

Session 5

**Celebrate Our Diversity
And Unity In Christ**



The vision challenges us to move toward a future where every Congregation names and celebrates our identity and bears fruits of respect, love, and mutual ministry.

Prayer for the week

Your are invited to use this prayer to begin your study each day. As you read, study and pray, let the challenge of the vision work its way into your heart, your habits and your hopes for the future.

Ingenious Inventor

Ingenious Inventor, the natural world testifies to your love of diversity. You revel in all the permutations of life and landscape captured in your loving attention to detail. We confess that we don't always welcome such variety. There are times when we seek comfort in the familiar faces, places, language, liturgy, lifestyle. Forgive us our lapses of appreciation. Stretch the limits of our comfort zones. Fill us with awe and wonder at life's incredible abundance. Let us celebrate the work of your hand give praise to the joy of your heart.

Session author – Alice Ann Glenn

Alice Ann is a Deacon serving the denomination as a Christian Education Consultant, Curriculum Writer, and Health Advocate. Raised in small, rural congregations as a UM preacher's kid, Alice Ann has been a contract writer with the UM Publishing House for 20 years, after serving as Director of Christian Education in large churches for 15 years. Alice Ann has had a life time interest in multi-cultural and cross cultural education. Alice Ann lives in Monterey, CA where she works with three churches, most recently working with a team building a cross cultural church partnership.

**Session 5:
Celebrating Our Diversity & Our Unity in Christ**

Introduction: Living Multi-culturally

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female: for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3: 28 NRSV) We use this scripture to point to unity in Christ.

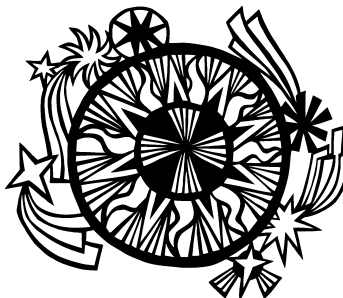
Eric Law stated a few years ago that every appointment in a local church is a cross cultural appointment. If one accepts that premise, then each local church is a multi-cultural congregation!

**These are some of the cultures or diversities
in the California-Nevada Annual Conference:**

geography [rural, small town, suburban, urban, inner city, mountain, desert, valley, coast]; worship [style and length]; size of congregation; staffing in the local church; spiritual types; personality types; power; leadership; emotions; traditions; theology; physical, mental, developmental and/or psychological and neurological ableness; politics; military; civilian; length of membership; immigrants [just arrived, here awhile, here for generations]; gender; age; language; economics; education; housing; health/medical care access; employment; class; status; family; telephone and computer access and capability; and of course the diversities of race, ethnicity, nationality, color, culture, and sexual orientation.

We assume our church reflects our community. We need to check those assumptions continually or else Jesus will remind us we are today’s Sadducees and Pharisees. How many cultures can you identify in your congregations? List them. Are there other cultures in your community you have not listed? Add them to your list and take them to share Sunday. How do you celebrate these cultures in your congregation?

We are called to transcend culture into community. Let us look at ways we can do that as we Celebrate our Diversity and Our Unity in Christ.



Day One — Living with Commas

Living with commas means we recognize our CA-NV Annual Conference, and all its local churches are continually changing and evolving. It means familiar paradigms (models or methods of how we do things) are changing. Whenever paradigms shift, we may be confused and disoriented, and we need to learn to live with the commas as we move through the shift. Living with commas is acknowledging and valuing diversity, not judging it.

Eric Law says (*The Bush was Blazing But Not Consumed* [Chalice Press, 1996] p. 43 & 44) “The first step toward becoming a multicultural community is to recognize our own tower of Babel—our ethnocentrism. Each cultural group has a tendency to make itself superior, believing that its tower is better and taller. In a multicultural community, we need to identify our tower of Babel and decide to consciously stop building it.” While the Tower of Babel was being built, everyone spoke the same language. After God destroyed the Tower, people could not understand each other and so came ethnocentrism. What is your ethnocentrism? Reflect on this and draw or diagram it. Some of you may not be sure what your ethnocentrism is. You may need to meet with others like you to have intra-group dialogue until you find out what your identity is. If you need to do this, gather a few friends around tea this week and talk about your identity.

“The World is my parish,” said John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. These words have been the motto of United Methodists throughout many generations. “We believe we have a responsibility to innovate, sponsor and evaluate new forms of community that will encourage development of the fullest

potential in individuals.” [Par. 161 *The Book of Discipline*, p. 98] Who do you see regularly in your community—age, gender, race, etc. but never see in your church? Have you been in conversation with any of these persons? Talk to one person you don’t know each day this week. How can you celebrate these people’s presence in your midst?

Read Matthew 2:1-12 Visit of the Wise Ones

We are often as surprised as Mary when unexpected visitors come. Do you, as Mary, accept the gifts they bring? What are the most recent gifts you have been given by someone unexpected attending your church? Did these gifts surprise you? Reflect on your answers.

Read Acts 11:12, 17, and 15:8 Early church decides the Gospel is not attached to one culture

Law says “We are not better or worse than others, we are just different. On level ground, we become prophets to each other, challenging each other to see God more clearly and to act more faithfully (p. 43).” This is what is meant by seeing the Gospel is not attached to one culture. It is also the beginning of inter-group dialogue. Where in your local church and community can you celebrate “no distinction between them and us”? Are there some other things you could do to live out “no distinctions”? Who can be prophets to you? Where do you need to go to encounter these prophets? Remember, it is more important to go to these prophets than for them to come to you. How can you celebrate these prophets?

Pause to Reflect

Day Two – Living with Questions

We live in constant tension with theological questions. They lead to discovery, surprises, and even celebration.

The Spectacles

The King of Fairies decided to give humans a gift and sent his right-hand fairy to deliver it. The messenger came to the world and called for the humans to come. “It is true,” she said, “that you are all a bit shortsighted, but to help that inconvenience, the king has sent you a gift.”

She opened an enormous bundle, and a great number of spectacles tumbled out. The people seized them with great eagerness. Soon, all the humans sported their own pair of fairy spectacles.

However, the people didn’t always see the same things out of the spectacles, for one pair was purple, another blue, one was white, and another black; some of the glasses were red, some green, and some yellow. They were all colors and every shade of color.

The odd thing was that each person was delighted with his or her own pair and believed it was the very best. How strange it is that all humans differ in their opinions and how strongly they are attached to their own! (“*Musings, Tales of Truth & Wisdom*”, Edited by Linda M. Ford [Fulcrum resources, 2000], 238)

What are those opinions to which you are most attached? List them as fast as you can. Then look at the list and number them from 1 to 10, with #1 being that to which you are most attached.

Think during the rest of this week of why that opinion is so important to you, if you would compromise on that opinion and what would make you willing to compromise or not. Journal these thoughts for sharing with your study group.

What can you do to keep yourself from separating yourself from those who see things theologically differently than you do? What do you see your local church doing so everyone feels they are part of “their” United Methodist Church? How can you be in fellowship with those who differ from your theology? How can your United Methodist Church celebrate the diversity of your theology?

Read John 4:1-42
Jesus and the Woman of Samaria

This is an example of theological conversation or dialogue. This is not a debate which assumes winner and losers.

“Theology serves the Church by interpreting the world’s needs and challenges to the Church and by interpreting the Gospel to the world.”(Par. 104, *The Book Discipline*, p. 74)

Theological inquiry can clarify our thinking about what we are to say and do. It presses us to pay attention to the world around us. (Par. 104, *The Book Discipline*, p. 76)

How did Jesus interpret the Gospel to the woman? How are you interpreting the Gospel to those you meet in your routine encounters? What do you need to do to feel comfortable sharing the Gospel with others? Set some goals to do this, i.e., develop a sentence you can use to introduce people to Jesus or a question you can ask others about faith.

What questions do you have about the Bible, theology, United Methodist beliefs, that are raised by your daily experiences? Journal those questions this week. Next to each one list one or two things you can do to find answers.

Read Acts 8:26-38
Philip and the Ethiopian

Devising formal definitions of doctrine has been less pressing for United Methodists than summoning people to faith and nurturing them in the knowledge and love of God. (Par. 101, *The Book Discipline*, p. 50)

What summoned you to faith in Jesus Christ? What summons you now to Jesus? Write your story, including how you were nurtured on your faith journey.



Celebrating Our Diversity and Unity in Christ

“For Wesley, a cogent account of the Christian faith required the use of reason, both to understand Scripture and to relate the biblical message to wider fields of knowledge. He looked for confirmations of the biblical witness in human experience...

In that task Scripture...occupies a place of primary authority...

In practice, theological reflection may also find its point of departure in tradition, experience, or rational analysis. What matters most is that all four guidelines be brought to bear in faithful, serious, theological consideration.” (Par. 104, *The Book of Discipline*, p. 77)

Take a question you have about a controversial theological question. Write it in the middle of a blank sheet of paper. Write one of these words in each corner scripture, tradition, experience, reason. Take 10 minutes and write everything down that you can think of in each of the four categories that help you think about your question. Add things during the week if you think of more.

We remind ourselves as a community of faith to remember who we are, what both civil and religious communities perceive about us in our discord, and what we have called ourselves to be as a church. [Par. 143 *The Book of Resolutions*]

How we disagree, more so than which position prevails, has a powerful impact on many audiences. [Par. 144 *The Book of Resolutions*]

When have you had misunderstandings or discord in church? What steps can be taken to eliminate the discord? Does your local community see your United Methodist Church as a church that does not always agree but respects, loves and cares for one another? Why or why not? What can you do about it?

Is disagreement in your United Methodist Church met with debate, which assumes winners and losers, or with dialogue, which assumes vulnerability, listening, understanding, and willingness not to dominate? If you had to describe yourself, do you prefer debate or dialogue? What are the values you attach to each? What can you do to encourage dialogue in your United Methodist Church? In your community?

Pause to Reflect

Day Three – Living in Harmony

I love music and was raised with classical music. When I recently attended the symphony, I was once again impressed by how the instruments are different sounding, varying in size and shape, and diverse in type such as wind, brass, string or percussion instruments, yet all worked together to make one magnificent sound! The largest instruments do not dominate the sound, nor are the smallest instruments overpowered.

Symphony, marching band or pop concert music becomes a good metaphor for the church and how we can have harmony from our diversity. As all of the diverse types and sounds of instruments give us one unified sound, we as the diverse parts of the church can each add our “sound” to the whole.

Where is the harmony in your church? What is the diversity in your church that makes the harmony rich and complex? What can you do, in Christian love, to enhance your local church’s harmony?

Read Acts 2:43–47 in Eugene Peterson’s The Message

A picture of the early church gives us a model of harmony.

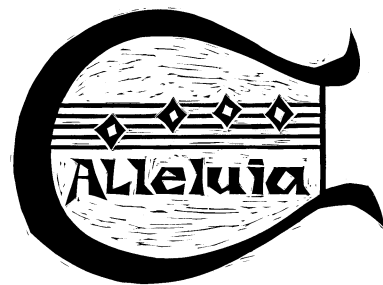
How does your local church allow for and encourage talking about how you saw God working in your lives this week? What other ways can your congregation share the wonders and signs you see, do or

experience each week?

One of the pictures of this early church community is that of “*holding everything in common*” and “*pooled their resources so that each person’s need was met.*” (MSG) How does your local church attempt to do that? How do you meet each others needs? How do you reach out to the recent immigrant and share resources? The homeless? The underemployed? Those without healthcare/insurance? The hungry? The addicted? Others?

The Scripture talks about daily worship! Reflect on what you do for daily worship. Are you paying attention to the wonders all around you? How do you celebrate those wonders? How do you celebrate the diversity in your own United Methodist Church? What more can you do to celebrate that diversity in worship?

We read that worship was “*followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God.*” Are your meals at home a celebration? Do you have meals after worship at your church? Are the meals/potlucks you have at your church a time of celebration? What would make church meals a celebration? What could you do to make every meal “*exuberant and joyful, as you praise God?*”



Day Five – Living as Light and Hope

In a day when divisions, barriers, distinctions, differences and racial enmity pervade our culture and our church, CA-NV multi-cultural ministries are a beacon of light and hope to a weary world. The churches are also a sign of God’s reign, of a “third way” different from the past, different from separation, and point to a better way than what we now do or know. Multi-cultural/multi-ethnic churches are a statement that people can learn how to reach out to the populations in their communities with sensitivity and skill. There are always steep learning curves about power dynamics and leadership styles, but those are seen as assets, not as problems.

We need to always keep before us the image of Jesus who constantly broke down or crossed barriers, pointing to light and hope. We opt, as CA-NV United Methodists, to live in a world of differences. We opt to Celebrate differences!

Read Acts 2:1-13 Pentecost All Hear in Their Own Language!

We all hear “in our own language” when we experience those languages of the United Methodist Church we all have in common, across our diversities. These are the California-Nevada common languages I have experienced:

Prayer	Fellowship	Giving
Love of Christ	Breaking Bread	Serving
Worship	Together	
Bible Study	Communion	

What other common languages have you experienced in your church? Other United Methodist churches/United Methodist Women/United Methodist Men/Annual Conference? Other denominations or other faiths in your area?

The CA-NV Annual Conference has much to celebrate as we live in “Light and Hope.” Some of the ways we do ministry are models of hope for many.

We, the CA-NV Annual Conference celebrate these things:

Cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments. Is your church one of these appointments? If so, what have you learned? List or note for sharing. If your church is not a cross-racial or cross-cultural appointment, what do you need to learn before you say yes to such an appointment?

Beginning new Sunday schools and congregations among people who are marginalized in your community. What new thing do you need to start in your church to reach those in your community who aren’t in your church? List and meditate on these during the rest of the week.

Day Six – Living in Celebration

This is the place of Party Time! We United Methodist's are renowned for our potlucks and our joy at sharing a meal in fellowship. When in doubt, we eat together, and we are one in Christ.

This is also true of Communion. It is a place of celebrating and feasting with Jesus, our Christ. Communion is also the place of reconciliation. One of the older rituals for the Lord's Supper admonishes us, "Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with our neighbors, and intend to lead a new life..."

Life is a cycle of forgiving, reconciling, feasting [Communion or Lord's Supper] and celebrating. The celebrating can be done in worship, in eating or throwing a party like the father of the prodigal.

Read Matthew 5: 24

In our current Communion ritual we have the words: "As forgiven and reconciled people, let us offer ourselves and our gifts to God." [P. 8 United Methodist Hymnal]

Who is unlike you in your church that you should invite to dine with you? Who is unlike you in your community that you should invite to your church for potluck?

From whom do you need to ask forgiveness? Can you do it in person? If not, by phone or note? Do that before this day is over. Look again at the diversity list at the beginning of this week's lesson. Which of these cultures have you ignored? Or hurt? Or dominated? Or made inappropriate jokes concerning? Or ridiculed? Or felt superior to List them and pray for forgiveness each day of this week.

What is the gift that you will offer when you come to the altar? Are you willing to give it or do you want to keep it? Reflect on your responses.

Read Luke 14:12-14

Whom to invite to a meal! This passage tells us do not invite your friends, relatives or rich neighbors. Invite the poor, crippled, lame and blind. We are being told to invite those who are unlike us!



