



What Is Multicultural Worship?

| *Is it possible to worship with people of such different backgrounds and experiences?*

Goal for the Session

To provide individuals with a basic understanding of what is meant by the term *multicultural worship*, and to provide basic steps for engaging in multicultural worship.

Preparing for the Session

- Pray for the participants who you believe will attend this session. Consider how they might react to this topic.
- Review material ahead of time by reading the Participant Handout and reading Scripture passages. There is enough material in this Leader's Guide to easily stretch this into a two-hour session or make it two sessions long. Discern which activities will work best with your group and watch the time. If you wish to make this a two-session study, assign the "Responding" activity as homework and discuss it in a future session.
- Gather items you will need: pens or pencils, paper, markers in a variety of colors, one large candle to be used as the Christ candle, several votive candles, matches or lighter, and colorful fabric.
- Make copies of the "Opening Liturgy" and the "Closing Liturgy" found as an appendix at the end of this Leader's Guide. Also make copies of the Participant Handout.
- Print out the Scripture passages found in activity 6 in large font or write in large letters and post them in the room.
- Prepare newsprint for the "True Multiculturalism" exercise.

Session at a Glance

OPENING

- Covenant for safe space
- Lighting the candle

EXPLORING

- The story of your name
- Mila and Ernesto
- True multiculturalism
- Scripture
- Stories of success

RESPONDING

- Creating elements of multicultural worship

CLOSING

- Liturgy

- As individuals arrive, invite them to be participants in the "Opening Liturgy" or the "Closing Liturgy." You will need readers and candle lighters.
- If necessary, move furniture around to create a place for the Christ candle and votive candles. Dress the table with fabric and place the candle in the middle with the votive candles around it. You will need one votive candle for each participant.
- If possible, use chairs that can be moved around as participants gather in smaller groups and then rejoin the larger group.
- If Web access is available, have a computer set up, plugged in, and ready to go. Bookmark the Web sites

for each of the churches described in the Participant Handout. As participants arrive, allow individuals to browse through some of the pages of each of the Web sites.

- On newsprint, write out the following definition in large letters and post it where everyone is able to see: *Multicultural worship is the gathering of people representing all the cultures of creation for the purpose of honoring God.*



Teaching Tip

Keep in mind that this topic will likely provoke thoughts and feelings of a highly volatile nature. It will be important to be watchful of participants. Setting up a safe place for sharing will be extremely important. This is usually accomplished through a covenant agreement that can be quickly established before discussion begins.

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Covenant for Safe Space

This will take a longer or shorter amount of time depending upon how familiar the group is with one another. Even if the individuals in the group know one another pretty well, it will still be better to go through this exercise.

Explain that the topic for this session may be one that brings up thoughts and feelings that most people tend to keep to themselves. However, for the sake of growing as individuals and as Christians, it is necessary for all of us to step outside of our comfort zones and trust one another. Each person needs to feel that he or she can say what is on his or her mind and do so without judgment or fear of rejection.

Ask if there are questions. If so, answer them honestly and openly. When there are no more questions, ask if it's okay to move on. If the group agrees, then tell the group that we need to enter into a covenant agreement with one another. Ask everyone to say that they agree. The covenant is that all will work to make others comfortable sharing what is on her or his mind and do so without judgment or fear of rejection. Likewise, all will take care with their words and be sensitive to others' feelings.

This is usually enough for most groups. If there are individuals who need more assurance, you will have to engage their sensitivities and find out what will make their participation easier.

2. Lighting the Candle

Distribute the opening liturgy found at the end of this Leader's Guide and call attention to the Christ candle and surrounding votive candles in the center of the table. Before beginning the liturgy, explain that after the first reading someone will light the Christ candle. Then, after the second reading everyone is invited to pick up a votive candle and light it using the flame from the Christ candle.

Exploring (30 minutes)

3. The Story of Your Name

In groups of three or four, invite participants to share the story of their name. This description can include a translation for it that they know, or a family history tied to it, or how it is culturally significant. Ask them to take a few minutes to think about it and then draw a symbol or a picture to illustrate their story. Then share the story and illustration with the people in each small group.

4. Mila and Ernesto

Remaining in small groups, read the paragraph in the Participant Handout about Mila and Ernesto to the entire group or ask each group to read it together. Give the groups five minutes to discuss these questions.

- Can you relate to either Mila or Ernesto? In what way?
- What do you think may have provoked Ernesto's response?
- If you were on the worship committee of a church and received an evaluation or criticism similar to Ernesto's complaints, how would you respond?
- What would you say to Ernesto?
- Would you change anything about the worship service? Why or why not?

Ask the small groups to join the larger group for the following exercise.

5. True Multiculturalism

On a piece of newsprint, write in large letters:

Posit: If one is to fully engage in true multiculturalism, one must thoroughly embrace and engage: feminism, people of all races, ethnicities, and sexual orientations.

On the top of another piece of newsprint write "Response." On another piece of newsprint write the word "Counter." And finally, on another piece of newsprint, write the word "Argument."

Ask individuals to take a few moments to read the "Posit." Then encourage participants to write on one of the newsprints what they think. Don't take too long on this part.



Teaching Tip: If your group is averse to moving around or is very small, feel free to make this a general discussion. Also, some people may take exception to the idea that multicultural worship must include people of all sexual orientations. In all fairness, some churches who call themselves multicultural also believe the Bible excludes these persons from full participation. You will need to decide how to handle this. If there is a lot of interest, you may choose to do an additional study on that topic.

6. Scripture

Read Genesis 12:2, 3; Revelation 5:9; 7:9.

- How do these passages inform this discussion? In what way does the Scripture have bearing on the topic of multicultural communities of faith and multicultural worship?
- How will we realize these biblical truths if we do not invite and fully include all of the people whose lives are representative, as a whole or in part, of the three categories of feminism, race-ethnicity, and homosexuality?

7. Stories of Success

Refer to the descriptions of the three different congregations in the Participant Handout. If you have a computer with Internet access, take a look at key pages on each of the Web sites so that everyone can see pictures and read key phrases.

Of course, anyone can make something look good in pictures. But these congregations are only an example

of worshipping communities that are doing a great job of being inclusive. They are intentionally reaching out to all of God's creation as they go about the work of growing their church.

Ask: What would you like to learn from these congregations?

Responding (15 minutes)

8. Creating Elements of Multicultural Worship

Say, "We shared a little of our own story and listened to others' stories. Let us take what we have heard and let it be expressed by putting together parts of a worship service."

Explain that you are asking individuals to write some part of a worship service that reflects an understanding toward multiculturalism and total inclusion of all God's creation.

You can either assign or give choices to write the call to worship, prayer of confession and assurance of pardon, offering of ourselves through gifts and talents, prayer of commitment, or benediction.

Add components of a worship service that are familiar to you.

If anyone is willing, let him or her share what he or she has written. Collect all writings, as individuals allow, for possible use in future worship services.

Closing (5 minutes)

9. Liturgy

Return to the table where the Christ candle and votive candles are. Ask individuals to bring the illustration of his or her name and place it on the table with the candles.

Read the closing liturgy together.

Before folks disperse, ask for a quick response. Did we honor our covenant with one another? If there are those who feel that we did not, please feel free to tell the group or let me know by writing it in a note. If everyone agrees that the covenant was honored, be sure to affirm that.

Ask individuals if they would like their illustrations back. Or, if you decide to extend the session, keep them for the next time you gather.

Teaching Alternatives

- **Discuss.** In one of the sermons of Martin Luther King Jr., he says, “You have allowed segregation to creep into the doors of the church. How can such a division exist in the true body of Christ? You must face the tragic fact that when you stand at 11:00 on Sunday morning to sing ‘All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name’ . . . you stand in the most segregated hour of Christian America. They tell me that there is more integration in the entertaining world and other secular agencies than there is in the Christian church. How appalling that is” (Martin Luther King Jr., “Paul’s Letter to American Christians,” November 4, 1956, http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/sermons/561104.000_Paul’s_letter_to_American_Christians.html).
- Dr. King spoke these words in 1956. Are they still true today?
- What are some examples of how segregation is still practiced even in the twenty-first century?
- What are some of the ways we try to rationalize or justify segregation in contemporary settings?
- What does this say about our ability to be truly inclusive?
- What are the implications for engaging in multicultural communities of faith?
- **Media Bias.** Bring in several newspapers from the previous week. Try to have a variety so that you are not picking on one periodical in particular. Also bring in magazines. Again, a very wide variety is important.

Give each person a section of the newspaper or a magazine and ask her or him to look through the stories. Discover if there are biases of any kinds, whether subtle or overt, in the writings. Remind participants that they are reading for all kinds of biases: male versus female, white versus race-ethnicity, youth versus elder, rich versus poor, “east side” versus “west side,” romantic love between man and woman versus romantic love between woman and woman or man and man, and so forth. Remember that the bias can be evidenced through the writing of the story or the story itself.

- What did you discover?
- Are you aware of media bias on a daily basis?
- How should the church respond to this?
- What does God require?

For More Information

- Michael V. Angrosino, *Talking about Cultural Diversity in Your Church: Gifts and Challenges* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2001).
- Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford Press, 2003).
- Eric H. F. Law, *Inclusion: Making Room for Grace* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000).
- Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993).
- William Sonnenschein, *The Diversity Toolkit: How You Can Build and Benefit from a Diverse Workforce* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1999).

Opening Liturgy

Reader 1: We are gathering in this time and place because you have called us. Your presence honors us, giving light and life to the world around us. We are amazed with your creation and we are blessed that we, your creatures, are part of such beauty.

Light the Christ candle.

Reader 2: We are creating a sacred space so that we may receive all that your Spirit illuminates and enlightens in us. We are open to hearing from one another as your Spirit moves and speaks through the thoughts and ideas of each person gathered.

Invite participants to light individual candles using the Christ candle.

Reader 3: We are offering our stories for one another and for you. We will share of our journeys, of our lives . . .

that we may know and be known
that we may behold one another in sacred trust
that we may step aside as we make room at the table for all.

Amen.

Closing Liturgy

Reader 1: As we go, open us to the possibilities and opportunities of becoming a true reflection of your perfect realm, where all creation sings your glory and worships you.

All: Help us as we go.

Reader 2: As we go, move us beyond words to action so that our praise is more than lip service and our “Amen” is more than intellectual assent.

All: Guide us as we go.

Reader 3: As we go, instill in us the urgency to bring about your realm here on earth—inviting everyone, in all circumstances—through our neighborhood congregations and the Body of Christ that extends around the world.

All: Bless us as we go.

Amen.

Extinguish the individual votive candles and then the Christ candle.