



“Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology, Ministry, and Faith Formation”

This companion study guide and related resources connects the seven faith practices of *Pray, Study, Worship, Invite, Encourage, Serve and Give* to the Practice Discipleship webinar session, “Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology, Ministry, and Faith Formation.” To view the original webinar and for more information on Practice Discipleship, visit www.practicediscipleship.org.

For group discussion:

Pray

Begin your time together with this prayer by Abby Willowroot (2008), found here with other interfaith prayers: (http://www.spiralgoddess.com/InterFaith_Blessings_Prayers.html) :

Make me willing and able to understand
the many complex differences in people,
differences forged in the fires of our experiences,
beliefs born of culture, faith, education and circumstance.

Make me willing and able to understand
that our hearts hunger for similar things,
that our hopes and fears mirror our life experiences,
possibilities sought after, with our strength and resolve.

Make me willing and able to understand that
each of us have dreams, hopes and aspirations,
to know we each value our families, friends and our lives,
we are more alike, than we are different from each other.

Make me willing and able to understand that
hopes for our children, our dreams, vision, home,
friends, family, work, honor, laughter, and song unite us,
knowing it is only our fears and prejudices that separate us.

May my understanding grow today and be a blessing,
making me closer to everyone I meet, everyone I see.
I value differences forged in the fires of our experience.
Amen.

Study

Story is an important part of Jesus' ministry.

- What Bible stories have been particularly meaningful to you? Why?

We are called to be part of God's story. Read Matthew 14:13-21.

- Which character—named or unnamed--can you most relate to? Why?

Read it again.

- Can you imagine yourself from the perspective of another character?
- What must this person have thought? Seen? Tasted?
- How does reading the story this way shape how you draw meaning from it?

As Dr. Frambach explains in the "Theories of Culture" webinar, understanding culture helps us understand ourselves. In the same way, understanding culture of Jesus' time and place helps us to better understand the Bible and its message.

Read Luke 11:5-13 (or another culturally confusing story of your choice) once. Then read this commentary

(<http://www.meetingwithchrist.com/E084%20The%20parable%20of%20the%20friend%20at%20midnight%20-%20Lk%2011%285-13%29.htm>) or another of your choice that explains some of the cultural nuances.

- How did this cultural knowledge change your understanding of this text—or did it?

Worship

The ELW has 50 hymns that are in languages other than English. Consider choosing one or more to incorporate into worship.

- What is a hymn that speaks to you? Why?
- How do you think your culture/s affect your choice?

Consider worshipping using hymns that participants have mentioned.

The ELCA has several international companion synods, including the Lutheran church in Peru. Worship with a song of praise from their community and culture:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tteT45Ak9oc>

Invite

Culture can be defined broadly, and we each belong to several cultures at any one time. Create opportunities for “cross cultural” dialogs. Talk to someone of a different age, gender identification, nationality, race, etc. Invite them to share their stories.

There is an icebreaker game with a sheet of squares, each with a description (who has visited 50 states, who has an unusual pet, who has a birthday in the same month as you, etc.) and the goal is to obtain signatures of people who fit each of those. Create a board, writing features of various cultures within your congregation and offer a time to play this.

Identify someone from a culture that is different from your own.

- What are important events/cultural milestones for that culture? For example, sports events are culturally important for many teenagers; final exams for university students, etc.
- Is there a place where you could support someone in your ministry setting from a different culture?
- Could you seek out someone you would identify from a different culture to invite to one of your milestones?

Encourage

Offer opportunities to talk about cultural (defined broadly) experiences within your ministry setting. Practice a group activity on cultural awareness and sensitivity like this one

(<http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/educators/lessonplans/lesson.cfm?lpid=369&sid=4>).

This exercise was built describing cultural differences within countries.

- What are cultures and cultural behaviors within your context?
- What would a dialog or exchange between them look like? Alternatively, have members self-identify with a culture (Baby Boomers and Gen X and Millennial, attended this ministry setting for 2 years or less and those 5 years or more, etc.).
- What are defining cultural norms for each of these groups?
- How can we build bridges and understanding among these groups that exist within a given setting?

Serve

- What are the cultures within the community around your ministry setting?
- What service opportunities would allow for local cross-cultural exchange? For example, could you serve food at a soup kitchen and sit, eat, and talk with those who come to eat?

Give

- What are local organizations that support cultural understanding in your community?
- Lutheran Social Services and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services are two organizations within the ELCA that support cultural understanding. Check their websites for contact information for local/regional opportunities to give. Specific sites will vary by region.

Closing Prayer: God of all cultures, we thank you for our differences and our commonalities that unite us as your people. Help us to see, to honor, and to love each culture that we encounter just as you love them. Guide us that we may learn to see you in every person we meet and to live in your love. Amen.

Related Resources for congregations

Pray

ELCA Prayer Ventures:

A daily prayer for people and ministries of the ELCA throughout the world:

<http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Prayer-Center/Prayer-Ventures-2.aspx>

Prayers of the day from different faith traditions:

<http://www.beliefnet.com/Prayers/Judaism/Nations-Leaders/Interfaith-Prayer-For-Peace.aspx#>

Study

An ELCA study on Race, Ethnicity, and Culture:

<http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Race-Ethnicity-Culture/study-guide.aspx>

ELCA resources on multicultural understanding: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Topics/Racism/Resources.aspx>

ELCA social statements on ethnic and racial cultures: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Topics/Racism/Social-Teachings.aspx>

ELCA Social Statements on broader cultures: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues.aspx>

Resources to better understand the Bible in its context:

<http://lutheranconfessions.blogspot.com/2013/01/7-great-ways-to-read-bible.html>

Worship

The ELCA offers many ideas and resources for multicultural worship. Learn more here:

http://www.elca.org/~media/Files/Multicultural/multicultural_resource_catalog.pdf

Each congregation has its own unique culture. Find another congregation in your area to visit and learn.

<http://www.elca.org/ELCA/Search/Find-a-Congregation.aspx>

Consider visiting a congregation from a faith tradition in which we share full communion to learn both about local culture and faith culture. Full communion is a formal relationship in which the ELCA and each of the six denominations below share a relationship based on recognition of baptism and sharing of the Eucharist. We respect

our differences, but we may also share clergy and worship together. We share a common commitment to showing Christ's love for the world.

- Presbyterian Church (USA): <http://www.pcusa.org/>
- Reformed Church in America: <http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=7601>
- United Church of Christ: <http://www.ucc.org/find/>
- The Episcopal Church: <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/find-a-church>
- The Moravian Church: <http://www.moravian.org/2013-04-04-15-50-57/congregation-finder.html>
- The United Methodist Church: <http://www.umc.org>

Invite

Invite your congregation to tell its story and to share it with neighbors. Living Lutheran provides an example: <http://www.livinglutheran.com/seeds/how-to-tell-your-congregations-story.html>

Encourage

Choose a culture that is culturally important to your community and learn words of encouragement in that language. Wordreference is a free online foreign language dictionary (<http://wordreference.com/>). One free slang dictionary is <http://onlineslangdictionary.com/>

Serve

Looking for new opportunities to serve? Volunteermatch helps you find organizations in your area that need help: <http://www.volunteermatch.org/>

Give

Race is one way of thinking about culture within our society. The ELCA offers specific ways to give to help advocate for social justice with respect to racial discrimination. <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Topics/Racism/Action.aspx>

The Practice Discipleship Initiative is a ministry of the ELCA Youth Ministry Network (www.elcaymnet.org), in partnership with the ELCA, ELCA Seminaries and ELCA Colleges. The purpose of Practice Discipleship is to foster faithful, thoughtful and intentional leaders in congregations who follow Jesus in their daily lives. For more information, visit www.practicediscipleship.org