

Reaching Across Difference: Best Practices for Building Bridges



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We must become aware of our biases to be able to follow Jesus's commandment to "love your neighbor."

Are we willing to consider our biases?
That's a tough question.

Is this work necessary? Is it easy? Is it worth it?
(Yes! – Kind of! – Yes! ☺)

This workshop will help us acknowledge our realities, consider how to better build bridges, and most importantly, become more Christ-like.




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Romans 12:3-5 (First Nations Translation)

Because Creator, in great kindness, has made me a message bearer, I give this message to each of you:

Do not think too highly of yourself. Instead, understand that the Great Spirit **calls us to different purposes** in answer to our trust in Creator.

For just as our bodies have many members and each member has a different purpose, it is the same way with the body of the Chosen One.

We are members of Creator's body, and each member belongs to all the others.

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Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is the ability to interact with people from different backgrounds and recognize differences in experience.

It's a lifelong process that involves reflecting on your own cultural values and world view.

Cultural competence involves understanding and respecting values, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences that differ across cultures.

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We lead
because of the
people we
serve.

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What scriptures can you think of that demonstrate reaching out across differences?

- Leviticus 19:34 – The command to love the foreigner. Differences in social location, relationship, and community.
- John 4:1-27 – The woman at the well. Differences in gender, social location, age, religious beliefs, race, and community.
- Matthew 8:5-13 – Jesus heals a centurion’s servant. Differences in social location, religion, race, allegiance to power.
- 1 Corinthians 12: 4-11 – Varieties of gifts but the same spirit. Differences in spiritual gifts and ways of being Christ in the world.

What other scriptures can you think of?

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Know your **WHY**

Our faith is our “why.”

We are reminded that our faith is based upon reaching out to those who are different from us.

Our faith **empowers** us to reach across difference.

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What else is
our why?

If we want to build bridges, we may want to name that our motivations can be varied:

- Our faith compels us to!
- We don't want our church to die 😞
- We could use some practice! 😊
- We got it wrong last time and want to do better.
- We care about each other.
- We miss who used to be here (young families, etc.).
- We are curious about the people who sit next to us every Sunday.
- We value being a community.
- Our church looks and sounds different now. 

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Sometimes when we start to dream, we can “talk ourselves out of” this possible new direction.

If we grow in health and community, scary things could start happening:

What if we are “overrun” by newer people and lose our current church identity?

What if everyone who is here keeps coming?

What if this gets “out of control?”

What if it doesn’t work?

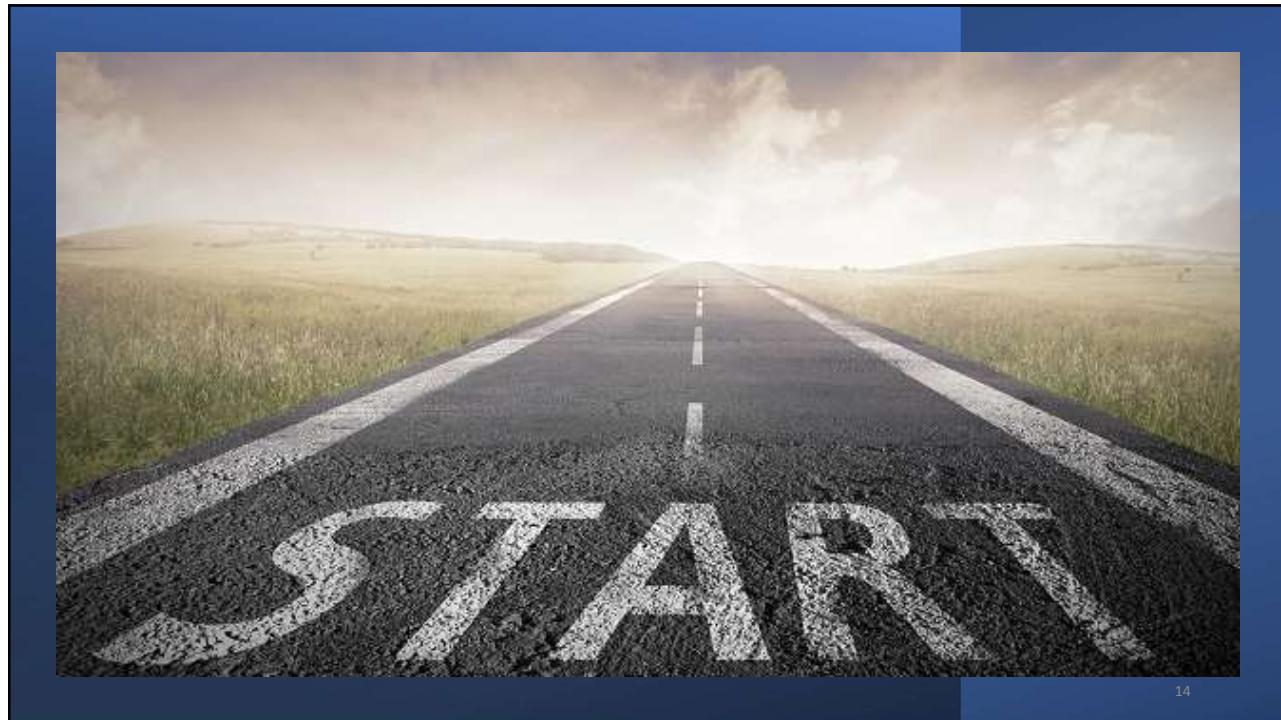
What if it **DOES** work?



WOAH!

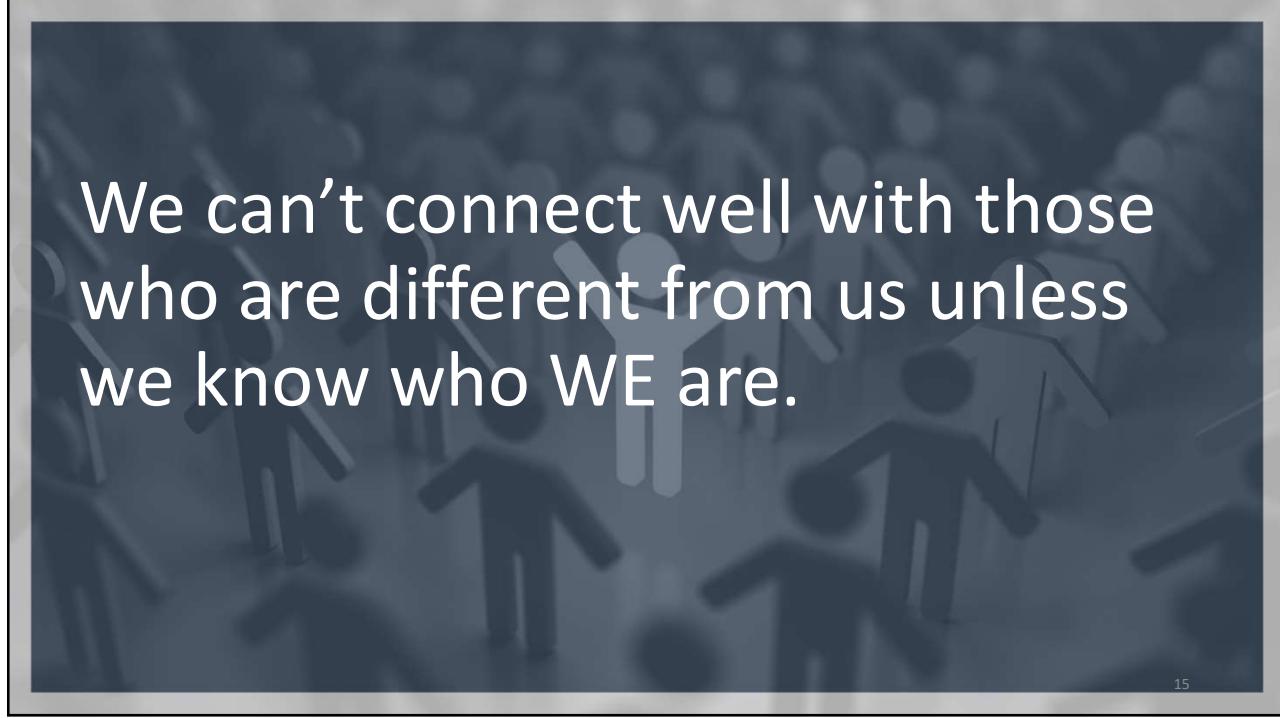
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We can't connect well with those who are different from us unless we know who WE are.

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Reflection
Questions

Who is your church
today?

What is your church like?

Who attends?

What do you value?

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Dimensions of Diversity

Race/Ethnicity

Gender/Sexualitiy

Geography
(where you live)

Sheltering (how you live)

Socioeconomic status

Ability/Disability

Political views

Religion/Ethics

Neurodiversity

Addiction

Incarceration

Educational background

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Share in the chat!

What are the dimensions of diversity that are showing up in your local church?

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What do culturally competent churches look like?

Let's look at three church examples, each at a different stage of growth.

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A church with the opportunity to grow in cultural competency

- Tolerant of a limited number of “token” people who “aren’t like us” (but who have the “proper” credentials)
- Maintains and prioritizes holding onto power and privilege through practices, teachings, and decision making
- Often declares “We don’t have a problem.”
- Comfort with the status quo, avoiding discord and conflict
- Norms, policies, and procedures viewed as “the right way to do things”
- Engages issues of diversity/social justice on the leaders’ terms and within their comfort zone

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A church with some cultural competency

- Making assumptions about members, attendees, and neighbors
- Relationships without transparency, authenticity, vulnerability
- Frustration with initiating change
- Comfort with the status quo and avoidance of discord and conflict
- Disinterest in engaging new people
- For people of diverse backgrounds, pressure to “go along to get along.”
- Traditionally marginalized groups not feeling valued
- “Performative justice seeker”

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A culturally competent church

- De-escalated conflict within the organization
- Increased growth mindset
- Willingness to engage in systemic change
- More innovation – trying new things
- New people engaged in organizational mission and vision
- People of diverse backgrounds feeling valued
- Meeting and seeing people where they are

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Reflection Questions

Where do
you see your
church?

Where would
your church
like to be?

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What is your cultural background?

What are your dimensions of diversity?

What kinds of difference have **you** been exposed to in the past?

First Step!

A stick figure is shown climbing a set of stairs, with the text "First Step!" written above it in a stylized font.

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PRACTICE

Practice. Practice with someone who you can **make mistakes with.**

Find someone who you **trust** and who you have some similarities with.

Have a conversation with them about your **similarities and differences**.

It sounds very simple, but when you two talk, you will be asking each other questions about what you thought you had in common, and you'll probably discover differences you may not have been aware of.

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Find your **cultural bridge builders**.

Find someone who you already have a relationship with who has found ways to **make connections** with people who are culturally different from themselves.

Ask permission first, and then ask them about **their experiences in connecting** with others who are different from them.

- What do they do to build bridges?
- What **benefits** do they gain from bridge building?
- What has been **challenging** for them in navigating cultural differences?
- How do they work through those challenges?

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Do Your Own Work: Cultural Humility

Cultural Humility is:

- A personal lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique whereby the individual not only learns about another's culture, but one starts with an examination of her/his own beliefs and cultural identities
- Recognition of power dynamics and imbalances, a desire to fix those power imbalances and to develop partnerships with people and groups who advocate for others
- Institutional accountability

Yeager, Katherine A., and Susan Bauer-Wu. 2013. "Cultural Humility: Essential Foundation For Clinical Researchers". *Applied Nursing Research* 26 (4): 251-256

"To be culturally humble means that I am willing to learn,"
- Joe Gallagher

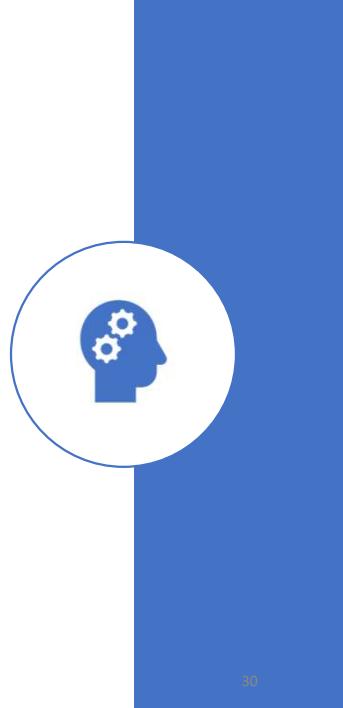
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As you go back into your church:

Step 1: Preparation

- Determine your goal for reaching out and connecting with each other
- Know your triggers
- Suspend judgement
- Reflect on what you do know about others
- Be prepared to use your intercultural knowledge and skills
- Remember: build *authentic* relationships
- Transformation takes time



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As you go back into your church:

Step 2: Engagement (Emphasize Commonalities)

- Listen to understand
- Be curious
- Empathize authentically
- Share openly
- Tell stories that help connect their experience
- Find stopping points
- Have a follow-up conversation



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Final Thoughts...

But what if my church
doesn't think we need to
improve how we build
bridges?

What if a lot of people in
my church think that we
are "just fine" and don't
need to explore cultural
humility?



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Engage Your Change Network!

People respond to change at various paces.

By understanding this, you can leverage the quicker adopters to move others along

Change Leaders/Early Adopters: They communicate and coach. Visibly recognize their contributions and involve them as pilots.

Early Majority/Later Majority: They communicate progress and win support with training and coaching. Solicit their input and involvement. Recognize and reward their contributions.

Contrarian: Listen to their concerns. Make sure they have opportunities to participate. Do not reward them for doing things the old way. BUT – don't let them bog you down!

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