mic is the only time during the week when they have a voice. As he spoke, I remembered that the role of worship is to access the sacred. In many ways, that time of Prayer and Praise was the most sacred part of the service. After that, Prayer and Praise became the cornerstone of the service, and the community's health has shaped the health of what is shared. Long story short: this congregation has shaped me in what it truly means to be a pastor: to walk with my people and, when necessary, lead them.

I love to tell another story about one of our gifted members, who established a hip hop worship service for young people. In his brilliance, this member translated the liturgy--from the Kyrie to the benediction--into hip hop. He took the liturgy and put it into the vernacular of the young people, and it was brilliant. I loved the number of pastors who registered their complaints about the music until they experienced the service and how it united young people in worship.

Connecting your story

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

In your church experience, where have you seen difference as gift?

A foundation of the church is to extend welcome, safety, and belonging. How is this exhibited in churches you have attended?

Culture and healing

Name three ways the church communicates belonging beyond white comfort.

How might the church distinguish itself more boldly as a place of welcome, safety, and belonging?

Broadening your experience

Invite a BIPOC person(s) to attend worship and discuss cultural observations following the experience.

An Unexpected Welcome

I grew up in small-town Minnesota: white, middle class, conservative, protestant Christian. Because I never saw anything other than this homogeneity for the first 19 years of my life, I assumed this is was an accurate depiction of America. That is, until I left for college to study youth ministry, and ended up doing an urban ministry internship for a month in San Bernardino, California. I had no idea that my life would be forever changed.

From the moment I arrived at Central City Lutheran Mission, and for the rest of that month, I experienced something very peculiar: I was, for the first time in my life, the only white person. I felt naked, exposed, nervous. As the staff members gave me a tour of the church which housed homeless folks in the pews at night, the dining hall and computer lab for the after school program, housing for people living with HIV/AIDS, and the free health clinic, I began to realize this was a very different America than the one I had grown up in. I didn't know how I could possibly fit in. Maybe I should leave. They probably don't want me here.

Then we rounded a corner, and I saw a long concrete wall covered in beautiful street art. A handful of young men with spray cans were painting the most intricate and mesmerizing images I had ever seen. Something within me lit up. I loved painting, they loved painting. I had to know these people. They were geniuses.

"Hi, I'm Chelsea. Do you mind if I watch you paint?" They introduced themselves, and after chatting about technique for a while, they handed me a spray can. I was too shy to paint in front of them, but we kept talking, and soon we were cracking jokes back and forth. They invited me to come to the "Hip Hop Jazz Mass" the following night.

"You gotta come, it's off the chain! It's a church service that's basically an open mic. People rap, recite poems, sing, dance, whatever. You gotta write something and share it too."

So I did. I was terrified, shaking. But I sat down in the circle with them and listened to their raps. I learned very quickly that a majority of people living here had experienced gang violence, drug addiction, fear of deportation, teenage pregnancy, constant and unwarranted harassment from the police, as well as extreme poverty. I also learned they were all incredibly talented artists, performers, wordsmiths, and comedians. After each person shared, everyone cheered and gave them compliments. Then it was my turn. I felt like I was going to puke. I read my poem (which I'm sure was terrible), but they all cheered and gave me "props" for getting up in front of the group and sharing.

After that, I was in. These people became my friends. My poems got better as I learned to loosen up. But most importantly, I listened to their stories. I asked questions. Although much of their experience was foreign to my own, I trusted what I learned from them. Their stories all added up to a growing realization within me: racism in America is alive and well, and it is

oppressing my new friends through the systems of education, healthcare, immigration, criminal justice, and housing. I learned about the impossible barriers to the American dream for people of color. I learned about my advantages based on my whiteness. I could no longer deny it.

When I flew back to college in Iowa at the end of that month, I cried the whole flight home. I was going to miss my new friends. I also knew I could not continue on the path I had planned. I had thought I was going to the inner city to minister to them, but it turned out I was the one who needed saving. They opened my mind and heart to a God who cares deeply about the

vulnerable, poor and oppressed. I felt I owed them a great debt for showing me the truth about race in this country. So I changed my major to social work, became politically active, and attended many protests. I befriended all the international students on campus by choosing to sit with them at their lunch table instead of expecting them to come to mine. I went on to study “Leadership Toward Racial Justice” at seminary. I wrote my senators, and I continued writing poems on race and whiteness. I led trainings for my friends. I learned Spanish.

Most importantly, I continued to keep an open mind and to not assume my experience was the only one or the right one. I continued listening to the people of color around me, and wrestling with my questions and discomfort. None of that would have been possible without the relationships I formed with the brilliant graffiti artists, poets, and rappers I met in the inner city. Every time I attend a Black Lives Matter protest or choose to get uncomfortable for the sake of racial healing, I bring to mind my gratitude to them for welcoming me into their community. Here’s to you Kuff, Amado, and Alex. I love you guys. Salud!

On Vulnerability

I grew up in Detroit, MI. A city in my opinion that was predominantly Black/African American. I live in a neighborhood with similar family demographics. We worshipped as a family at Iroquois Ave. Christ Lutheran Church. For many years, our family was the only family of color. It would eventually integrate. I was confirmed Lutheran. Most of my schooling was also integrated and within 3-4 blocks from my home.

My sophomore year my parents enrolled me in Lutheran High East, in Harper Woods, MI. I believe there was a student body of 500, with maybe 13-15 students of color. It was on this school's campus that I had my first experience of being "Nigger" and threatened with harm by a white person. It was a friend of one of my confirmation classmates Janet H. I do not know what hurt more, be called the name, the threat of harm, or watch my church confirmation classmate not defend or take up for me. Things were never the same between Janet and me after that. I believe that experience opened my eyes to all the ways that being a member of a predominately white upper-middle-class congregation was rooted in whiteness. One of my closer white church friends told me about the members of the congregation that would not take the common cup because they did not want to drink from the cup in behind black members.

So as a BIPOC woman, most of my most hurtful negative racist experienced happened to be by or in the presence of white people in the Lutheran Church. These incidents and others have caused me to be distrustful of people who show up with white skin. When I relocated to Minneapolis, MN, I did not know what to expect Its a Lutheran mecca. I realized the racial composition of Minnesota was more than 82 % white, maybe 7% Black or African American including "African nationals". That is a lot of white bodies, and it was not something I was used to. I was comfortable working in Harrison Neighborhood because of its demographic. It was one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the Twin Cities. I knew how to function in diverse spaces. I worked with families of color but most of my colleagues were young white women, fresh out of college. I think a challenge for me was that they were so comfortable in their skin and when we would go places, they were unaware of how uncomfortable I was. I remember one conversation with a former coworker I was telling her I thought I might go back to Detroit. I told her "I didn't sign up for all this Minnesota Nice. I was not equipped for this". Her response was "Babette, God doesn't call the equipped, God equips the called!". That young white girl really gave me something to think about. We had a deep theological conversation. She opened to me in ways she had never. She could repeat to me things I had said or did that helped her better engage the BIPOC children we were working with. I realized, that in her sharing some of her struggles and experiences with me, that she was someone that I could also open to.

You see as BIPOC it is not always easy to be in all-white spaces because in those spaces White people are just so comfortable. And oblivious to the discomfort of the People of color that have been invited in. But not really made to feel welcome. I recall many times being invited to a space where I know very few people it is an extremely uncomfortable place to be.

I can come to understand the Power and Light that is within me. To understand that I bring gifts and the Spirit of Christ into these spaces. That I am safe, and beloved and bring value into these spaces. Dr. King said "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that." MLK J

A Surprising Experience of Racial Reconciliation

Here’s how quickly a world can change. One sentence reframed how I saw my personal world.

How did that happen?

I was talking with the Pastor about racial reconciliation and how it might look in the context of our multi-racial congregation. I had been a member there for several years, learning a lot from reading and from the race exhibit at the Science Center, and I wanted to take the next step. A current author and race specialist had written some material about inviting racial conversations across cultures and I was describing how this might happen as a program at our church. The Pastor was very supportive and said to me, “You set the table and I’ll be there.”

In the same conversation, I was describing my experience in our multi racial quilting group. I told him about how we all helped each other and how satisfying and proud the new quilters were of their completed quilts. But, more than that, for me it was about the new relationships I was forming, and the conversations and stories that came about in that quilt room over the sounds of sewing machines, the sharing of our individual types of quilts, and, of course, the snacks! I learned to eat soul food, as well as goat, cornbread made in a frying pan, and lots of African samosas! And a huge surprise for me was discovering African batik fabric and new design ideas. Discovering these new ways to quilt made me want to dance!

The group had recently welcomed Harriet, a Ugandan survivor of torture, into our group and she was new to quilting. At first, she only wanted to press the fabrics and do the cutting but eventually, she made her own quilts and gained confidence in her own designs and fabrics. Along the way she saw how quilting helped her to tell her story and how it helped her to heal. She had now become a solid member of the quilt group.

So… the sentence that changed my world view was the Pastor’s response after I was telling him these exciting things about the quilt group. He said, “Janet, your quilt group is an example of racial reconciliation.” That set my heart on fire! I realized that I could do something I loved with women of other cultures and in the process form relationships that offered mutuality. We learned to share our pain as well as our joy. Then, with Harriet in the lead, she and I connected with another quilt group from a suburban church who committed to working with women Harriet knew who were also victims of torture. They needed safe places to learn and grow and I think we needed to provide safe places for us to learn from them and grow as well. We found a friendly house that opened its doors to us for one day a month for a year, and together we quilted, ate meals, and formed relationships of trust as well as shared pain and shared joy. It taught me how to be present, to engage with, and be influenced by women I never would have met without quilting. If one way of describing racial reconciliation is reaching across cultural boundaries for understanding, trust, compassion, and relationships then mutuality through quilting is a surprising and creative path of reconciliation.

Relationship as Primary Task

I first came to know Pastor Kelly in 1997 when I was a graduate student living in Texas, and he

was serving as the ELCA's Director for Youth Ministries. One day, I came home to a voicemail, asking that I call him at the ELCA Churchwide Organization. I'd attended confirmation and youth group, served as president of my home synod's Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO). I was currently the youth member of synod council, teaching confirmation class and, although I was completing a master's degree in accounting, I was also considering a call to public ministry. Still, I had never engaged nationally with the church beyond attendance at two ELCA Youth Gatherings. So, when Pastor Kelly invited me to serve as a co-advisor to the LYO Multicultural Advisory Committee (MAC), I was feeling excited, humbled and a bit unqualified.

Pastor Kelly supervised me and the other young adult co-advisor, Carmelo Santos, as we worked with the eight members of the recently-elected MAC. The most visible and expected outcome of our work included planning the Multicultural Youth Leadership Event (MYLE) to be held in conjunction with the 2000 ELCA Youth Gathering in St. Louis, MO.

In introducing us to our roles, Pastor Kelly cautioned Carmelo and me against the impulse to focus exclusively, or even primarily, on planning for the next MYLE. There would be a lot of excitement and energy around this task. MYLE was the ELCA's largest leadership development event for youth of color, and the current MAC membership had been elected by participants of the previous MYLE to continue in this good work. Moreover, many would judge our "success" by the attendance, programming and logistics of the next MYLE. Notwithstanding these considerations, Pastor Kelly advised that concentrating on event planning would be a misuse of the time and abundant gifts of these young leaders. Moreover, if their principal achievement would be delivering a best-ever MYLE, we would have squandered the opportunity here and missed the moment. This, one of my earliest lessons from Pastor Kelly, has been the most transforming.

Pastor Kelly invited Carmelo and me to consider that, as two young adults of color, working in partnership, called to journey with a diverse group of youth leaders…our primary task would be building relationship and creating community.

This invitation resonated, but also challenged me. In my years of synod LYO participation and leadership, we had gathered in board meetings and small groups to plan gatherings and advocate for youth concerns within the synod. Working closely together, we certainly created strong bonds of friendship. However, there was never the notion that our primary work was building relationship or creating community.

It took me some time to fully embrace this new orientation to what it means to be about ministry. When asked to describe my work with MAC, I regularly responded that we were planning a multicultural leadership development event and developing a pipeline of diverse leaders for the

church. I still felt the need to legitimate myself and our work by highlighting what seemed more acceptable, normative explanations for such an investment of time, energy and money.

My turning point came after Pastor Kelly recommended that he, Carmelo and I spend a

weekend together. Pastor Kelly came from Chicago, Carmelo from his home in Puerto Rico, and we gathered in my hometown of Houston. I introduced them to my family; we worshiped together with my home congregation. We ate and played and talked. And as we shared our personal, family and faith stories, histories and hopes, Pastor Kelly modeled for us and taught us in word and in deed about relationship- how, having been made in the image of God, we are born out of and into holy relationship. As the body of Christ, we are freed and joined together, knit into one community of believers. Community is where we discover our identity, our own and others' unique giftedness; community is how we grow and live out individual and collective witness in the world. Our inheritance of Christian community stretches back to the early church and forward into generations yet to come, and we encounter the realities of both the liberating and the oppressive ways we experience and abuse community and others. In the fellowship of beloved community, no one except Christ stands in the center and no one is relegated to the margins. We trust and therefore live in such a way that we strengthen and are strengthened in community through the promise and power of belonging, forgiveness and resurrection.

At the end of our weekend together, I finally understood what Pastor Kelly had been saying from the beginning. My paradigm shifted. When asked why we gathered and what we were doing, for the first time I proudly responded that we were creating community.

In the twenty years since my tenure working for Pastor Kelly, God has continued to call me in service through the ELCA. I was ordained in 2006, and have served as a parish pastor, Treasurer of the ELCA, and currently through the Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA. I have carried this awareness and orientation to ministry with me into contexts as varied as public accounting, seminary, children's church, family holidays, staff meetings, and ELCA Churchwide Assemblies. I have yet to find a context in which building relationship and creating community is not the (acknowledged or unacknowledged) primary task. Yet, it's still challenging for us to grasp and orient ourselves around this as our primary task. We are easily distracted. But I am convinced that our deepest need and most important ministry is first and always about creating, nurturing, restoring and/or reconciling relationship. Everything else we are about, no matter how important, is secondary.

Linda Norman
January 5, 2021

Leader's Guide

I think we need something for leaders to ensure a quality conversation space.

- *Brave space*
- *RESPECT*
- *Mutual invitation*

References

Additional Resources