

Prophetic Unity/ *Unidad Profética*:

Embracing a *mestizaje* approach to relationships in the church.

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Abstract

This project seeks to work toward a “prophetic unity” between Hispanic and Anglo Disciples in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arizona (CCAZ). The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (CCDC) has long proclaimed that “unity is our polar star” but too often has settled for superficial unity at best. A theological understanding of what the author calls “prophetic unity” is presented as a vision for a church characterized by mutuality, shared power, and reciprocal affirmation. An analysis of racialization in the United States as an obstacle to prophetic unity is offered with a focus on White blindness to Whiteness, White normativity, and White expectations of assimilation. The work of Hispanic authors is presented to argue that the concept of *mestizaje* offers an alternative to assimilation. *Mestizaje*, as defined in this project, allows for the other to remain other while living and working together and celebrating communion-with-diversity. The failure of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to achieve a genuine unity is observed, and a process for leading Arizona Disciples toward prophetic unity is proposed. A reflective analysis of two events is offered: the first, a relationship building and leadership development event for young adults; the second, an event for all Arizona Disciples called “*Juntos: A Regional Gathering.*”

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Table of Contents

The Dialogue	1
Chapter 1: Introduction	2
Chapter 2: The Theological Framing: Being “The Church:”	
Trinitarian Theology and the “Body of Christ”	14
Chapter 3: The Broader Context:	
The United States: A Racialized Society	34
Chapter 4: The Ministry Context:	
The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arizona	66
Chapter 5: The Project: Transformation through Leader Development	95
Chapter 6: Analysis of the Retreat, Lessons Learned, and Next Steps	111
Dialogue for a New Beginning	131
Bibliography	133
Appendix 1: Event plan	137
Appendix 2: Terminology Worksheet Exercise	141
Appendix 3: Participant Handouts	142
Appendix 4: Privilege Bead Exercise	149
Appendix 5: Feedback Questionnaire and Participant Responses	152
Appendix 6: <i>Juntos</i> : A Regional Gathering: Questions, Liturgy, and Sermon	157

The Dialogue

In the beginning there was a dialogue...

The scene: Retired minister's breakfast in September 2019.

The characters: Myself -- the brand-new Regional Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arizona

5 retired ministers

The dialogue:

Retired Minister #1: "How many Disciples congregations are there in Arizona?"

Regional Minister: "Twenty-four. One in Prescott, one in Globe, six in Tucson, and sixteen in the greater Phoenix area."

Retired Minister #2: "There aren't sixteen Disciples congregations in Phoenix."

Regional Minister: "Well, I'm new here. But I think there are."

Retired Minister #2: "Name them!"

Regional Minister: "Well, there's Coolwater and First Christian Church in Scottsdale. There's Sun City. Foothills. Larkspur. Alfa y Omega. Iglesia Hispana de Glendale ...

Retired Minister #2: (Interrupting) "Oh! Are you counting the Hispanic churches?"

Regional Minister: (Stunned) "Well ... yes. Yes, I am."

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The Author's Journey

To begin, some self-description is in order, as so much of this project is based on self-learning and the building of relationships in order to increase my capacity to lead in ecclesiastical transformation. I am a straight, white, cisgender male raised with most of the blind spots that come with such an identity. I grew up in Arizona, moving away at age 15. My father was also a Disciples pastor, so I have been in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (CCDC) my entire life. My brother was a Global Mission Intern in Honduras from 1990-92 and married a Honduran. While visiting them after my college graduation, I experienced what I call my re-conversion to Christianity during worship on a rooftop in Tegucigalpa, an experience which led me to feel called to a life of church leadership. Vanderbilt Divinity School helped me develop, and I was heavily influenced by Liberation and Process Theologies. I describe myself as a pragmatic, process-oriented, liberation theologian. In 2019, I was called to serve as Regional Minister in my home state for the Christian Church in Arizona, where I am blessed to serve and very excited to be able to reconnect with the Hispanic Christian community to which I feel I owe my faith.¹

¹ A note on voicing and pronouns: As a pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), I will sometimes use “we” and “our” to refer to the denomination, not to be exclusive of readers who are not Disciples, but to locate myself in the middle of the community I discuss. I write the analysis sections of this project mostly in the third person, however, for example referring to White people in chapter 3 and Disciples in Chapter 4 as “they” and “them.” In making this choice, I do not intend to distance myself or exempt myself from the issues discussed. Critiques of Whiteness and White blindness, and critiques of mistakes by Disciples leaders, are directed as much to myself as to any other persons or groups mentioned.)

The Problem and The Goal for Arizona Disciples:

As exemplified by “The Dialogue” presented above, the specific problem this project seeks to address is the disconnect between the Anglo/Euro-American² and Hispanic/Latinx³ congregations in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arizona (CCAZ or “Arizona Disciples”). Theologically speaking, it is an ecclesiological problem, a misunderstanding of what it means to be “The Church.”⁴ Disciples in Arizona have not yet reached our goal of Christian unity, have not yet become “the body of Christ” that the apostle Paul envisioned in 1 Corinthians 12. Sociologically speaking, it is also a problem rooted in the racial context of the United States of America.

Congregations are composed of human beings who are prone to reflect the divisions of the prevailing culture. And thus, the problem presented above goes beyond Arizona. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada (CCDC or “Disciples”) and many other Christian denominations in the United States have also been infected with racial division, racial power differentials, and the failure to be “The Church” that the Apostle Paul envisioned. The goal of this project is to help build the capacity of Arizona Disciples to become “The Church,” characterized by what I will call “prophetic unity.” To become “The Church” requires overcoming historic and

² Racial labels and groupings are problematic in all kinds of ways, and there is no perfectly agreed upon term for any group of people. I will generally use “Anglo” for English speaking congregations primarily made up of people of European descent but have here included “Anglo/Euro-American” to emphasize the broader European origin of many people in “Anglo” congregations.

³ In academic circles, “Latinx” is often preferred to “Hispanic.” Most of the Spanish-speaking Disciples in Arizona, however, refer to themselves as “Hispanic” or “hispanos,” and some have openly eschewed the term “Latinx.” Exploring terms people prefer for themselves became part of my research. Mindful of the imperfections of any label, I have chosen to use “Hispanic” to affirm the preferred term of Arizona Disciples. “Anglo” and “Hispanic” thus will refer to historic language groups, rather than used as racial labels.

⁴ I use “The Church” in quotation marks here and elsewhere to signify what Samuel Pagan envisions as “an inclusive, pluralistic, and multicultural church, the body of the living Christ in the midst of the North American society.” (see note 86 on p. 33 in Chapter 2). I will drop the quotation marks for simplicity but use capital “C” to mean the same.

systemic racism and learn to be a Church based on mutual respect and shared power, a Church bound together by a covenant of love,⁵ a Church where *if one member suffers, all suffer*.⁶ In other words, the goal of this project is to meet the challenge of the General Minister and President of the CCDC, Rev. Teresa Hord-Owens, who calls Disciples to “be the Church we say we are,”⁷ to intentionally live into the denomination’s ideals.

The Larger Denominational Context of the Problem:

In 1999, Rev. Dr. Dick Hamm, then General Minister and President of the CCDC, offered a guide for the ministry of the CCDC called the “2020 Vision” which presented two denominational goals. The first goal established a mission imperative of becoming an anti-racist, pro-reconciliation church and the second goal called for the planting of 1,000 new congregations by the year 2020.⁸ The Disciples’ office of New Church Ministry reports that 1,049 congregations were started under the 2020 Vision, and over one-half of these new congregations identify as primarily “Hispanic, African-American, or Pacific-Asian.”⁹ Disciples are celebrating the increase in diversity; we now have congregations that worship in 28 different languages. But as exemplified above in “The Dialogue,” we are still far from being authentically “The Church” -- a church of mutual partners in mission, a church that reflects the authentic unity that Paul envisions as “the body of Christ.” We have started over 1,000 new congregations, accomplishing one goal of the 2020 Vision, but we are still learning what it means to be an anti-racist,

⁵ A paraphrase from the Preamble to The Design of the Christian Church (DoC).

⁶ 1 Cor. 12:26a. This and all scripture quotations are from the NRSV.

⁷ Rev. Terri Hord-Owens, “We need to be the Church we say we are,”

<https://disciples.org/congregations/we-need-to-be-the-church-we-say-we-are>. June 3, 2020

⁸ Richard L Hamm, *2020 Vision for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2011), 116, 125.

⁹ *2020 Vision: New Church Impact Report*. n.d., accessed May 19, 2021.

<https://online.fliphtml5.com/vzjz/kqoy/#p=1>, 14.

pro-reconciling church. In fact, the Disciples are sometimes problematically described as “primarily White with a growing number of Racial/Ethnic minorities” – implying a White normativity that serves as a roadblock to mutual partnership in mission. This project will embrace a *mestizaje* approach¹⁰ that seeks to decenter White normativity and help us grow into a Church with shared power, resources, vision, and mutuality – a Church that embodies the truth that we are all equally vital to the body of Christ.

The Ministry Context: Arizona Disciples and the CCDC

The ministry context for my project is the Christian Church in Arizona, one of the 31 Regions of the CCDC. In the last 20 years, 20 new Hispanic Disciples congregations have been started in Arizona; only seven remain. Throughout these 20 years, despite sincere efforts on the part of Regional leadership, there has been a limited and imperfect relationship between Hispanic and Anglo congregations. Various factors have resulted in Hispanic congregations in Arizona operating as a parallel regional church rather than as part of one Regional church. The “Region” has often been seen as the Anglo Region, while the Hispanic congregations join together in a “Convención.” While the *convenciones* of the National Hispanic and Bilingual Fellowship are designed as fellowship or affinity groups for Hispanic Disciples, meant to support Hispanic Disciples congregations, many people were told that the *convención* was like a “Hispanic Region,” separate from an “Anglo Region.” Regional Boards, Commissions, and other decision-making groups have been almost exclusively made up of Anglos. Clearly, there has not been a mutual understanding of what it means for these Anglo and Hispanic

¹⁰ Chapter 3, part 2 will develop the use of a *mestizaje* approach to intercultural relationships as a preferable alternative to assimilation and White normativity.

congregations to be “bound together in God’s covenant of love.”¹¹ This project represents a step forward toward building the capacity of these two groups, Hispanic and Anglo Disciples in Arizona, to embody the foundational unity of “The Church” and to live into becoming one church, sharing leadership, resources, and ministry together. Prophetic unity is the goal – a unity based on mutuality and shared power, not on superficiality and photo-ops.

Not a New or Isolated Problem

The struggle of Disciples to live in unity, especially along racial lines, did not begin in Arizona. Sandhya Jha’s *Room at the Table: Struggle for Unity and Equality in Disciples History* explores the history of what she calls “Disciples of color.”¹² Jha’s work exposes some of the ways Disciples of Color were often treated as second-class citizens within their own denomination. The history of Native-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, and African-Americans in the life of the CCDC is often omitted or diminished in major works which focus primarily on the history and development of European-American Disciples. As she notes at the beginning:

*Throughout Disciples history, there has been considerably more diversity in the midst of the fragile unity of our church than our history books would indicate. Black people, both slave and free, joined a church at best ambivalent (or more accurately multivalent) in its response to abolition. Latinos and Latinas joined a church eager to engage in missions in Spanish-speaking countries, but uncomfortable ministering with or even acknowledging the ministries of Spanish-speaking Americans. Asians found Christ through a church that never spoke out against discriminatory immigration acts that buffeted their communities whenever their labor had been extracted.*¹³

¹¹ From “The Design of the Christian Church (DoC),” the guiding document of our denomination.

¹² Sandhya Jha, *Room at the Table: Struggle for Unity and Equality in Disciples History* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2009), 7.

¹³ Ibid, 1-2.

Referring to Disciples' ideals of Christian unity, and our actual practice, Jha writes:

“Sometimes we rose to the core values of our denomination, sometimes we failed, and on some occasions those core values were insufficient to mobilize action on behalf of the realm of God.”¹⁴ In Chapter 4, I will explore the problems of racial division and injustice within our denomination, including some painful stories of moments of fragmentation within the body of Christ.

Approaching the Problem

Disciples have often been proud of calling our movement “the most American of denominations.” Unfortunately, when it comes to race, this description is far too apt. Disciples of Color have been treated as second class citizens, underfunded, under-resourced, and disrespected. As will be explored more in chapters two and three, true Christian unity cannot be expected when all parties are not respected and do not have equity of resources. In the words of Robert Goizueta: “No authentic dialogue is possible between teachers and students, masters and slaves, men and women, rich and poor, Anglo and Hispanic – unless and until the asymmetrical power relationships are corrected.”¹⁵

Since the problem is both widespread and deeply embedded in the church and in American culture, I must necessarily take a long-term approach to transforming the Disciples church culture in Arizona toward what I call “prophetic unity” – a church in which we share leadership, resources, and ministry together in a relationship of mutuality. No series of workshops or weekend retreats will be enough to instantaneously heal long-term wounds and divisions. Nevertheless, we must begin.

¹⁴ Ibid, 7.

¹⁵ Robert Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 127.

I begin with myself. As the Regional Minister and President of the CCAZ, I have considerable influence in the selection of Regional leadership and the use of Regional resources: i.e., financial resources, time and energy resources, relational resources, and media resources. In addition to working hard to improve my Spanish language skills and my ability to relate directly to our Hispanic community, this project has led me to do considerable reading about Hispanic peoples and cultures, theology from Hispanic perspectives, and racial formation in the United States. I have directed Regional financial resources to create a new position, *Enlace Regional* (Regional Liaison), to help bridge gaps between Hispanics and Anglos (including myself). This position is a concrete step intended both to foster relationships with Hispanic Disciples and to consult Hispanic Disciples on all aspects of Regional ministry in order to practice mutuality and avoid unconscious privileging of predominantly Anglo congregations and ministries. Together we are working to create more racial/ethnic equity in the make-up of our Regional boards and commissions, and we begin every board meeting with a presentation and discussion focused on anti-racism education.

The goal of doing my own anti-oppression work is to build my capacity to lead transformation within the CCAZ. My two-pronged approach is both theological and sociological/relational. Through my preaching throughout the Region, anti-racism education, and retreats and workshops for both clergy and lay leaders, I hope to foster an understanding of “The Church” as a place of mutuality, shared resources, and authentic communion. This understanding is the focus of chapter 2. In addition to theological education and visioning, I will also create opportunities for personal interaction and relationship building between Hispanics and Anglos. It is my hope that theological

reflection and education, coupled with relational opportunities to build familiarity with and appreciation for each other, will drive social transformation within the church.

For the purposes of this project, I will focus on one particular retreat: a retreat for young adult leaders entitled “Learning to Be ‘The Church’ Together.” Chapters 5 and 6 will focus on the planning process for, and the analysis of, the retreat. Arizona is blessed with a large number of young adult Hispanic-Americans who have grown up and have attended schools in the United States, are fluent in both English and Spanish, and live as part of and “in between” multiple cultures: Hispanic and Anglo, Mexican and American, immigrant and citizen. It is my belief that investing in theological education for and relationship building among our young adult leaders is a path toward eventually “becoming The Church we say we are.”

Outline of the Project:

Having presented the problem, goal, contexts, and approach for this project above, I will establish in Chapter 2 a historical, scriptural, and theological foundation that, for Disciples, “prophetic unity” lies at the heart of what it means to be “the Church.” By using the modifier “prophetic,” I am emphasizing that I do not think of unity as uniformity. Nor do I seek a superficial presentation of togetherness, a photo-op. “Prophetic unity” is a sacred relationship that affirms, celebrates, and respects the Other. The call to prophetic unity challenges the divisions of the status quo within our fragmented world. I will offer a brief tour through Disciples history with its emphasis on unity, beginning with our early 19th century founders, continuing through the 20th century, and concluding with the 21st century work of Michael Kinnamon and Jan Linn. I will

highlight that throughout our history, Disciples leaders have claimed that scripture calls us to true oneness, that unity is indeed “our polar star.” I will next look at key scriptures Disciples have used in their calls to unity. With the assistance of the writing of Dr. Jerry Sumney, I will look in depth at the Apostle Paul’s image of the “body of Christ” in 1 Corinthians 12 as a scriptural vision of prophetic unity.

Following the tour through Disciples history and the look at key scriptures, I will use the work of Mark Heim, Zaida Maldonado Pérez, Loida I. Martell-Otero, Roberto Goizueta, and especially Metropolitan John Zizioulas to explore in depth a theological understanding of unity-in-diversity based on the Trinity. For these writers, the calling of the church is to embody the unity-in-diversity, or “communion and otherness,” that originates in the very nature of the Trinity. Chapter 2 concludes with my ecclesiological vision of the church as an embodiment of prophetic unity.

In Chapter 3, I will examine the cultural contexts in which the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arizona exists. Chapter 3 is divided into two large parts. Part 1 looks at the racialized society of the United States. I will focus on particular aspects of the dominant culture which are most pertinent to a discussion of prophetic unity or the lack thereof in the CCDC. Namely, White¹⁶ blindness to Whiteness, White normativity, and White expectations of assimilation. Using the work of Joseph Barndt, Jim Wallis, Shelley Tochluk, and Robin DiAngelo, I’ll discuss aspects of the socialization of White people that results in blindness to Whiteness and White privilege. Using the work of DiAngelo, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, and Andrew Draper, I will look at the

¹⁶ Many authors of race capitalize “White” and “Whiteness” when referring to the hegemony of a dominant culture, while using lower case when referring to individual white people. But usage does not seem consistent. I will usually capitalize racial terms when referring to the concept, but when quoting I will stick with the usage by the author.

problematic tendency of universalizing White/European culture and holding it as the norm for all society. Using the work of Jennifer Harvey, Angel D. Santiago-Vendrell, and Andrew Draper, I will explore the oppressive expectation that People of Color will assimilate to the dominant White culture, losing their cultural identity in the process.

Part 2 of Chapter 3 will explore these and other themes through the eyes of Hispanic authors, followed by an exploration of characteristics of Hispanic culture(s). Jorge Gracia, Roberto Goizueta, and Virgilio Elizondo all write powerfully about *mestizaje* as a preferable alternative to assimilation, offering *mestizaje* as another way of conceptualizing communion-with-otherness. Gracia, Goizueta, and Fernando Segovia highlight experiences with expectations of White/European normativity. Throughout this writing, and especially here, I offer extended quotations of Hispanic scholars and Disciples of Color. I do so in an attempt to learn and share from them in their own words, an essential approach to decentering Whiteness.¹⁷ Chapter 3 concludes with a brief summary of some key points the church must consider in attempting to seek a healthy and prophetic unity.

Chapter 4 is also divided into two parts. Part 1 will build on Chapter 3 to look in greater depth at the history of relationships among the different races and ethnicities within the Disciples movement. Using the work of Sandhya Jha, Bill Lee, and Daisy Machado, I will explore moments where the Disciples both succeeded and failed at embodying unity, at times in quite painful ways. Notable here is an analogy Bill Lee highlights after hearing the question: “What does a minnow do when it is swallowed by a whale?”

¹⁷ Books that I have read in Spanish I will quote the original Spanish to honor/respect the Author’s context and language. I will then put my efforts to translate into English in (parentheses).

Part 2 moves to the more focused situation of the Disciples in Arizona. I begin with the history of Disciples in Arizona, focusing especially on the very recent development of Hispanic congregations in the years after 2000. I will look especially at records from the Arizona New Church Development Committee (NCDC) to analyze discussions and decisions as they attempted to create a unified Region with a strong new Hispanic presence, and I will analyze these discussions and decisions in light of the analysis in Chapter 3. I will explore some of the cultural differences between the Hispanic and Anglo Disciples in Arizona. I will then analyze some of the historical and current differences in financial and property resources and conclude with a summary of where things stand today.

Chapter 5 first summarizes important conclusions from Chapters 2-4, including the need to decenter Whiteness, share power, and embrace a *mestizaje* approach to church unity. These conclusions propel us forward to plans for a first step on the journey toward prophetic unity. Namely, a one-day event for young adults. Originally, we had planned for a full weekend retreat, but due to a surge in Covid cases we shortened it to a one-day event. Chapter 5 will describe how the event was planned based on the theology of Chapter 2 and the historical/contextual analysis of Chapters 3 and 4. Robert Chao Romero's *Brown Church* figures prominently in the design of the event design.

In the final chapter, Chapter 6, I will offer a description and analysis of the event, as well as an analysis of the perceived outcomes. I will share feedback from both the retreat leaders and participants. What we learned about ourselves, other cultural worship practices, and Christian mission will be explored. What we feel inspired to do in the future will also be mentioned. A brief description and analysis of a follow-up event will

be presented along with an exploration of the next steps on our journey toward prophetic unity. I will conclude by offering a new and very different dialogue that took place at this follow-up event.

CHAPTER 2: The Theological Framing

Trinitarian Theology and the “Body of Christ”

Disciples and Unity

The movement which eventually became known as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) emerged in the early 19th century as a movement for Christian unity. The leaders who initiated the movement – Barton Stone, Thomas Campbell, and Alexander Campbell - held deep convictions that the Church must be united to truly witness to God’s love. The early slogan, “Christian Unity is our polar star,”¹⁸ testified to the importance that early Disciples leaders placed on oneness, a theological emphasis that continues to be relevant and much needed in our fractured world. The purpose of this chapter is to establish a historical, scriptural, and theological foundation for understanding what I call “prophetic unity” as an essential component of the mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The term “prophetic unity” does not mean uniformity, in the manner that a hegemonic group insists on conformity to its norms before granting the “privilege” of “inclusion.” Nor does it mean a superficial unity, in which we all smile for the camera while ignoring significant differences between us. It also does not mean only a structural unity, in which we are formally united but have little or no relationship. The unity that twenty-first century Disciples are called to seek, prophetic unity, is unity-in-diversity, where we each bring our authentic selves together in a covenantal relationship of mutuality.

¹⁸ This phrase is attributed to Barton Stone by William Garrett West, *Barton Warren Stone: Early American Advocate of Christian Unity* (Nashville: The Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1954), 130.

Barton Stone signed the *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*, one of the two most influential historical documents for Disciples. It declares the foundational unity¹⁹ of the Church. After forming the Springfield Presbytery in 1803, Stone and his colleagues quickly realized that by forming a new presbytery, they had created yet one more division in the Body of Christ. So, they voted to dissolve their organization in 1804: “We *will*, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large; for there is but one Body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.”²⁰ Stone would call his movement simply the “Christian Church,” emphasizing his commitment to Christian unity.

A few years later, Thomas Campbell penned his *Declaration and Address*, spelling out his conviction that “the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures.”²¹ Campbell saw unity as a gift from God, the intention of God, and essential to shining the light of God’s love to the world:

That it is the grand design and native tendency of our holy religion to reconcile and unite men to God, and to each other, in truth and love, to the glory of God, and their own present and eternal good, will not, we presume, be denied, by any of the genuine subjects of Christianity. ... In so far, then, as this holy unity and unanimity in faith and love is attained, just

¹⁹ “Oneness” and “unity” are often used interchangeably, but they can have a slightly different meaning. Although not always perfectly distinguishable, I will use “oneness” when referring to the connection that underlies all being, and I will use “unity” to refer to the bringing together or connecting of otherwise disparate parts. “Oneness” is a gift from God and the foundation of all matter; “unity” is the embodiment or living out of this foundational oneness. I will also attempt to follow Campbell and Stone’s use of “unity” in their writings and early Disciples’ slogans.

²⁰ *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*, (Springfield, KY: Springfield Presbytery, 1804). Reprinted by The Bethany Press in St. Louis, MO: 1960.

²¹ Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington* (Washington, PA: Brown & Sample, 1809), Proposition 1.

*in the same degree is the glory of God and the happiness of men promoted and secured.*²²

Indeed, Thomas Campbell declares: “Division among the Christians is a horrid evil ... antichristian ... antisciptural ... and antinatural.”²³

Thomas’ son Alexander furthered his father’s argument that the church must practice unity in order to witness to God’s love in the world. In *The Christian System*, Alexander Campbell writes: “Nothing is essential to the converting of the world but the union and co-operation of Christians.”²⁴ Campbell cites Jesus’ prayer in John 17 as a foundational scripture for understanding the importance of unity: “From Messiah’s intercession above quoted, it is incontrovertible that union is strength, and disunion weakness.”²⁵ Campbell also draws upon Paul’s image of the church as “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12-31) to illustrate how we are both united and retain our own individual uniqueness.²⁶ And like his father, Alexander insists that unity is a gift from God:

*No mortal need fancy that he shall have the honor of devising either the plan of uniting Christians in one holy band of zealous co-operation, or of converting Jews and Gentiles to the faith that Jesus is that seed in whom all the families of the earth are yet to be blessed. The plan is divine. It is ordained by God; and, better still, it is already revealed.*²⁷

Michael Kinnamon and Jan Linn, in their 2019 book *Disciples: Who We Are & What Holds Us Together*, continue to trace the Disciples’ emphasis on unity throughout our history. They cite the title of a book from the 1950s by Disciples historian Howard

²² Ibid., 1.

²³ Ibid., Proposition 10.

²⁴ Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing Company, 1835), 87.

²⁵ Ibid., 86.

²⁶ Ibid., 55-59

²⁷ Ibid., 86.

Short: *Christian Unity is Our Business*.²⁸ Short quotes Peter Ainslie, champion of the cause for unity in the 1910's: "Take Christian unity out of the message of the Disciples and their existence only adds to the enormity of the sin of division by making another division."²⁹ Kinnamon and Linn also cite T.J. Liggett who wrote in 1980 "that the wholeness of the body of Christ remains 'the dominant concept of our church.'"³⁰

In addition to the list of Disciples' writings that emphasize unity offered by Kinnamon and Linn, Pablo Jiménez wrote a book for Spanish-speaking Disciples entitled *Somos Uno* (We are One).³¹ Like the Campbells, Jiménez emphasizes the importance of unity for Christian mission. "*Si queremos que el mundo crea nuestro mensaje, debemos estar unidos. De otro modo, el mundo no creará nuestra proclamación del Evangelio.*" ("If we want the world to believe our message, we should be united. Otherwise, the world will not believe our proclamation of the Gospel.")³² Jiménez also emphasizes that the unity we seek is not to be confused with uniformity.

"Buscamos unidad dentro de la diversidad. Podemos trabajar a favor de varias causas nobles en unión a personas de otras denominaciones sin renunciar a nuestros principios teológicos y pastorales."
("We are looking for unity within diversity. We can work for various noble causes in union with people from other denominations without renouncing our own theological and pastoral principles.")³³

Having highlighted calls to unity throughout Disciples history, Kinnamon and Linn add their own voices. Like Thomas and Alexander Campbell, they claim that unity

²⁸ Michael Kinnamon and Jan Linn, *Disciples: Who We Are & What Holds Us Together* (St Louis, MO: CBP, 2019), 60.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

³¹ Pablo A. Jiménez, *Somos Uno: Historia, teología y gobierno de la Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo)* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005). In his introduction, Jimenez mentions that since many of the leaders of Hispanic Disciples congregations came from other denominations, he felt it would be helpful to write an introductory type of book in Spanish explaining who the Disciples are, including our history, basic beliefs, and structure. (pp. 2-4)

³² *Ibid.*, 57 (Translations mine.)

³³ *Ibid.*

is a gift, already given by God: “The calling is ‘to become what we are’ – a single body with many members, a single house with many stones, a single vine with many branches.”³⁴ They continue: “One implication of this insight is that unity is not synonymous with, or dependent on, human agreement. To claim that unity is constituted by our agreement on doctrine or social justice or anything else is a form of works righteousness.”³⁵ Kinnamon and Linn claim:

*this idea of unity as gift ... gives the ecumenical movement its prophetic edge. Persons of different races, classes, nations, and political affiliations find themselves bound in fellowship, not because they agree on all things, but because through their communion with Christ they have communion with one another. No matter how estranged they are humanly speaking, in the body of Christ they cannot say, “I have no need of you.”*³⁶

Kinnamon and Linn emphasize that “unity is diverse.”³⁷ They cite Galatians 3:27-28, paraphrasing that “unity in Christ ... brings together Jew and Gentile, male and female, liberal and conservative, Hispanic and Anglo, urban and rural. Such diversity is a blessing when it is part of a greater whole.”³⁸ Like Jiménez, Kinnamon and Linn call for a unity that is not uniformity. The unity they envision allows people to come together while maintaining their own uniqueness, united but distinct, one body with many members. They envision a unity that can be described, in the words of Metropolitan John Zizioulas which we will explore below, as balancing “communion and otherness.”³⁹

Scripture and Unity

Perhaps the three most cited scriptures by Disciples leaders, when calling for unity, are John 17:20-21, Galatians 3:27-28, and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. John 17:20-21

³⁴ Kinnamon and Linn, 63.

³⁵ Ibid., 63.

³⁶ Ibid., 64.

³⁷ Ibid., 65.

³⁸ Ibid., 65.

³⁹ John D. Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness* (London: T Clark, 2006).

has Jesus praying for unity, a prayer that leads Disciples to stress that Jesus himself wants us to be united. In Galatians, Paul emphasizes the power of baptism into Christ to bring us together – especially people of different ethnic, gender, or class identities. Where there is division, there is a lack of understanding of what it means to be “in Christ Jesus.” But it is perhaps Paul’s metaphor of the Church as the “body of Christ” that is the dominant scriptural call to unity. So, let us take a deeper look at 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

To understand more fully Paul’s metaphor of the Church as “the body of Christ,” we must look at the overall context of the church in Corinth as presented in *1 Corinthians*. Paul is aghast upon hearing that there are divisions, factions, quarrels among the Corinthians. “Has Christ been divided? ... I thank God that I baptized none of you!” (1 Cor. 1:13-14) He continues: “For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations?” (1 Cor. 3:3) In chapters 1-3, Paul insists that life in Christ, or “the message of the cross,” is different than life lived according to human inclinations. The love of Christ calls us to overcome all human quarrels and dissension. He continues this message throughout the entire letter, dealing with several causes of dissension, most notably their behavior at the Lord’s Supper.

In chapter 11, Paul chastises the Corinthians for their malpractice of the Lord’s Supper: “When you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.”

Biblical scholar Jerry Sumney summarizes the problems:

At this early time, the Supper included an entire meal. Some church members, particularly the wealthy, have been conducting themselves as they would in other settings that included meals with people from different social classes. The accepted protocol at a banquet was to have different

*food for different social classes. The more wealthy the person, the better the food and drink they were served. So some at the meal might have steak while others had a hamburger and some even got Spam.*⁴⁰

This kind of class division, where the rich fared better than the poor, was unacceptable to Paul. Class division is absolutely a misunderstanding of what it means to be “the Church,” what it means to be “in Christ,” and what it means to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. “What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?” (1 Cor. 11:22) “The Church” must be something different from our normal social settings fraught with division, hierarchy, and inequality. Sumney continues: “Paul reacts vehemently. He demands that they all eat the same food rather than having different food according to social class. This sameness at the meal both represents and enacts the oneness of all in the church; none can claim privilege based on social status.”⁴¹ The Lord’s Supper is not to be just a token symbol tacked onto the end of a community meal to give it a flavor of spirituality. The whole meal must reflect sharing, unity, and oneness. Paul, according to Sumney, “says that those who fail to see and embody the oneness of the body of Christ (the church) by serving everyone the same food come under a curse.”⁴²

Against this backdrop of division in the church, Paul offers his constructive vision: the church as “the body of Christ.” “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” (1 Cor. 12:12) As Kinnamon and Linn note in their use of Galatians 3:27-28, Paul here also emphasizes unity-in-diversity. “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into

⁴⁰ Jerry Sumney, *Paul: Apostle and Fellow Traveler* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), Chapter 6 (accessed on-line as an eBook and no page numbers are given).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

(1 Cor. 12:13) Continuing the theme of unity-in-diversity, Paul discusses how the many different parts of our bodies do different things, serve different functions, but are all part of the same body. The parts of the body cannot disassociate themselves from each other, nor do they need to do anything special to be part of the same body. By their very nature they are already part of one body, a metaphor that led Thomas and Alexander Campbell to claim that our unity is a gift already established, not something we have to create.

What affects one of us, affects all of us. “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” (1 Cor. 12:26) Paul’s metaphor of the body of Christ is meant to teach all of us that our well-being is tied up with each other, that the essence of “the Church” is to be a community in which mutuality is practiced.

For Paul, it is the gift of the Spirit that enables and empowers humans to overcome our tendencies toward individualism, hierarchy, and division. Receiving the gift of the Spirit is what Paul has in mind when he talks about the message of the cross. In the words of Jerry Sumney:

Paul asserts that the Spirit enables believers to put the good of others ahead of their own good ... Paul’s use of the “word of the cross” as the paradigm for living means that he rejects an individualistic understanding of the gospel. The “word of the cross” exemplifies the belief that the good of the community is more important than the good of individuals. For Paul, the cross calls all believers to shift their pattern of thinking so that the community’s good takes precedence over his or her own good ... [Paul] contends that God’s wisdom is seen in Christ being willing to put the good of others before his own good, in being willing to accept disadvantage—even to the point of a shameful death—in order to provide advantages for others.⁴³

⁴³ Ibid.

Paul's metaphor of the church as the body of Christ, then, sets a positive vision of a church that unites people by encouraging us to hold each other's concerns as deeply as our own.

Theology and Unity

Paul's vision of oneness in the body of Christ, where "if one member suffers, all suffer together," may also be called "holy relationship." God created us for holy relationship: relationship with God, relationship with each other, and relationship with all of creation. Trinitarian theologian Mark Heim claims that sacred relationship is ascribed to the very nature of God, using the Greek term *perichoresis* to attempt to describe the in-dwelling of each aspect of the Trinitarian God with each other.⁴⁴ God's *perichoretic* nature extends outward to all of Creation. Sacred relationship recognizes that we are not separate, isolated, individual human beings, but that our well-being and indeed our entire existence is connected to God, to each other, and to all of Creation. Heim names this sacred relationship "communion."

*This understanding of communion derives ultimately from what we understand of the relations among the trinitarian persons: that communion is a unity-in-difference... Communion is a mutual indwelling, in which the distinct persons are neither confused nor identified but are enriched by their participation in each other's inner life.*⁴⁵

Note that unity is not to be confused with uniformity, or fusion, or merging, or assimilation, but is a holy relationship of unique but intimately connected beings, groups, or communities.

⁴⁴ Mark Heim, "Salvation as Communion: Partakers of the Divine Nature," *Theology Today* 61, (2004): 322-33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 325.

Based on this understanding of communion, Heim offers his vision of what it means to be “the Church.”

the Church is a body called to live out this communion. It is a community of people whose relations with each other are shaped by their common participation in relation with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. For individuals to be "in Christ" is inextricably to be part of the universal church that is Christ's body. The church is an embodiment of the scriptural injunction that those who say they love God and hate their neighbors are liars. Communion with God that does not, at the same time, encompass concrete communion realized in life with other human beings is a blatant contradiction of the gospel.⁴⁶

Further, Heim claims that such communion not only existed in the beginning, in the very nature of God, but is also our ultimate salvation. Indeed, he offers a definition of Christian salvation: “Salvation is a relation of communion with God and other creatures in Christ.”⁴⁷ As we’ve seen, Paul uses the “body of Christ” metaphor to help express this communion, our interdependence one with another. Jesus uses the term *basileia*, which has been translated as realm, kingdom, kin-dom, and commonwealth.

Philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce called it “Beloved Community” in the early 20th century, a phrase that was picked up and popularized by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.⁴⁸

No matter what we call it, no matter what metaphor we use, God has created us for holy, intimate, sacred relationship with each other, with the divine being, and with all Creation. The purpose of the Church is to teach and practice such communion, such holy relationship, until we experience the salvation of oneness when we truly all suffer together, and all rejoice together.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 328.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 323.

⁴⁸ “The Beloved Community,” accessed October 12, 2021, <https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/>.

In his book *Communion and Otherness*, theologian John D. Zizioulas writes extensively about unity-in-difference, and the challenges and goals of living in sacred relationship. The biggest challenge is *xenophobia*, fear of the other, which Zizioulas names in language that we might hear as a definition of original sin: “There is a pathology built into the very roots of our existence, inherited through our birth, and that is the *fear of the other*.”⁴⁹ Zizioulas claims our fear of the other leads us to reject that which is different, that which we cannot incorporate into our own self. “Fear of the other is in fact nothing but the fear of the different; we all want somehow to project into the other the model of our own selves, which shows how deeply rooted in our existence the fear of the other is.”⁵⁰ This tendency to project into the other our own ways of being pushes toward uniformity and works against respect for the integrity and identity of others. Zizioulas argues that the key to all relationship, especially holy relationship, is that the other is seen, respected, and valued in their own integrity. He cites Martin Buber who “makes the Other co-constitutive with the I in the structure of being and regards the I and the Other as of equal primordially: ‘The I exists only through the relationship with the Thou.’”⁵¹

Zizioulas claims this ontological approach is key to the Christian conception of communion. People have value, what the Unitarian-Universalist Church calls “inherent worth and dignity,” by the sheer fact of their being, “by the sheer fact that he or she is, and is *himself or herself*.”⁵² Zizioulas argues that for Christians, respect cannot be based on a person’s qualities or attributes. Citing Mark 5:45, in which God “sends the rain on

⁴⁹ Zizioulas, 1.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁵¹ Ibid., 47.

⁵² Ibid., 6.

the just and on the unjust,” he argues that “the Christian ethos of otherness does not allow for the acceptance or rejection of the Other on the basis of his or her qualities, natural or moral.”⁵³ Rather, “everyone’s otherness and uniqueness is to be respected on the simple basis of each person’s ontological particularity and integrity. Not only the rejection, therefore, but even the mere *tolerance* of the Other on the basis of such qualities would be incompatible with the Christian ethos.”⁵⁴ There is no “beloved community” without everyone being valued for who they are in their own uniqueness.

Along these lines, Roberto Goizueta, in his book *Caminemos con Jesús*, writes about community-in-difference through the lens of the cultural *mestizaje*⁵⁵ of what he terms the “U.S. Hispanic.” Goizueta argues that the life experience of U.S. Hispanics leads them to “refuse to accept easy dichotomies,”⁵⁶ perhaps having an easier time conceptualizing community-in-difference than those who have been steeped in Western dichotomies.

*Growing up in a bicultural, biracial, and bilingual environment, Latinos and Latinas are accustomed to living between two perspectives, two interpretative horizons – or, more accurately, three: the indigenous or African, the Spanish, and the North American. To be a U.S. Hispanic is thus to live in a world where differences – in cultures, perspectives, and interpretive horizons – are not dichotomized: what is “other” or “different” is not viewed as contradictory or wrong vis-à-vis what is “the same.”*⁵⁷

Goizueta’s use of the term *mestizaje* gives a real sense of embodiment to what Heim characterized as communion, in which distinct entities (individuals, cultures, congregations) are enriched by participation with each other but are not

⁵³ Ibid., 86.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 86.

⁵⁵ The term *mestizaje* will be developed more in chapter 3, part 2.

⁵⁶ Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 119.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 119.

confused, fused, and collapsed into each other. *Mestizaje* is a term derived from *mestizo*, a racial label applied to a person of “mixed” race, Spanish and Indigenous, a real flesh and blood experience of communion.

Loida I. Martell-Otero makes a similar point with an analogy from the world of music.

*“The dominant culture at times believes that diversity implies division and precludes harmony; or that harmony and unity demands uniformity. Yet the fact is that in the world of music, harmony requires diversity! You cannot have harmony unless you have different notes. Scripture seems to point to the same conclusion: diversity and disagreement do not signal division, but rather are a part of what it means to live in a healthy, living body (1 Cor 12:14-27).”*⁵⁸

Martell-Otero uses the term *teologia en conjunto* to describe theology done in community, where everyone brings their unique voice, and all are enriched in a communion of mutuality.

Like Heim, Zizioulas claims that the Trinitarian God is the true model for the nature of the church:

*There is no model for the proper relation between communion and otherness either for the Church or for the human being other than the Trinitarian God. If the Church wants to be faithful to her true self, she must try to mirror the communion and otherness that exists in the triune God. The same is true of the human being as the ‘image of God.’ The relation between communion and otherness in God is the model both for ecclesiology and for anthropology.*⁵⁹

For Zizioulas, as for Heim, the key understanding of the Trinity, the *perichoretic* relationship or the “ontological interdependence of the three persons,”⁶⁰ serves as a model or framework for which to understand all sacred relationship. God

⁵⁸ Loida I. Martell-Otero, “Epilogue,” in *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins*, eds., Loida I. Martell-Otero; Zaida Maldonado Pérez; and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013).

⁵⁹ Zizioulas, 4-5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

*exists as a communion of free love of unique, irreplaceable and unrepeatable identities, that is, true persons in the absolute ontological sense... True personhood arises not from one's individualistic isolation from others but from love and relationship with others, from communion.*⁶¹

Looking at the Trinity, then, Zizioulas deduces: "Otherness is constitutive of unity ...

God is not first one and then three, but simultaneously one and three. ... Otherness is not a threat to unity but a *sine qua non* condition of it... Communion does not threaten otherness; it generates it."⁶²

Zaida Maldonado Pérez agrees: "For *evangélicas*, a unity without difference is a theological oxymoron. Unity necessarily implies difference or "otherness."⁶³ She continues, emphasizing the importance of affirmation of the other:

*Trinitarian interrelations of the One to the Other is not to be confused with human tolerance of the other; however. Toleration implies a normative center from which the other deviates. It suggests a value judgment over the other. Thus, it also signifies power over the one being tolerated. There is no unity in toleration, only an agreement to bear the other until such time as it may no longer be to one's advantage. Thus, toleration is self-serving. The persons of the Trinity do not tolerate their difference or otherness. Their unity lies in their mutual self-affirmation.*⁶⁴

Maldonado Pérez uses the image of *familia* to explore Trinity as communion-with-otherness.⁶⁵ A *familia* is both one and many, a unity of distinct persons whose uniqueness does not prevent them from being in communion with each other.

For Zizioulas, Christ himself is the model and example of true communion, of unity-in-difference. Citing the Christological agreement reached at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 C.E., Zizioulas notes that the union of divine and human natures in

⁶¹ Ibid., 168.

⁶² Ibid., 5.

⁶³ Zaida Maldonado Pérez, "The Trinity *Es* and *Son Familia*," in *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins*, eds., Loida I. Martell-Otero; Zaida Maldonado Pérez; and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013), 37.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 38.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 39.

Christ is “indivisible but also without confusion.”⁶⁶ The human and divine are united in Christ, but not confused, abandoned, or compromised. For this Christology to matter, though, Zizioulas argues that it must be embodied by the Church. “Trinitarian theology takes its “concrete form in the Church.”⁶⁷ Through Christian rituals and ministry, the Church must practice unity without uniformity, communion “without division” but also “without confusion.”⁶⁸ This happens through our being united “in Christ,” by being the body of Christ. “The Church is the community in which otherness is experienced as communion in and through uniqueness.”⁶⁹ And again: “Church is the place where the fear of the Other is replaced in the Eucharist and in the ascetic ethos by the acceptance of the Other *qua* Other.”⁷⁰ Note that Zizioulas again emphasizes that true communion “will not end up in an absorption of the many into the one, in the loss of otherness.”⁷¹ Zizioulas’ vision of the church is not a “melting pot,” in which all lose their identity as they become one in Christ. It is a community of those who are connected but maintain their own unique integrity as well.

Zizioulas focuses on two particular aspects of the Church in which communion as unity-in-difference is essential: the ritual of *eucharist* and the Church’s ministry.

Zizioulas stresses the importance the *eucharist* as a ritual expression of

unity-in-difference:

The Eucharist not only affirms and sanctifies communion; it also sanctifies otherness. It is the place where difference ceases to be divisive and becomes good. Diaphora [difference] does not lead to diaphora [division], and unity or communion does not destroy, but rather affirms diversity and otherness in the Eucharist. Whenever this does not happen, the Eucharist

⁶⁶ Zizioulas, 259-261.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 261.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 75-76.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 88.

⁷¹ Ibid., 76.

is destroyed and even invalidated. ... A Eucharist that excludes ... is a false Eucharist.” “[Eucharist] is the place where difference ceases to be divisive and becomes good.”⁷²

In theological language that strongly affirms the Disciples practice of having an “open table,” at which all are welcome, Zizioulas insists that the inclusion of otherness is essential to the ritual of the Lord’s Supper. “There is only one kind of exclusion that eucharistic communion permits, and that is the exclusion of exclusion itself, that is, of those things that involve rejection and division.”⁷³ And again: “The Eucharist is *communion*, and this means that otherness is experienced as *relational*. The eucharistic ethos, therefore, precludes any exclusiveness in otherness. The only exclusion that is permissible – even imperative – is of exclusiveness itself.”⁷⁴

Zizioulas also sees unity-in-diversity exhibited in the Church’s practice of ministry, again drawing on Paul’s image of the Church as the body of Christ:

Perhaps there is no area of Church life where communion and otherness co-exist so deeply as in the case of the Church’s ministry. Ministry involves charismata of the spirit, and charisms involve variety and diversity. ‘Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all ... have the charism of healing? (1 Cor. 12:29). ... The body of Christ consists of many members, and these members represent different gifts and ministries. No member can say to the other ‘I have no need of you’ (1 Cor 12:21). There is an absolute interdependence among the members-ministries of the Church: no ministry can be isolated and conceived apart from the ‘other’. Otherness is of the essence of the ministry.’⁷⁵

Zizioulas acknowledges the danger of division, however, noting the problems that Paul found in Corinth. Due to our inherent fear of the other, there is always a danger that difference will lead to division. Zizioulas charges pastoral leadership with the task of

⁷² Ibid., 7.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 91-92.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 8.

reminding people of our communion, of enforcing and protecting the Church's foundational unity. "In order to avoid this, the Church needs a ministry of unity, someone who would himself be needful of the 'others' and yet capable of protecting difference from falling into division. This is the office or ministry of the *bishop*."⁷⁶ One of the responsibilities of a congregational pastor, and of a Regional Minister, is to prevent difference from falling into division. "A bishop who does not in himself transcend ethnic and cultural differences becomes a minister of division and not of unity."⁷⁷

Zizioulas' theology of communion-in-otherness, unity-in-diversity, exposes problems with many of the Church's past approaches to unity, approaches we might call "cheap communion." "The Church is a community that lives within history, and therefore within the fallen state of existence."⁷⁸ Though usually well-intentioned, models that use "tolerance" and "acceptance" do not imply a full validation of the other qua other. Models that use "welcome" and "inclusion" also tend to imply an absorption into a hegemonic culture rather than full partnership among parties who retain their own unique identity and integrity. Samuel Pagan stresses this point in the context of Hispanic Disciples:

*In order to create, design and develop a relevant and contextual ministry among Hispanics it is very important to recognize and accept that the church should respect culture. In our preaching and church program the aim should not be to produce white, middle-class, English speaking Christians, but Christians that retain their distinctive social and cultural identity.*⁷⁹

True communion means affirmation, celebration, respect, and mutuality.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 8-9.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁹ Samuel Pagan, "Hispanics and the Church," *The Disciple* (September 1990): 9.

Similar to Heim's critique that the concept of individual salvation misses the point of Christian communion, Zizioulas calls the Church to a new and deeper understanding of its mission. He notes that Western society has always privileged the self over the other, the individual over the community.⁸⁰ But in relation to such a self-focused social order, he writes: "The Church can never coincide with society; she lives *in the world* but she is not *of the world* (Jn 15:16) ... The Church is the sign and image of the eschatological community."⁸¹ The Church, through being the true body of Christ, through following Christ's teaching and example of love for others, can be the antidote to a divided, self-centered society.

*Communion with the other requires the experience of the Cross; Unless we sacrifice our own will and subject it to the will of the other, repeating in ourselves what our Lord did in Gethsemane in relation to the will of his Father, we cannot reflect properly in history the communion and otherness that we see in the triune God.*⁸²

The true calling of the Church is to embody God's love as Jesus did, replacing our inherent tendency to fear difference with a love that values and respects otherness on its own terms. "'Perfect love casts out fear' (1 Jn 4:18). The fear of the Other can only be overcome by love, that is, by acceptance and affirmation by the Other and of the Other as indispensable for our own otherness."⁸³

In a densely packed statement, Zizioulas sums up his understanding of the true calling of the Church:

The Church as the body of Christ points to a mysticism of communion and relationship through which one is so united with the 'other' (God and our fellow man) as to form one indivisible unity through which otherness emerges clearly, and the partners of the relationship are distinct and

⁸⁰ Zizioulas, 43-44.

⁸¹ Ibid., 87.

⁸² Ibid., 86.

⁸³ Ibid., 55.

particular not as individuals but as persons. This kind of mystical union presupposes the Christological ground laid down by Chalcedon, according to which union between man and God is realized in Christ without division but at the same time without confusion, that is, a perfect unity which does not destroy but affirms otherness. The Church as the 'mystical body' of Christ is the place where this Christologically understood 'mystical union' is realized.⁸⁴

CONCLUSION

From our origins, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has been a movement seeking unity, claiming that unity is foundational to the nature of the Church and essential to Christian witness. An early slogan claimed that “Christian unity is our polar star,” and a recent slogan claims that we “are a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.” Drawing especially from John 17:20-21, Galatians 3:27-28, and 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Disciples have claimed that oneness is a gift from God that is not based on our achievements but is an ontological given, based on the very nature of our being. Oneness, or communion, or sacred relationship, is grounded in the very nature of God, in whom the three persons of Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit dwell within each other in a primordial relationship. We do not have to create oneness, but we are called to live it, to live in unity. The ultimate goal of human life, or salvation, is to embody sacred relationship, to suffer together, rejoice together, to know and live as if we are part of the same body. Collectively, we are the body of Christ.

True unity, however, is not to be confused with uniformity, in which individuals and cultures lose their distinct identities in a fusion of sameness. If Dietrich Bonhoeffer talked about “cheap grace,”⁸⁵ we might talk about “cheap unity.” Cheap unity is uniformity, sameness, or a thin veneer of togetherness that masks or denies difference and

⁸⁴ Ibid., 307.

⁸⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Collier Books, 1937), 45.

injustice. Cheap unity is content to tolerate the other but not affirm the other, to allow the other but not welcome the other, even to include the other but not truly establish a relationship of mutuality. The unity we seek may better be called “prophetic unity.” Prophetic unity challenges all the divisions in our society. Prophetic unity challenges the racial and ethnic divisions in our world, calling us to live in communion with otherness, to practice unity-in-diversity, to be one body with many gifts. Prophetic unity calls us to affirm, respect, and celebrate the other in a relationship of mutuality. In the words of Samuel Pagan: “To reach God’s goal of one church and many cultural manifestations, we need the will and courage to be what the Lord wants and calls us to be: an inclusive, pluralistic, and multicultural church, the body of the living Christ in the midst of the North American society.”⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Pagan, 31.

CHAPTER 3: The Broader Context

The United States: A Racialized Society

Part 1: Witnessing and Challenging White/European Normativity

Since we are called to be “the body of the living Christ in the midst of the North American society,” we must take seriously the racialized context in which we live. There are a number of things that divide North American society, of course, and many of them cause division within the church, preventing it from being “The Church,” the body of Christ that lives in prophetic unity. In addition to race and ethnicity, other lines of division include sex, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, geography, political leanings, theological leanings, education, and more. A full analysis of the context of the North American church is obviously not possible here, nor for that matter is a full analysis of race in the United States. For the purposes of this project, then, I will focus on aspects of race and ethnicity that seem pertinent to the quest for prophetic unity within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arizona.

A proliferation of books on race and racism, both academic treatises for scholars and popular books aimed at the general public, has exploded on the scene in the last several years, as many Whites are beginning to wake up and see what African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans -- and indeed many within the global society -- have known for a long time: that the United States is a highly racialized society which privileges Whites. Jim Wallis claims that racism is “America’s original sin.”⁸⁷ Isabel Wilkerson writes about how race functions as a caste system in the United

⁸⁷ Jim Wallis, *America’s Original Sin* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

States, a system of hierarchy with Whites at the top and Blacks at the bottom.⁸⁸ Michael Omi and Howard Winant explore the development of racial formation in the U.S. and how race shapes institutions and individuals in the U.S.⁸⁹ These, and other books that are part of this proliferation, analyze race and racism in the United States from a number of different angles. Michelle Alexander highlights how mass incarceration and mass supervision have become a third major system for White America to control People of Color, following enslavement and Jim Crow.⁹⁰ Robin DiAngelo argues that “white fragility,” the defensiveness White people often show and the inability to stay in conversations about race that bring up strong emotions, is in truth a way of maintaining the status quo of White supremacy.⁹¹ Bryan Stephenson exposes the gross racial inequalities in the application of the death penalty.⁹² Again, a full analysis of race in the United States, and all the facets of White privilege and White supremacy, is beyond the scope of this project. I will focus on three aspects that come up frequently in recent literature that seem especially pertinent to analyzing the racial division among the Disciples in Arizona: White blindness to Whiteness, White normativity, and White expectations of assimilation. I will then draw from the writings of several Hispanic authors in order to dialogue with these three aspects of racism and to explore culture from the perspectives of Hispanic thinkers.

⁸⁸ Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020).

⁸⁹ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015).

⁹⁰ Michelle Alexander. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Era of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2012).

⁹¹ Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's so Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (London: Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2019).

⁹² Bryan Stephenson. *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (Brunswick: Scribe Publications, 2015).

White Blindness to Whiteness

One of the most pernicious aspects of race in the United States, and one of the most exasperating to People of Color, is that most White people do not see their Whiteness. Because White people do not see their Whiteness, they therefore do not see themselves as participating in or benefiting from racism, racial caste, or racial hierarchies. They think of themselves as “normal” and do not see themselves as having a distinct race. “Other people” have a race; White people do not. White people therefore do not see their privileges.⁹³ They do not see how the practices and social structures of the United States, from policing to red lining to unequal education to the inheritance of wealth accumulated on the backs of people of color, consistently favor White people. Many White people do not want to be racist. They truly believe that they are not racist. But as they go about their daily lives trying to be good people, they do not see how they participate in and benefit from racist structures. This unawareness of Whiteness, this blindness to Whiteness, is a frequent theme in recent literature on race, and many authors correctly claim that it is difficult if not impossible to fight an enemy one does not see.

Joseph Barndt outlines how the socialization of White people racializes them and produces feelings of racial superiority. “This socialization conditions us to be unaware of the benefits that come with whiteness, but at the same time to receive them as a meritorious reward.”⁹⁴ Barndt uses the image of White people being “imprisoned”

⁹³ The concept of “white privilege” was popularized by Peggy McIntosh in her 1998 essay “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” Accessed October 20, 2018.

https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege_McIntosh-1989.pdf.

McIntosh argues that White people have an “invisible knapsack” filled with privileges they do not even see. McIntosh had experienced decades of frustration that men did not see and would not admit the inherent advantages they had in relation to women. One day it hit her that people of color had the same frustrations that she did not see the advantages she had as a white person.

⁹⁴ Joseph Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 127.

without knowing it -- imprisoned in a life of deformed humanity in which we believe we are superior, noble, and entitled to material advantages. “We believe in nothing more strongly than our ideology of liberty for all and charity toward the poor and needy, without comprehending that charity is a poor substitute for justice.”⁹⁵ In reference to the genre of cowboy and Indian movies, which form part of our socialization process, Barndt asks: “Has a nation ever before celebrated the genocide of an indigenous people with such pride and joy?”⁹⁶ As long as White people remain blind to Whiteness and blind to privileges, they can keep believing that they are good, noble people. As long as they believe that they are noble and deserving people, they have no motivation to change, no motivation to repent, no motivation to work for justice – and they miss out on the richness of life lived in solidarity and relationship. What Barndt calls “deformed humanity” might be understood in theological terms as sin, as separation from the life of God, from each other, from the body of Christ. He calls White people to see the sin, to wake up to their deformed humanity, to search their history and discover the processes by which they are socialized. He claims that learning to see Whiteness is necessary if White people ever want to be truly free.

Barndt’s explanation of the socialization process sheds light on Jim Wallis’ designation of racism as “America’s original sin.” Original sin is something we are born into, something that we are a part of, initially, through no fault of our own. We inherit bias from our culture. We inherit the systems and structures of our society. Since the systems and structures of the United States began with two horrific systems of racism -- dispossessing Native Americans of life and land and enslaving Africans to work on

⁹⁵ Barndt, 134.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 132. In response to his rhetorical question, I might suggest the book of Joshua as one example.

plantations – the very economic, political, and social structures of American society have been racist from the beginning. We all are born into these structures, and unless we intentionally work to change them, they will continue long after we are gone. Barndt calls White people “unintentional racists,”⁹⁷ people who “benefit” from racist structures without even trying, people who need to wake up and learn to see how the systems work if they ever want the true benefits of authentic, *perichoretic* relationship that characterizes communion-in-diversity in the body of Christ.

Shelley Tochluk, in her aptly titled book *Witnessing Whiteness*, similarly calls us to wake up to the way things are. “White people ... are less in touch with how race affects us. For this reason, our first step is to identify the ways our whiteness emerges. Our first step is to become witnesses to our whiteness.”⁹⁸ Tochluk outlines four ways that White people, often unconsciously, avoid their whiteness: denying the continuing effects of race, claiming to be “colorblind,” focusing on ethnicity instead of race, and believing they are post-racial and transcend race.⁹⁹ But “philosophically rejecting whiteness does not stop us from escaping racial profiling... We will never be mistaken for gardeners when working in our front yards.”¹⁰⁰ Similar to Barndt, Tochluk calls White people to explore their ethnic roots, their history of privilege, the way privilege works, and their potential to work against racism.¹⁰¹ Indeed, she goes a bit further and calls them to develop a healthy white identity, to begin to know themselves as racial beings and develop a healthy way to be white.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Barndt, 139.

⁹⁸ Shelly Tochluk, *Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How to Do It* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2010), xvii.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 48.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Like Barndt, Tochluk warns of the damage to the souls of White people by not understanding or admitting the racial dynamics of U.S. society. In a section entitled “Emotional Superficiality,” she quotes a man named Michael who is discovering his whiteness:

*Imagine the ignorance of a culture that can take pride in not knowing and not learning, the damage done inside the oppressing people and their families. Because in order to sustain these ultimately nonviable ideas, something has to be killed off in those who continue them. People can only hold a false sense of superiority by remaining undeveloped and unrealized inside themselves.*¹⁰³

In addition to harming themselves, of course, White blindness to whiteness can continue to hurt others. “White people who are as-yet unresolved about their own whiteness can operate out of racial prejudices in offensive ways.”¹⁰⁴ To avoid both damage to themselves and damage to others, White people need to listen to someone challenge them on race, and that is hard. “Our sense of ourselves as individuals, not marked by race, preempts our ability to really listen to someone who challenges us regarding issues of subtle racism, especially our own.”¹⁰⁵ She asks: “What does it take for someone to stay within a heated conflict?” She concludes that being willing to listen and be challenged requires “a true leap of faith.”¹⁰⁶

Robin DiAngelo’s *White Fragility* is an exploration of the lengths White people go to, consciously or unconsciously, to remain ignorant or in denial about racism and its effects. She highlights “the good/bad binary” – the idea that if racism is bad, and White people want to see themselves as good, then they cannot see themselves as benefiting

¹⁰³ Ibid., 135.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 108.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 167.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

from racism or privilege.¹⁰⁷ She uses the term “aversive racism” as a way of enacting racism “in ways that allow [us] to maintain a positive self-image”¹⁰⁸ and argues that this form of racism is often found in educated, progressive, well-intentioned people. She lists a number of things White people say to tell themselves that they are not racists, like using racially coded terms instead of direct racial language – terms like “urban, underprivileged, diverse, sketchy, and good neighborhoods.”¹⁰⁹ “Unfortunately,” she claims, “aversive racism only protects racism, because we can’t challenge our racial filters if we can’t consider the possibility that we have them.”¹¹⁰ Aversive racists enact racism but maintain a positive self-image. DiAngelo provocatively claims that in contrast to aversive racists, avowed racists are at least “more honest about their biases than those of us who consider ourselves open-minded yet who have rarely thought critically about the biases we inevitably hold.”¹¹¹ Her words remind us of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s critique of the white moderate:

*"First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council-er or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action;" who paternalistically feels he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by the myth of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of goodwill is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection."*¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ DiAngelo, 72.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 43.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 47.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” April 16, 1963.

Like Barndt and Tochluk, DiAngelo and Dr. King call White people to learn to see how Whiteness functions in our racialized society so they can eventually begin to move toward freedom.¹¹³

White Normativity

One of the aspects many White people are blind to is White normativity, the idea that “normal” is White and everything else is “other.” DiAngelo states this plainly: “My race is held up as the norm for humanity. Whites are ‘just people’ – our race is rarely if ever named.”¹¹⁴ She notes that people are often identified by their race – “my black friend, the Asian woman” – unless they are White.¹¹⁵ Along these lines, Johnny Ramirez Johnson and Love Sechrest refer to Whiteness as a “yardstick:”

*The challenge that Christianity faces in this new century is to overturn white subjectivity in all its modalities since whiteness acts as a yardstick for maturity in terms of our politics, our ways of inhabiting space, and our ways of building communities.*¹¹⁶

When one group of people is held to be the norm, the yardstick, they also become the center, the most meaningful, the most deserving, and everyone else is defined as “lesser than.”

Michael Omi and Howard Winant note that a person is “ethnic” if they have not assimilated into being White,¹¹⁷ as evidenced in the use of hyphens and modifiers like Hispanic-American and African-American. Ironically, even the people who originally

¹¹³ As one white person to whom this call has been issued, I respond: May we no longer be like those Jeremiah referred to as “foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but do not see, who have ears, but do not hear.” Jeremiah 5:21

¹¹⁴ DiAngelo, 56.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Johnny Ramirez Johnson and Love Sechrest, “Introduction,” in *Can White People Be Saved?: Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, ed. Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, and Amos Yong (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 19.

¹¹⁷ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, 75.

lived here, the people indigenous to the land, are given the modifier “Native” American while the word “American” is often assumed to mean White.

“For five centuries the phrase “the American people” has been understood as an implicitly white designation. This understanding predates the achievement of national independence in the American revolution and ignores or represses the continuing presence – in substantial numbers – of people not considered white.”¹¹⁸

For much of United States history, first in the law and later in practice, citizenship was restricted to Whites.¹¹⁹

Omi and Winant refer to the insidiousness of making Whiteness the norm as a way of pushing others to the margins. “Race-making can also be understood as a process of ‘othering.’”¹²⁰ Combined with the hierarchy of putting Whites at the top and “others” below, normalizing Whiteness is a means of racial despotism.¹²¹ Omi and Winant affirm movements of “cultural nationalism” and “racial resistance” in which people take pride in their own culture, offering as examples the “Black Panther Party ... Brown Berets, American Indian Movement, the Asian American Political Alliance, and similar groups.”¹²² Just as Wallis, Barndt, Tochluk, and DiAngelo call on Whites to see their own Whiteness and their own participation in racial hierarchies, Omi and Winant stress that race-consciousness is necessary to address persistent and entrenched forms of racial inequality in the United States.¹²³

Andrew T. Draper notes that society’s making White people the norm pervades the church as well: “In this center-periphery game, there are normal White people and

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 75.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 77.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 105.

¹²¹ Ibid., 130.

¹²² Ibid., 87 and 131.

¹²³ Ibid., 260.

then there are ethnic Black and Brown people.”¹²⁴ Draper claims that within the church, Whiteness functions as a “religious system of pagan idol worship.”¹²⁵ “For whiteness as idolatry to be cast down, White identity ... must be decentered and not held as normative.”¹²⁶ Anticipating our next section and the work of Jennifer Harvey, Draper claims that the term “reconciliation” is “a contested term that has been used to encourage assimilation to whiteness and to remove the pursuit of justice as a precondition for the beloved community.”¹²⁷ Draper does not abandon the use of the term “reconciliation,” but he wants to be clear that true reconciliation does not mean assimilation to Whiteness:

*Reconciliation is not reconciliation if the normativity of whiteness is left uncontested. As bell hooks has noted, white people must actively work against white supremacy and for social justice rather than simply lament a lack of meaningful relationships with people of Color. She maintains that this integrity of praxis and this longing for the other will compel White people to be part of “the beloved community where diversity is a given.”*¹²⁸

In search of the beloved community, a Church based on mutuality and affirmation, Draper offers a way forward: “This then is mission: decentering white identity so as to be joined by others who are also making the journey to a Center not of our own making.”¹²⁹

White Expectations of Assimilation

¹²⁴ Andrew T. Draper, “The End of ‘Mission’: Christian Witness and the Decentering of White Identity,” in *Can White People Be Saved?: Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, ed. Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, and Amos Yong (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 93.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 177.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 178.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 179.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 206.

Jennifer Harvey also notes, and challenges, flawed notions of “reconciliation,” claiming that “reconciliation today is largely a ‘white’ vision.”¹³⁰ Harvey claims that whenever the church talks about reconciliation, White Christians nearly always equate that to people of color joining “us,” doing things “our” way, being part of “our” church. “White Christian concerns about our segregated hour overwhelmingly rest on the unspoken assumption that inclusion or diversification should happen primarily in one direction. Namely, ‘our’ churches are too white” and we want People of Color to join them. And so White Christians ask: “Why aren’t there more people of color here, and what can we do to fix that?”¹³¹ Instead, Harvey suggests asking: “Why don’t more white Christians join historically Black churches? Especially since we say we long for diversity and reconciliation, why don’t we join churches in which people of color are in the overwhelming majority, including in leadership positions?”¹³²

Harvey argues that it is inappropriate for White people to expect People of Color to join them while they maintain power and control. Christians of color, she claims, are at risk of losing their identity in calls for reconciliation.¹³³ Ibram Kendi makes the same point, that it seems like from a White perspective, integration means “black bodies going into White spaces” where the whites are still in control.¹³⁴ Harvey quotes James Cone:

*What most whites call “integration” (or in the language of today, diversity) is often merely ‘tokenism.’ There is very little justice in any education institution [and, we could add here, ‘ecclesial institutions’] where black presence is less than 20 percent. ... There is no justice without power; and there is no power with one, two, or three tokens.”*¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹³⁴ Ibram X Kendi, *How to Be an Anti-Racist* (New York: One World, 2019), 178.

¹³⁵ Harvey, 68-69, quoting from Cone’s *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2013), 61.

Shared power, mutual power, is essential to authentic relationship.

Harvey advocates for a “reparations paradigm” rather than a “reconciliation paradigm.”¹³⁶ A reparations paradigm insists on repairing harm,¹³⁷ transferring wealth and power, truly sharing leadership, and using a “particularist” ethic, in which we recognize and value particular cultural differences rather than universalizing the White norm.

Harvey claims it is “disrespectful, perhaps even dangerous, to expect people of color to trust unless and until”¹³⁸ repentance has repaired harm as much as possible. Harvey calls on White Christian leaders to do a lot of soul searching and history learning about why social imbalances exist and how we can all work together to change them. One of the questions she suggests we ask is: “What is the relationship between White Americans and Mexican Americans in the Southwest?”¹³⁹

An example of the dynamic of White expectations of assimilation is offered by Angel D. Santiago-Vendrell, who explores the paternalism of missionaries who “wanted to make Puerto Ricans become Americans.”¹⁴⁰

The process of making Puerto Ricans Protestant was equated with making them loyal to the United States. This was clearly expressed by George Milton Fowles, who after criticizing Spanish literature as useless ... argued for what he thought to be the best way to Americanize Puerto Ricans: “If the people learn to read American literature and come to know our ideals of national life, if they are able to converse in an intelligent manner with American citizens and officials who reside in Porto Rico, it will not be long until this people shall be thoroughly American.” As

¹³⁶ Ibid., 127.

¹³⁷ This notion is found in the biblical concept of the Year of Jubilee and picked up by Disciples leader Rev. Dr. William Barber, using a phrase from Isaiah 58:12, in his movement “Repairers of the Breach.”

¹³⁸ Ibid., 73.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 165.

¹⁴⁰ Angel D. Santiago-Vendrell, “Constructing Race in Puerto Rico: The Colonial Legacy of Christianity and Empires, 1520-1910,” in *Can White People Be Saved?: Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, ed. Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, and Amos Yong (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 168.

Charles Detweiler stated, “Ought not the Porto Ricans to embrace the religion of their liberators as well as the other elements of civilization?”¹⁴¹

Note that one White missionary, George Milton Fowles, saw the goal to make Puerto Ricans “thoroughly American,” while the other, Charles Detweiler, blindly considered that Americans were the “liberators” of Puerto Rico rather than merely the most recent conquerors and colonizers.

Andrew Draper outlines steps for White people who want to forgo thinking of Whiteness as a yardstick, who want to decenter white identity and work toward developing an anti-racist identity – a process that is necessary for a more authentic process of reconciliation. Draper suggests that Whites must (1) repent of complicity in systematic sin; (2) learn from cultural and theological resources not their own; (3) choose to locate their lives in places and structures in which they are necessarily guests; (4) manifest tangible submission to leadership by people of color; and (5) immerse themselves in contexts where they will hear the glory of God spoken in unfamiliar cadences.¹⁴² Like Harvey, he argues that “faithful Christian witness can no longer operate in modalities of control, power, and ‘hosting’; it must instead learn the practice of ‘guesting.’”¹⁴³ Further, like Barndt and others, Draper argues that Whites must be intentional about overcoming their socialization to be blind to White centrality:

If ... whiteness is a way of life into which its novitiates are disciplined, then a Christian discipleship that entails a deconversion from whiteness is necessary if any true reconciliation with God, others, the creation, and ourselves is to take place.¹⁴⁴

Part 2: Learning from Hispanic (and other) Cultural and Theological Resources

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Draper, 181.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Critiques of Assimilation and Normativity: A *Mestizaje* Alternative

The first thing to be said is that the themes highlighted above by scholars of race come up frequently in literature by Hispanic authors, suggesting that Hispanics have a much easier time than Whites seeing how race influences community dynamics. Ada María Isasi-Díaz refers to this dynamic as the “epistemological privilege of the poor and oppressed.”¹⁴⁵ She cites José Míguez Bonino, who writes that the oppressed have the possibility

*to see and to understand what the rich and the powerful cannot see nor understand. It is not that their sight is perfect, it is the place where they are that makes the difference. Power and richness have a distortionary effect – they freeze our view of reality. The point of view of the poor, on the other hand, pierced by suffering and attracted by hope, allows them, in their struggles, to conceive another reality.*¹⁴⁶

Like Barndt, Harvey, Kendi, and Cone, Robert Goizueta writes about the importance of power dynamics in relationships. “No authentic dialogue is possible between teachers and students, masters and slaves, men and women, rich and poor, Anglo and Hispanic – unless and until the asymmetrical power relationships are corrected.”¹⁴⁷ Goizueta also suggests that interaction with others is the key to becoming aware of our particularities, which in the case of Whites would mean seeing our Whiteness. He writes:

*only when we encounter an-other culture do we recognize the existence of our own culture as distinct; prior to that, we simply assume that our way of life and our interpretative horizon are universal. Not until I am exposed to another culture do I recognize myself as a cultural being, that is, as some-one who has a particular way of life; prior to that, I simply assume that my way of life is also everyone else's.*¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha: In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology*, 10th anniversary ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 91.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesus*, 181.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 72.

Along these lines, one of the most important things for the church to understand about Hispanic culture is that it is not monolithic. Perhaps it would be better to use the plural: Hispanic cultures. Several times, until I finally learned this lesson, I have spoken to Hispanic pastors about my vision for multi-cultural ministry, only to have them respond: “I already have a multi-cultural ministry. We have members who were born in Mexico, Cuba, El Salvador, Puerto Rico, Texas, Arizona, California – you name it. Some of us are U.S. citizens, some of us have ‘green cards,’ and some of us are undocumented. We are already multi-cultural.” It is far too easy for Whites who have been socialized in an either/or racial environment to lump all Hispanic people into one category, missing all the diversity -- and all the difference of opinion. For example, Samuel Pagan reminds us, “The vast majority of Hispanics...are not immigrants.”¹⁴⁹ While general statements have been and will be made about Hispanics and Anglos within this cultural analysis, it is important to keep in mind that there is a wide variety of subcultures. The mutuality, the “authentic dialogue,” that I call for must always allow people to define themselves and their own cultural values. I will return to this topic below in the sections about naming and theology (p. 59).

Regarding the pressure to assimilate, Guillermo Ramirez-Munoz highlights the biblical scholarship of Daniel Smith: “majority cultures rarely understand, much less appreciate, the actions of minorities to preserve and maintain identity.”¹⁵⁰ Isasi-Díaz writes of the importance of the Spanish language as a cultural glue, claiming that many U.S. Hispanic families work hard to teach Spanish to their children to preserve both the

¹⁴⁹ Pagan, 8

¹⁵⁰ Guillermo Ramirez-Munoz, “It is These You Ought to have Practiced, without Neglecting the Others,” in *Can White People Be Saved?: Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, ed. Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, and Amos Yong (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 52.

language and the cultural bond.¹⁵¹ Johnny Ramirez-Johnson offers a biblical argument in favor of communion-in-diversity rather than assimilation. In his discussion on Acts 10 and 15, he writes: “The church established the hermeneutical principle of inclusion in the church community without conversion to Judaism or circumcision.” He concludes: “The church need not, should not, ought not expect the other to look, feel, believe, and worship exactly as they do. But, of course, that is easier said than felt, practiced, or even believed.”¹⁵²

Jorge J. E. Gracia writes about *mestizaje* as a preferable alternative to assimilation.¹⁵³ The term *mestizaje* is used in a number of different ways by different authors.¹⁵⁴ Gracia uses it in a positive sense of adding different cultures/characteristics to a mix without any of them losing their original identity. It is a process of increasing identity, rather than losing it. “*Mestizaje* should be distinguished from assimilation, with which it is sometimes confused.”¹⁵⁵ Those who assimilate “lose what they had before that was different ... but *mestizos* preserve differences.”¹⁵⁶ Gracia also argues that assimilation “implies a dominant group and a subservient group,” but that “*mestizos* could be mixes of groups which are not related as dominator-dominated.”¹⁵⁷ Gracia’s understanding of *mestizaje*, therefore, offers a preferable way for groups to interact than a

¹⁵¹ Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha*, 66-68.

¹⁵² Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, “Intercultural Communication Skills for a Missiology of Interdependent Mutuality,” in *Can White People Be Saved?: Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, ed. Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, and Amos Yong (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 265.

¹⁵³ Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2000), 110.

¹⁵⁴ *Mestizaje* is derived from *mestizo* which is a racial label for a person of “mixed” race, Spanish and Indigenous.

¹⁵⁵ Gracia, 110..

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

dominator-dominated relationship, in which the dominant group absorbs the less powerful group and in which the less powerful group loses its identity.¹⁵⁸

Gracia's understanding of *mestizaje* also offers a powerful critique of the notion of purity. Dominant groups insisting on purity have cut off and broken relationships with "others" throughout history, from Ezra's horrific ousting of foreign women and children in post-exilic Israel,¹⁵⁹ to the concept of *limpieza de sangre* (cleaning of blood) in the 15th century that justified the Spanish Inquisition, to the horrors of Nazi Germany and the Aryan race. Isasi-Díaz notes that these quests for purity are really about power and control: "The history of Christianity shows that orthodox objections to syncretism have less to do with the purity of faith and more with who has the right to determine what is to be considered normative and official."¹⁶⁰ Gracia writes: "The notion of *mestizaje* I have proposed undermines these attempts, for it recognizes the value of diverse elements originating in different cultures and races."¹⁶¹ Instead of purity, Gracia argues for a welcoming approach to mixture, a notion very akin to communion-in-otherness.

Isasi-Díaz agrees, writing:

*It is important for non-Hispanics to understand that for us, mestizaje is a reality which we have come to accept and of which many of us are proud. Mestizaje for us does not carry the negative connotations associated with miscegenation... It is not the attempt of one race to make the other disappear ... Mujerista theologians affirm mestizaje as the coming together of different races and cultures in a creative way that necessarily precludes the subordination of one to another; we affirm it as the going forward of humankind.*¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ This framework offers a helpful critique of the boarding schools that European based denominations started in order to inculcate Native American children with European culture. But that is a conversation for another paper.

¹⁵⁹ Ezra 9-10.

¹⁶⁰ Isasi-Díaz, 65.

¹⁶¹ Gracia, 111.

¹⁶² Isasi-Díaz, 33

It is worth noting that this understanding of *mestizaje* not only resists expectations that Hispanics assimilate to White culture, but also invites Anglos to become enriched through interactions with Hispanics and other cultures.

While Gracia, like Isasi-Díaz, mostly sees *mestizaje* in a positive way, he does address a challenging consequence. Like many Hispanic authors, Gracia writes of the “identity crisis” that many Hispanics experience in the United States, given that they live constantly in between at least two cultures. Those who assimilate, Gracia notes, “become part of the group ... and cease to suffer from an identity crisis. But *mestizos* continue to live an ambiguous social and psychological life that causes them to suffer a constant crisis of identity.”¹⁶³

What Gracia calls an identity crisis, Goizueta calls “cultural schizophrenia.”¹⁶⁴ Goizueta writes about his personal struggle to find his identity: “After years of trying to become ‘American,’ and, then, trying to become Latin American, I realized that I was not and could never be either: instead, I was *both*, I was *in between*.”¹⁶⁵ Goizueta shares that he identifies with the story of a New York-born Puerto Rican who, “when asked whether she felt more at home in New York or in Puerto Rico, responded ‘I feel most at home on the airplane.’”¹⁶⁶ Such pressures and perceptions make developing a healthy self-identity difficult. “In one sense, we are part of the country, but in another we are perceived as not belonging in it. And even when we are tolerated, we are never completely accepted.”¹⁶⁷

Gracia notes that even in the supposedly well-educated realm of the “American philosophical community,” Hispanics are treated as “perpetual foreigners.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Ibid., 110.

¹⁶⁴ Goizueta, 6.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶⁷ Gracia, 188.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 159-187.

*It would be impossible for me to recall the number of times that my European-American, and even African-American, friends have spoken of me as if I were not an American, a true American, or quite American. Indeed, I do not think a week goes by without my hearing some comment or other which confirms this view.*¹⁶⁹

Such exclusion leads many Hispanics to try to divest themselves of their cultural roots and blend into the hegemonic culture of the United States.¹⁷⁰ Gracia believes that promoting the positive aspects of a *mestizaje* identity could help Hispanics embrace their dual identity.

Virgilio Elizondo agrees. In *The Future is Mestizo* Elizondo writes of his personal quest to develop a healthy self-identity. “I lived on the border between two nationalities. I was an inside-outsider to both. I was ‘Mexican’ in the U.S. and *gringo/pocho* in Mexico.”¹⁷¹ While at first he experienced this inside-outsider status as a painful liability, he eventually came to see it as a blessing.

*I was not and would never be, even if I wanted to, a regular U.S.-American. Yet neither would I be a puro mexicano. There were identities that I knew that I was and was not at the same time ... My very being was a combination. I was a rich mixture but I was not mixed-up! I was not just U.S.-American and not just Mexican but fully both and exclusively neither ... I lived in two worlds, and the two worlds lived in me. That was wealth.*¹⁷²

As his title implies, Elizondo views that “wealth” as a gift for the future, a *nueva raza* (new race).¹⁷³ Elizondo defines *mestizaje* as “the process through which two totally different peoples mix biologically and culturally so that a new people begins to emerge.”¹⁷⁴ In this new people, Elizondo sees hope.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 181.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 187.

¹⁷¹ Virgilio Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000.), 21.

¹⁷² Ibid., 26.

¹⁷³ Ibid., xv.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 17.

In the introduction to Elizondo's book, David Carrasco highlights Elizondo's positive look to the future: "We say 'no' to the debilitating provincialisms of the white/black discourse and 'yes' to the potentials of the new *mestizaje* of democracy. Latinos are the 'unsplit.'" ¹⁷⁵ In making his argument, Elizondo refers to Jesus as a Galilean *mestizo*, pointing towards the "universal *mestizaje*," a future in which we create a new all-inclusive people, the body of Christ living communion-in-otherness, in which we all become "a truly human family." ¹⁷⁶ Elizondo closes by celebrating the potential of transforming shame into pride, curse into blessing, and inside-outsider status into leaders who bring us toward a new and better future:

The great challenge today is to transform the destructive sense of mestizo shame into a life-giving sense of pride and excitement. ... This transformation from disabling shame to energizing pride will come about as we convert the sense of marginalization and non-belonging into one of new being, new potential, and new life. ... This very "in-between," far from being negative, has a tremendous advantage. I am an inside-outsider of both and thus have the ability of knowing both from within and from the outside. ... I can truly become the interlocutor who will help both to see and appreciate themselves and each other in ways they had never before suspected. ... I can also promote the dignity and welfare of my oppressed indigenous parents, as I can help to purify the oppressive elements of the foreigners who took over. I am both, and also something new. I can even have more fun, for I can party in many more ways than imagined by any one group alone. ¹⁷⁷

It should be noted here that the church has played and continues to play an important role in developing a positive self-identity. Zaida Maldonado Pérez writes about how the church as a "reconstituted" family, with its familial language about being a "child of God," can provide a sense of home, support, and affirmation that are necessary to develop a health identity:

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., xvii.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 101.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 129.

*For first and second generation Latinas/os in the US ... the experience of familia becomes especially critical for the emotional and other kinds of support it provides. Familia becomes essential for helping the newcomer-turned-outsider adjust to and survive very different and sometimes hostile environments intent on shutting out the stranger and the disparate one.*¹⁷⁸

The church as a “reconstituted *familia*,” a chosen family, can bring in and affirm those ostracized and “othered.” She claims that

*this forging of new ties that undercuts the dominant cultural paradigm of what constitutes a family is concretely subversive. Familia become those who, by choice or circumstance, are “no longer foreigners but friends”—to expand upon Ephesians 2:19. They are familia by virtue of that which unites them. Being and living as familia is thus central to our survival and to how we make sense of the world.*¹⁷⁹

Juan Rodriguez shares his personal experience of the church playing this role: “In my identity crisis/struggle early in life, the Church gave me a transcendent identity -- ‘Beloved Child of God, Disciple of Christ’ – an identity beyond race and culture.”¹⁸⁰ The church as *familia* can play a role both in individual identity formation and in promoting mutual inclusion across cultural lines.

Another way of understanding the “inside-outsider” status that Elizondo highlights is the use of the image of being a bridge. Like in-between status, Hispanic people use the image of “bridge” in both positive and negative ways. Those who can speak both Spanish and English, those who understand the cultures of both Mexico and the United States, for instance, can serve as bridges between the two cultures and between individuals who only speak one language. Goizueta writes: “Having initially seen my theological vocation as that of building bridges, I now came to realize that, like

¹⁷⁸ Zaida Maldonado Pérez, “The Trinity *Es* and *Son Familia*,” in *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins*, eds., Loida I. Martell-Otero; Zaida Maldonado Pérez,; and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013), 41.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Juan Rodriguez, personal email to the author.

all Latinos and Latinas, I *am* a bridge.”¹⁸¹ On the “NBA¹⁸² 2019 Immigration Detention Immersion Trip” for Disciples leaders, several young Hispanic Americans introduced themselves: “We are your *puentes*, your bridges. We will help interpret culture for you in addition to translating.” Serving as a bridge is especially common for second-generation immigrants who are often called upon to translate for their parents. Even though the ability to be a bridge is a positive skill, however, some second-generation immigrants struggle with always being expected to serve their parents, and their church, in this manner. Some have said to me: “you know what happens to a bridge, don’t you? It gets stepped on all the time.” So inside-outsider status, in-between status, can either be embraced positively as Elizondo suggests, or it can feel like a burden. And, of course, because *mestizaje* is not an either/or approach, both positive and negative feelings about being a bridge can be present at the same time.

In addition to advocating for *mestizaje* over assimilation and highlighting the importance of mutual interaction and a balance of power in relationships, Hispanic authors also critique the supposed normativity of White/European culture. Gracia suggests that the so-called “discovery of America” should more properly be called the “encounter between Europe and American.” “‘Encounter’ neutralizes the Eurocentric bias” and makes the parties equal.¹⁸³ For that matter, he points out, “America” itself is a European name, coming from the Italian cartographer Amerigo Vespucci.¹⁸⁴ It is hard to escape White/European normativity. Even the Hispanic Disciples in Arizona, I have

¹⁸¹ Goizueta, 6.

¹⁸² NBA in Disciples world stands for the National Benevolent Association, a general unit which focuses on care, compassion, and justice ministries.

¹⁸³ Gracia, 89.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 90.

discovered, refer to Anglo Disciples as “Americans” and the Region which we share as the “American Region.”

As a final critique of White normativity, Fernando Segovia argues for the importance of contextualization in reading the Bible; not just the context of the author, but the context of the reader. He advocates for the “flesh and blood reader” as a way to correct the European normativity of biblical scholasticism. He sees:

*the irruption of the flesh-and-blood reader into biblical criticism as a harbinger not of anarchy and tribalism, as many who insist on impartiality and objectivity often claim, but rather of continued decolonization and liberation, of resistance and struggle against a subtle authoritarianism and covert tribalism of its own, in a discipline that has been, from beginning to end and top to bottom, thoroughly Eurocentric despite its assumed scientific persona of neutrality and universality.*¹⁸⁵

Community, Family, and Face to Face Relationships

Several authors also write about the importance of community and family relationships in Hispanic culture, especially in contrast to the individualism of the United States. “For U.S. Hispanics,” Goizueta writes, “there is no such thing as an isolated individual who is not intrinsically defined by his or her relationship to others.

‘Community,’ writes Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, ‘is not something added on, but a web of relationships constitutive of who we are.’”¹⁸⁶ Sounding reminiscent of Heim’s take on the *perichoretic* nature of the Trinity, Goizueta continues: “For U.S. Hispanics, the entire cosmos – including the earth below and the heavens above - is an intrinsically relational

¹⁸⁵ Fernando Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora: A Hermeneutics of Otherness and Engagement,” in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Apuntes in Honor of Justo L. González*, ed. Alvin Padilla, Roberto Goizueta, and Eldin Villafane (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 55.

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesús*, 50.

reality, as in an organism, each member is necessarily related to every other member. The person, therefore, is always *intrinsically related*.¹⁸⁷

Samuel Pagan writes about the practical implications of being a relational culture. Pagan emphasizes the importance of family. Everyone in the family is sacred and important. Elderly people are valued as sages and seldom end up in nursing homes, instead being cared for by the family.¹⁸⁸ There often is little or no separation between family and church – members are called “brother” and “sister,” and congregations often consist of one or two large extended families. He also makes a powerful argument for what the Disciples church must understand if it wants to be partners in ministry with Hispanics.

*In North American institutions, bureaucracy and formality are important factors for communication. That understanding of life fails to meet the expectations of Hispanics. From the Hispanic perspective these institutions and understandings of reality give the impression of a cold, impersonal people. Latin American society is a face-to-face oriented community. If the church wants to serve the Hispanic population in the United States, that must be understood. Hispanics will not respond to a “business-like” understanding of faith with its bureaucratic and often impersonal attitude.*¹⁸⁹

Here again, we find themes critiquing White normativity and the expectation of assimilation:

*In order to create, design and develop a relevant and contextual ministry among Hispanics it is very important to recognize and accept that the church should respect culture. In our preaching and church program the aim should not be to produce white, middle-class, English speaking Christians, but Christians that retain their distinctive social and cultural identity.*¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Critics of Pagan have suggested, however, that systemic economic oppression plays a role in this, and that many Hispanic families would opt for nursing homes if they had the means to do so.

¹⁸⁹ Samuel Pagan, “Hispanics and the Church,” 29.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Self-Definition and the Challenge of Naming

A particular battle against White normativity involves the terminology used for naming. About terms like “Hispanic” and “Latino,” Goizueta claims: “None of these terms is indigenous to our communities; we have historically preferred to identify ourselves by country of origin: e.g., Cuban, Puerto Rican, Mexican.”¹⁹¹ The catch all terms like Hispanic, Latina, Latino, and Latinx are imposed from the outside, lumping people from all Spanish-speaking heritages together into one supposedly homogenous group. “The term ‘Hispanic,’ given to us by the U.S. government, emphasizes our Spanish heritage while ignoring our Native American and African heritage.”¹⁹²

Fernando Segovia speaks of how these broad names are used in a “script” that the dominant culture expects Hispanics to follow:

“First, the name does vary, with Hispanic, Hispanic Americans, and Latinos, as recurrent options; the important point in this regard, however, is that we use none of these names for ourselves. The names are given to us and thus form part of the script itself. Second, the pattern behind the name is consistent and inflexible: ... we are all seen in terms of a rather monolithic and undifferentiated mass. Again, we have but little choice in this regard, with no amount of explanation seemingly capable of altering the established pattern. Third, the value judgment that underlies the pattern is not only similarly rigid and unchanging but also quite disparaging and destructive. Its overall contours encompass such attributes as lazy and unenterprising, carefree and sensual, undisciplined and violent, vulgar and unintelligent, its corresponding images in popular culture come readily to mind: the Puerto Rican gangs of West Side Story; the Mexican outlaws and bandidos of countless Westerns; the drug lords and pushers of Miami Vice and a host of other television programs; the happy-go-lucky Carmen Miranda and Ricky Ricardos of this world. Thus the name and the pattern are by no means neutral but reveal and convey a dominant perception of the group as primitive, inferior, and uncivilized. Once again, we find ourselves tightly locked into this external view of ourselves, with protestation or enlightenment as a seemingly useless enterprise. In our present, permanent, and everyday world, therefore, we

¹⁹¹ Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesús*, 12.

¹⁹² Ibid.

*begin as strangers and we remain strangers throughout – the undesirable ‘others,’ the ones who do not fit.”*¹⁹³

In Segovia’s words, we hear the frustration of one who is being defined by others, defined according to norms and understandings of another culture. The mutuality, the “authentic dialogue,” that characterizes prophetic unity must always allow people to define themselves and their own cultural values.

Jorge J. E. Gracia emphasizes and expands on these points in *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective*. “It should be one of the dearest principles of decent human conduct that every person should be allowed to choose how he or she is called.”¹⁹⁴ “There is nothing so destabilizing,” he adds, “than being treated and regarded as something other than what one thinks of oneself.”¹⁹⁵ The whole book is an exploration of identity. He asks, about those known as “Hispanics,” what, if anything, do we all have in common, and what should we be called? Gracia’s exploration leads to the conclusion that there is no essential characteristic, no common trait, that is shared by all people known as Hispanic. There is no single discernable “Hispanic” race. “The only thing that these diverse peoples have in common is their marginalization and the domination imposed on them by others.”¹⁹⁶ Ultimately, Gracia prefers to use the term “Hispanic” in a historical sense.

*Hispanics are the group of people comprised by the inhabitants of the countries of the Iberian peninsula after 1492 and what were to become the colonies of those countries after the encounter between Iberia and America took place, and by descendants of these people who live in other countries ... but preserve some link to those people.*¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Segovia, 59.

¹⁹⁴ Gracia, 5.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 26.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 23.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 48.

The peoples known as “Hispanic” are diverse, share no specific characteristics other than these historical relationships, and should always be able to define themselves in their own particularity.

Liberation Theology – Or Not

A major example that Hispanic culture is not monolithic can be found in the theology of Hispanic churches. Goizueta claims that some form of liberative theology is essential to being “The Church.”

*The lived commitment to social justice is not superfluous to but a precondition for authentic Christian faith. The struggle for justice is not an option for Christians, over and above their Christian belief and worship; the lived commitment to social justice is itself an essential, intrinsic dimension of any authentic Christian faith.*¹⁹⁸

As do many Hispanic authors, Goizueta draws heavily on the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe to argue for God’s preferential option for the poor.¹⁹⁹ Our Lady of Guadalupe, affectionately referred to as *la Morenita*, is Mexico’s version of the Virgin Mary, who appeared to a poor indigenous man named Juan Diego in 1531. *La Morenita* inspired Juan Diego to leave behind his internalized inferiority and to begin to live as a person with God-given worth and dignity. Such is the call of the church, Goizueta claims – to inspire, to lift up, to liberate those who have been oppressed.

Despite Goizueta’s claims that social justice is essential, many Hispanic churches descend from the colonizing efforts of evangelical missionaries from the United States, which has led them to ignore or resist the “social gospel,”

¹⁹⁸ Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesús*, 88.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 37-46.

Liberation Theology, and the message of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Elizabeth

Conde-Frazier writes that many of

*the educational resources of the Hispanic community have been informed by an evangelical tradition that has separated the church from the affairs of the world. Thus, the church can only view its mission as it relates to personal behaviors. Pietism and sin are defined in privatistic terms alone.*²⁰⁰

Thus, a theological fault-line exists between evangelical churches which emphasize individual salvation and churches which emphasize communal salvation, social justice, and the preferential option for the poor. This divide, which is present throughout the church, certainly impacts the life of Hispanic religious communities.

Justo González, who many consider to be the patriarch of Latin American theologians,²⁰¹ treats this subject at length in his book *Teología liberadora*. González writes of the *otra iglesia* (other church),²⁰² the church of the poor, the church that challenges the injustices of the world. González calls this church the “other church” because he was raised in the evangelical church brought by missionary colonists from the United States, a church which prioritizes individual salvation and neglects social issues. *Teología liberadora* is a systematic theology which espouses an approach to reading scripture and understandings of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit which undergird the call for the church to work for social justice.

²⁰⁰ Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, “Religious Education in an Immigrant Community,” in *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Apuntes in Honor of Justo L. González*, ed. Alvin Padilla, Roberto Goizueta, and Eldin Villafane (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 190.

²⁰¹ Accolades on this topic abound in the compilation *Hispanic Christian Thought at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Apuntes in Honor of Justo González*, written by younger Hispanic theologians to honor Gonzalez on his 67th birthday.

²⁰² Justo González, *Teología liberadora: Enfoque desde la opresión en una tierra extraña*, 2a ed. (Florida: Kairos, 2014), 82.

Robert Chao Romero takes up these themes in *Brown Church*.²⁰³ Romero traces the history of Hispanic Christianity in the Americas, making an argument for a “Brown Church” based in liberational theologies. He begins with Bartolome de Las Casas, referring to him as “the central founder of the Brown Church and progenitor of Brown Theology in the Americas.”²⁰⁴ He continues through the story of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, the colonial resistance of Garcilaso de la Vega el Inca, Guaman Poma, and Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, and the social movement of Cesar Chavez in California. Romero claims that Latina/o theology has long argued for *misión integral* (wholistic mission) -- resisting social injustices and treating the whole of human life as essential to theology.²⁰⁵

While Romero, like Gonzalez and Goizueta, views *misión integral* as essential to Christian life, he also acknowledges that many Hispanic congregations in the United States are still heavily influenced by their colonialist missionary roots. As background, Romero discusses power and the oppression of the Jewish people in the Roman Empire. He outlines “three major responses to the oppression of Roman cultural, political, and economic colonialism:” compromise, withdrawal, and resistance. Romero links these three responses to the Jewish sects known from the Bible and/or from Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews*. The response of *compromise* is exemplified by the Sadducees and Herodians, the response of *withdrawal* by the Essenes, and the response of *resistance* by the Zealots.²⁰⁶ Romero then argues that we see similar approaches in the Latino/a community in the 21st century, with the religious community most often taking the second approach.

²⁰³ Robert Chao Romero, *Brown Church: Five Centuries of Latina/o Social Justice, Theology, and Identity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020).

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 53.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 12.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 34. Romero’s outlines of the three ancient and three modern responses to oppression are included in Appendix 3, Handouts 5 and 7, on pages 142 and 144.

Latina/o Essenes, those who withdraw, are probably the most common within the Latina/o religious community. Modern day Latina/o Essene churches do a good job of connecting their members with personal Christian spirituality and relationship with Jesus. Their great blind spot, however, is that they tend to dismiss legitimate and pressing issues of social justice as 'liberal' and 'worldly.' To make matters worse, many modern-day Latina/o Essenes and Sadducees have formed a partnership with Latina/o Herodians in support of the status quo and modern day empire.²⁰⁷

Romero argues that the withdrawal of the church from social issues not only misses the best of the Brown Church tradition, but also leads to younger people and activists abandoning this church that ignores the needs of the community it serves.

CONCLUSION:

A church called to be “the body of the living Christ in the midst of the North American society” must take seriously the racialized context in which we live. Given the historic imbalance of power and privilege in the United States, White Christians must identify, repent from, and surrender power differentials as part of a collaborative, creative, healing process if they want to help create a community of true mutuality. Given the history of political, economic, and theological colonialism in which the dominant White culture imposed itself on Native, African, and Latin American peoples, White people must constantly analyze their thoughts, communications, and behaviors so that they avoid the idolatry of White normativity. We – all of us, but especially Anglos -- must be conscious of whether we are “othering” many of our Christian siblings by calling them “ethnic” and/or expecting them to “join us” or become like us. We must ask questions like “What is the relationship between White Americans and Mexican Americans in the Southwest?” suggested by Harvey.²⁰⁸ We must be intentional to ensure that we have

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 35.

²⁰⁸ Harvey, 165.

balanced leadership and shared power. Intentional anti-racism must be practiced if we hope to eventually experience true reconciliation. As Andrew Draper puts it: “This then is mission: decentering white identity so as to be joined by others who are also making the journey to a Center not of our own making.”²⁰⁹

Mestizaje, as used by Goizueta, Gracia, Elizondo, and Isasi-Díaz, offers an approach to cultural relationships that promotes the community-in-diversity that I am calling “prophetic unity.” *Mestizaje* invites us to affirm each other, listen deeply to each other, learn from each other, and value each other. In a culture that has long privileged White norms, white people are especially called to enter spaces in which Hispanic people are leaders, to acknowledge their leadership, to learn from their voices. There is a wealth of literature written by Hispanic scholars about theology, biblical interpretation, cultural dynamics, and many more topics of interest to the church that invite us to understand Hispanic cultures through their own voices. We also must recognize and affirm that, at times, Hispanics need their own spaces to breathe and celebrate their own culture and leadership without the background of hegemonic expectations.

Finally, Liberation Theology offers a healthy challenge to the church to always be cognizant of our contexts and aware of power and resource differentials. If the church can be “The Church,” if we can embody communion-in-otherness, then our unity will have a prophetic character. I pray that we can embody prophetic unity as a witness to a badly fragmented world that a better way is possible.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 206.

CHAPTER 4: The Ministry Context

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arizona

Part 1: The Disciples and Race

The ministry context for my project, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arizona (CCAZ), is one of 31 Regions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada (CCDC). Before looking specifically at the CCAZ, I will explore the wider context of the CCDC, and our quest for unity highlighted in chapter 2, in light of the analysis of our broader racialized society presented in chapter 3.

Throughout the history of the CCDC, there have been sincere attempts by people of all races to achieve unity, perhaps most notably in the decision of Black Disciples and White Disciples to merge in 1968. But there has also been blindness to the lack of mutuality in relationships governed by White normativity and expectations of assimilation. Indeed, White normativity is evident in the fact that the official organizations of Disciples of Color, like the National Convocation for those of African descent; the North American-Pacific/Asian Disciples (NAPAD) for those of Asian and Pacific Island descent; and the *Obra Hispana* for those of Hispanic descent – are referred to throughout our denomination as “Racial/Ethnic Ministries,” as though White is the norm and anything else is an ethnic “other.”

Before going further, however, I want to be clear that I am not questioning the sincerity of White Disciples leaders. I am not accusing them of wanting to be racist, wanting to feel superior, or consciously trying to “other” Disciples of Color. Critically analyzing our social location and the power dynamics involved in any relationship is not the same as berating ourselves. Recalling Jim Wallis’ use of the term “original sin,” we

are born into a racialized society and are socialized to be blind to white normativity. From my lifelong experience in the Disciples, I believe that the vast majority of our leaders sincerely have tried to pursue unity out of a love for God and neighbor. I trust the goodwill and good intentions of all involved. However, I do not want to minimize the painful effects of our blindness. Words, actions, and official decisions that are made with good intentions but lack a critical understanding of the racial dynamics of privilege and power still cause pain. We cannot make progress toward our polar star if we do not critically examine our social histories and power dynamics, if we do not acknowledge and work to heal pain, if we do not seek prophetic unity rather than cheap unity. In the words of a developing anti-racist reflecting on her relationship with a more “awake” friend, “She helped me understand that we are who we are and we can work at being the best version of who we are, but that we don’t need to denounce ourselves.”²¹⁰

Sandhya Jha’s *Room at the Table: Struggle for Unity and Equality in Disciples History* explores the oft-neglected history of Disciples of Color.²¹¹ Jha notes, using a phrase often spoken by Disciples with pride, but one which in a racialized context is unfortunately far too apt: “As the first denomination founded on American soil, the Disciples’ story follows many of the contours of the story of the United States.”²¹² Jha’s work exposes some of the ways Disciples of Color have been treated as second-class citizens within their own denomination. Beginning with African American Disciples, Jha notes that “Blacks first entered Disciples churches as slaves of church members,”²¹³ an image that reeks of a complete lack of equality and mutual regard. She cites the church in

²¹⁰ Tockluk, 109.

²¹¹ Sandhya Jha, *Room at the Table: Struggle for Unity and Equality in Disciples History*, (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2009), 7.

²¹² Ibid., 6.

²¹³ Ibid., 7.

Midway, Kentucky, in which enslaved Blacks worshipped in the same building as the Whites, but had to sit “in the balcony, which was more of a hay loft; it had no stairwell. So, in order to worship, Black members climbed a ladder into the balcony.”²¹⁴ White leaders also failed to recognize their Black siblings²¹⁵ as mutual partners in ministry. “In addition to the second-class seating of Black Disciples in slave states, their opportunities for leadership in the ‘priesthood of all believers’ likewise were limited in title, function, and to whom they could minister.”²¹⁶ Relegating Black Disciples to the balconies and prohibiting them from full leadership participation demonstrates that the White Disciples did not see their Black siblings as mutual partners who shared power, leadership, and full participation in Christian unity.

Tired of being treated as second-class citizens, Black Disciples formed their own congregations and eventually their own organizational structure. Jha cites Kenneth Henry’s summary of Preston Taylor’s address at the forming of the National Christian Missionary Convention in Nashville in 1917: “Black Disciples were pushed in the direction of forming the convention by a general attitude of many Whites that the Negro was a ward, pet, or second-class human being, not a full equal partner in the family of Disciples.”²¹⁷ Brenda Cardwell and William Fox²¹⁸ draw on James Blair’s summary of the specific frustrations that led Black Disciples to form their own Convention:

- *The need for a good institution of higher education which would provide quality education for Black people;*

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ I use “siblings” rather than the more traditional “brothers and sisters” to be even more inclusive, seeking to include and affirm those in the family of God who do not identify as strictly male or female.

²¹⁶ Jha, 7.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 38.

²¹⁸ Brenda M. Cardwell and William T. Fox, *Journey Toward Wholeness: a History of Black Disciples of Christ in the Mission of the Christian Church. Vol. 1, From Convention to Convocation: No Longer ‘Objects of’ Mission but ‘Partners In’ the Work (1700-1998)* (Ashland: Christian Board of Publication, 2016).

- *Treatment of second-class Christian citizenship which seemed to permeate most relationships between Blacks and Whites in the church;*
- *Lack of public accommodations being available to Blacks when they attended large gatherings of White members of the Christian Churches and no strong advocacy by the White Convention for the securing of such accommodations for all attendants regardless of race;*
- *Lack of communication between the church bureaucracy serving Blacks and an unwritten policy that Blacks “were being told what was best for them, rather than being asked what was best;”*
- *Need for communication and understanding among Black Disciples themselves;*
- *Need for an elimination of stereotype ideas about race through the creative interaction of competent Blacks and Whites.*²¹⁹

Tired of such second-class treatment, Black Disciples formed the National Christian Missionary Convention. In the words of Rev. Dr. Bill Lee, which express a recurring theme throughout Jha’s book in reference to all Disciples of Color: “African American Disciples wanted to be treated as equals in all aspects of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).”²²⁰

After fifty years of Black Disciples leading their own Convention, they took the risk of uniting once again with White Disciples in what is known as the “merger.” In the late 1960s, when racial conflict was high in the United States, Black and White Disciples merged, a witness to the unity we believe God wants for the church and for humankind.

As Sandhya Jha puts it:

*At the exact moment when many African Americans were giving up on White America’s capacity to live into the Beloved Community of Martin Luther King’s dream, Black Disciples chose to merge with White Disciples because they were so committed to Disciples’ core value of unity in the Body of Christ that they were willing to take the risks involved.*²²¹

²¹⁹ Ibid., 28.

²²⁰ Rev. Dr. William “Bill” Lee, “‘Kick Like Hell:’ Remarks Presented Concerning the Merger Agreement and the Design at Design at 50.” A paper presented at Brite Divinity School’s “Design at 50 Symposium.” Ft. Worth, TX: January 2019. Accessed December 3, 2021: https://brite.edu/programs/lifelong-learning/The_Design_at_50/.

²²¹ Jha, 73.

But this act of trust on the part of Black Disciples would lead to great pain. Despite promises that things would be different, Black Disciples once again began to feel like second-class citizens. Rev. Dr. Bill Lee expresses the lack of mutuality with a story from a meeting of the National Convocation.²²²

*The Rev. Dr. T. Garrott Benjamin, Pastor of 2nd Christian Church Indianapolis, Indiana (Light of the World Christian Church) raised an interesting question and in my mind Dr. Lincoln's response was equally interesting. "What do you do, queried Dr. Benjamin, when you are a minnow swallowed by a whale?" "Kick like hell", was Dr. Lincoln's quick, terse response.*²²³

Lee quickly realized in this analogy that "the minnow was the National Christian Missionary Convention and the whale was the International Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)." ²²⁴

The feeling of still being second-class citizens began almost immediately after the merger. The governance document of the newly formed Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, *The Design*, made no mention of the merger or the covenant between two conventions.

*Our struggle with the Design is that it did not include us at all. The Rev. Dr. Raymond E. Brown, one of the principal leaders at the time of the merger often said, "Before the ink dried on the merger documents they had already written the Design." There is no mention of the merger in the Design and therefore nothing concerning the covenant between the two conventions.*²²⁵

Lee outlines how throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Black Disciples tried to work within the new system to achieve equality, engaging in a number of meetings and sponsoring resolutions.²²⁶ Then, at the 1985 General Assembly, in an act that blatantly testifies to

²²² The National Convocation is the association of Black Disciples within the structure of the CC(DOC).

²²³ Lee, 1-2.

²²⁴ Ibid. The "ICCC" was the association of primarily White Disciples.

²²⁵ Ibid., 3.

²²⁶ Ibid., 12-16.

the lack of mutuality, the General Minister and President named the new Associate General Minister and Administrative Secretary of the National Convocation – without consulting Black Disciples on who their own administrative leader would be. Lee expresses the extreme frustration:

*Enough was enough. The merger was not working as expected. Many did not want to say that out loud. The African American Disciples were step children. And now our perceived highest ranking officer is being chosen without African American leaders being consulted. African American Disciples that night felt disgraced.*²²⁷

Lee describes the strong reaction of African American Disciples, but he is careful to note that it was not a reaction to just this one incident of disrespect:

The frustrations mounted and the African American leadership blew a gasket at General Assembly in Des Moines, Iowa in August 1985. It is important to understand that the anger displayed by African American Disciples was not over this one incident. The anger had been built over years of frustration with the merger agreement. Years of unresolved resolutions. The loss of decision making power was an unintended consequence of the merger.

After fifty years of leading their own convention, African American Disciples had merged with White Disciples to show the world that the two races could live and work in harmony. But soon they once again felt like second class citizens. The merger was primarily a structural merger on paper which fell far short of a relationship of genuine mutuality.

Lee's analogy of a whale swallowing a minnow highlights White expectations that Disciples of Color would assimilate. Jha quotes Kojiro Unoura about his efforts to evangelize Japanese people in California in the 1940s and the instruction he received to focus on assimilation: "I was definitely instructed by both societies not to start any segregated racial church, but to work on the principle of integration, encouraging our

²²⁷ Ibid., 18.

people to attend the existing Caucasian churches.”²²⁸ While integration may initially sound like a worthwhile goal, White Disciples are often unaware that they are asking others to give up their supposedly “inferior” cultures to join a supposedly “superior” White culture, to submit to White leadership rather than have the ability to choose their own leaders and create their own ministries. Jha writes, “the challenge and the gift of multi-cultural ministry at this time: multicultural ministry meant non-Whites assimilating into White churches.”²²⁹

Expectations of assimilation go all the way back to our roots, and they are especially evident in the manner in which White Disciples have related to Hispanics. For the history of Hispanic Disciples, Jha draws heavily on the work of Daisy Machado and Pablo Jiménez. Citing an address Alexander Campbell gave in 1849 entitled “The Anglo-Saxon Language – Its Origin, Character, and Destiny,” Machado notes that Campbell envisioned a time in which the whole world would speak English and learn from Anglo-Saxon ways. Campbell wrote of the Anglo-Saxon language:

*But, beyond all the advantages yet named, it is animated by a mighty proselyting spirit and power, arising from the innumerable stores of learning, science, art and new discoveries tied up in it – the rich behests of Anglo-Saxon genius. These are the great benefactors of man – the great reformers of the world ... The Lord Almighty, who has now girdled the earth from east to west with the Anglo-Saxon people ... by giving colossal power to Great Britain and the United States over the continents and oceans of the earth, will continue to extend that power and magnificence until they spread from north to south ... in one vernacular, in one language ... For all over the earth there will be but one Lord, one faith, one hope and one language.*²³⁰

²²⁸ Jha, 55.

²²⁹ Ibid., 56.

²³⁰ Daisy L. Machado, *Of Borders and Margins: Hispanic Disciples in Texas, 1888-1945* *Of Borders and Margins: Hispanic Disciples in Texas, 1888-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 64-65.

While Campbell was a product of his times, and we can certainly hope he would take another approach in our post-holocaust society, we see similar sentiments in 1964, over 100 years later, in the words of Rev. Byron Spice, a Disciples leader who was attempting to reach out to Hispanic people:

*Growth in acculturation ... is certainly one of the desired outcomes of our ministry to Spanish-speaking people ... The Spanish-language churches provide a training ground where Spanish-speaking persons can prepare themselves to take their places as members and possible leaders in English-speaking churches ... Perhaps the goal of our work is to bring about such a degree of acculturation that eventually all will worship in English-speaking churches.*²³¹

Machado offers her critique:

*What one notices immediately is that the ultimate denominational goal was not the creation of strong, self-sufficient, self-governing Latino congregations. Instead, the emphasis is on the creation of 'bridge' congregations that would help Latino immigrants 'cross over' to the dominant culture. These 'bridge congregations' would then die after completing their task.*²³²

In addition to the pressure to assimilate, we also see Hispanic Disciples, particularly Mexican-Americans in the Southwest, treated as second-class citizens rather than mutual partners in Christ's mission. White Disciples leaders and historians often spoke about Mexican-American Disciples in condescending terms and in language that clearly views them as "other." Machado notes that in 1919, Disciples newspapers wrote about "the Mexican problem," citing an article in *World Call*:

Almost every phase of the immigrant question in the United States has been fully treated with the exception of the Mexican problem of the Southwest ... It is needless to say that when these people came to the United States, they did not suddenly forget or leave behind their former modes of living, their vices, their superstitions and their nonreligion ...

²³¹ Jha, 70.

²³² Ibid., 71.

*these are a primitive people and live under conditions quite different from our own people.*²³³

Note the use of the phrases “these people” and “our own people” – a clear indication that the author did not see Mexican Americans as equal and beloved siblings in Christ. Machado claims there was a tension between Disciples’ missionary efforts and the Mexican culture, as the White Disciples “possessed a foundational *perception* that the people they were called to serve were inferior, they were not really North American, and they were not really Christian.”²³⁴ Jha notes that in a later article from 1997, Machado shares her “firsthand experiences of ... ministry on the margins within the Disciples church:”

*In our eleven-year ministry we were evicted from one Disciples church facility because the congregation decided they didn't want any more “Mexicans” in their building. Another Disciples congregation agreed to let us use their facility but we were forbidden from bringing our children into the nursery because ‘the mothers were concerned that Hispanic children carried lice.’*²³⁵

Machado also notes the creation in 1913 of the “Mexican Christian Institute” (today known as the Inman Center). She points out that the institute was said to be run by “four Anglo Disciples missionaries” and “three ‘Mexican helpers.’”²³⁶ Again, the language used shows a lack of respect for the Mexicans as equal partners in mission., as does the analysis Machado provides in her conclusion:

*If a Mexican-Texan Disciples mission succeeded, God was praised and the missionary society had pictures taken to assist with future fundraising efforts (today it is done through videos). If it failed, the blame was placed on a people who made the work that much more difficult because they were ‘ignorant, irresponsible, roving and superstitious.’*²³⁷

²³³ Machado, 95.

²³⁴ Ibid, 97.

²³⁵ Jha, 92.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid., 111.

Agreeing with Machado about those early years of neglect and disinterest in ministry with Mexican-Americans, Pablo Jimenez writes:

*Las personas hispanas eran consideradas como extranjeros, no como verdaderas “americanos”. Este prejuicio les permitía a los miembros del movimiento Stone-Campbell ignorar a las personas mexicanas que Vivian en Texas, Oklahoma, Nuevo México, Arizona y California.*²³⁸
(Hispanic people were considered as foreigners, not as real “Americans.” This prejudice permitted members of the Stone-Campbell movement to ignore the Mexican people that lived in Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.)

Writing in 2005, Jiménez sadly concludes: *En muchas maneras, el pueblo hispano todavia es visto como “extranjero.”*²³⁹ (In many ways, Hispanic people are still seen as foreigners.)

Machado outlines what she believes to be the Disciples’ paradigm for approaching their work with Mexican-American communities:

*no resources invested in educating and developing indigenous leaders; no resources invested in printing materials in Spanish; local missions were underfunded and neglected; the Mexican leader was seen as a “helper” and not given equal status. And, as a result, the Disciples church in TX created a Latino church that was relegated to the margins of the denomination’s focus and resources.*²⁴⁰

This paradigm is apparent in 1992, especially the part about underfunding and under resourcing Hispanic ministry. Seven years after the eruption of frustration in Des Moines over White Disciples choosing the leader of the African American National Convocation, Hispanic Disciples experienced their own frustration. Hispanic Leaders, after years of careful study, had proposed the creation of a Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries. The proposal was reviewed and approved by the General Board of the

²³⁸ Pablo A. Jiménez, *Somos Uno: Historia, teología, y gobierno de la Iglesia Cristiana (Discípulos de Cristo)* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 22.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Machado, 111.

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).²⁴¹ Having received approval from the General Board, Hispanic leaders expected the full allocation of the \$297,000 requested to begin this new ministry (about 1.4 percent of the total money to be distributed at that meeting). But at the April 26-30, 1992, meeting of the Commission on Finance of the CCDC, only \$125,000 was allocated – 42% of the requested amount.

The frustration of the Hispanic Disciples leaders, much like that of the African American Disciples, had also built up over years of underfunding and neglect. This frustration is painfully apparent in an article penned by Daisy Machado and Juan Rodriguez:

The decision of the Commission on Finance to allocate only \$125,000 to the new Hispanic endeavor constitutes an offence to the dignity of Hispanic Disciples. Above all, it is a scandal to realize that our church at a general level is willing to share with the official Hispanic administrative structure only .59 percent of its general church resources. It is clear that Hispanic ministry is not a priority of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) despite the fact that we are the fastest growing minority in the United States, and expected to become the largest minority by the year 2000, though in many ways economically and structurally deprived.

*The Commission on Finance's drastic 58 percent cut of our original proposal speaks for itself. The church does not want to invest in the present and in our future. No further explanations are needed ... Our integrity has been, once again, violated. We have not been heard seriously. The system failed. We are alone once more.*²⁴²

David Vargas, the man chosen to be the new National Hispanic Pastor at the time, also expresses his frustration, adding the idea that Hispanics are presented as first-class citizens when it comes to public relations but second-class in the allocation of resources:

We feel that although we are constantly used for purposes of promotion and public relations, when it comes to distributing the resources of our church, it does not respond with the same intensity. Inclusivity in our

²⁴¹ Daisy Machado and Juan Rodriguez, "Hispanic Disciples feel betrayed," *The Disciple* (August 1992), 34-35.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 35.

church is basically a public relations exercise. Church reports, special offering promotions and other materials that are often published with the objective of demonstrating our church's commitment to justice, equality, compassion, etc., frequently contain photographs and description that give the impression that Hispanics are an integral part of the dynamic of our denomination. However, this is only in terms of public relations. In those photographs, for instance, we frequently appear as one among five or six people or images. Nevertheless, in terms of programmatic and budgetary support the percentage is much less. In the Bethany decision, for example, the percentage was less than one in one hundred.

In other words, we are good for publicity and for the purposes of motivating and inspiring churches to donate money in order to fulfill its Christian mission, but when funds collected as a result of this effort are distributed, we are not deserving of even one percent of the goods of our church.²⁴³

After venting their frustrations, the Hispanic Caucus of the National Hispanic and Bilingual Fellowship concludes with a call that sounds very much like our current General Minister and President's call to 'be the church we say we are:' "Our call is for our church to move beyond the idea of inclusiveness as an exercise in public relations. The real need is for the church's actions to match its public image and declarations."²⁴⁴

The Anti-Racism Initiative

In an attempt to answer that call, perhaps having finally heard and understood some degree of the pain and frustration of Disciples of Color, Disciples started to develop a mission imperative to work toward becoming an anti-racist church. In July 1998, the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) officially adopted what is known as the "Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation Initiative" (ARPR) – a call for the church to learn about, unmask, and overcome systemic racism in our church. Rev. Dr. Richard (Dick) Hamm, then our General Minister and President, boldly stated in his book *2020*

²⁴³ Ibid., 37.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 35.

Vision (2001) that our “aim is to see every congregation, region, general unit, and other institution of the church in the United States implement this initiative over the next several years.”

In the “Vision Statement” of Reconciliation Ministries, the Disciples general unit charged with taking the lead on our anti-racism efforts, we hear the call to prophetic unity. The vision includes a desire to provide a witness of communion-in-diversity, a call to listen to and learn from once-silenced voices, and a call to repent and truly change:

The Pro-reconciliation/Anti-Racism Initiative was founded upon the need to make visible God’s beloved community. It invites the church to listen to the once silenced voices of its racial/ethnic communities, learn from their wisdom and gain insight from their leadership. It calls the church to discernment and prayer; study of the scriptures and reflection, dialogue and table fellowship. The true goal is to transform, strengthen and deepen the church’s spirituality, resulting in a community that understands its mission to be about bringing justice and salvation to the world.²⁴⁵

The vision reminds one of the goals of the 1968 merger, but this time with more intentional focus on mutuality.

The ARPR initiative has had the most success at the level of our general units. Several of them have active anti-racism teams, including the Office of General Minister and President, Disciples Home Missions, Disciples Overseas Missions, Church Extension, the College of Regional Ministers, and the National Benevolent Association (NBA).²⁴⁶ All search committees at the general unit level are required to undergo anti-racism training before beginning their search. In addition, the NBA requires all partners in their Incubate program, a program for leaders of developing ministries, to attend ARPR training every three years.²⁴⁷ So, in the general units of the CCDC, the

²⁴⁵ “The Vision of the Church,” accessed December 12, 2021: <https://reconciliationministry.org/who-we-are/history-of-reconciliation-ministry/>.

²⁴⁶ Reconciliation Ministry website, n.d., accessed September 18, 2018.

²⁴⁷ Ayanna Watkins, email message to me (September 15, 2018).

ARPR initiative has been taken seriously and has led to the creation of some system-wide attempts to combat structural racism.

Regions and congregations have shown varying degrees of commitment/interest in this mission imperative. As of 2018, 13 of 31 regions had officially established anti-racism teams, and only 12 regions required ministers to attend anti-racism trainings in order to renew ministerial credentials (“standing”).²⁴⁸ In April of 2015, after yet another disturbing shooting of a black man by a white police officer, the College of Regional Ministers issued a letter calling on the church to renew commitment to our mission imperative.

*Your Regional Ministers believe that much more work remains both in church and society to counter the effects of racism. Our own congregations too often reflect or experience little of the diversity found nearby. In society, the news has brought a series of calamities where unarmed, young African American men have been killed by police or others, often with no indictment to follow. While leaders in other arenas have sought to address the issues, the church as a collective has not given voice to the heinous acts of discrimination and disregard for human life. We, the College of Regional Ministers of the Christian Church (DOC), believe that “Black lives matter.”*²⁴⁹

Regional ministers called on all manifestations of the church “to pursue our calling to more abundant life as an Anti-Racism/Pro Reconciliation Church.”²⁵⁰ My project falls within this context and is an attempt to pursue the work of becoming an Anti-Racism/Pro Reconciliation Church.

²⁴⁸ “Standing” is the credentialing process for Disciples ministers. These statistics come from my research on regional websites and in conversations with regional ministers.

²⁴⁹ “Pastoral letter to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) from the College of Regional Ministers concerning excessive force against unarmed African American men,” April 9, 2015, accessed December 21, 2021: <https://disciples.org/congregations/college-regional-ministers-offers-letter-church/>.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. I will note that this letter showed me a prophetic side to the College of Regional Ministers that I had not yet seen, inspiring me to begin the work of anti-racism and eventually leading to my interest in Regional Ministry.

The Obra Hispana

Despite the frustration over lack of funding, the creation of the Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries (CPOHM) in 1991 was a positive step toward increasing Hispanic involvement and leadership in the denomination. Newell Williams writes:

*This Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries has three objectives: to provide programs and pastoral care to Hispanic leaders and congregations; to advise the different regional and general ministries of the church on Hispanic ministry; and to be an advocate for Hispanic Disciples.*²⁵¹

Pablo Jiménez highlights some of the positives in his article about Hispanics in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*:

*The future of Hispanic ministries in the Stone Campbell Movement seems positive. The creation by the Disciples of the Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries has opened many possibilities for change. The rapid establishment of new Hispanic and bilingual congregations ... promises to transform the face of the churches. In Disciples organizations clear evidence of this is the election of Paul D. Rivera as moderator of the Church (1999-2001) and of David A. Vargas as president of the Division of Overseas Ministries in 2003.*²⁵²

While Jiménez expresses hope for the future, he also lists several remaining challenges. A major challenge involves leadership development. Jiménez notes the absence of Hispanic scholars and students in Disciples theological schools. Of those who do attend, most are of Puerto Rican heritage. Jiménez highlights the need for more diverse leadership with the communities of people that are often lumped together under the term “Hispanic:”

Disciples’ Hispanic ministries are also still overly dependent on immigrant pastors, a situation highlighted by the fact that since Rodriguez, all top Hispanic executives have been ethnic Puerto Ricans,

²⁵¹ D. Newell Williams, “The Disciples of Christ in One Sentence” (Indianapolis: Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministry, 2021), 3.

²⁵² Pablo Jimenez, “Hispanics in the Movement.” In *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004, 400-401.

*most of whom have been trained and ordained by the Disciples in Puerto Rico. The hegemony of Puerto Ricans among Hispanic Disciples churches also presents a difficult challenge. The leadership dilemma is worsened by the rapid growth of congregations that now serve Central Americans and Mexican Americans. Puerto Ricans are already the minority in most congregations outside the Eastern seaboard. Disciples must develop more leaders from the diverse ethnic backgrounds that comprise the Hispanic community.*²⁵³

A result of the failure to develop sufficient leadership is that many Disciples congregations are pastored by people who have grown up in other (non-) denominational cultures and have little or no experience with the Disciples approach to church.

Another major challenge Jiménez mentions is finances – from lack of income to tension throughout the church about who controls denominational finances:

*Hispanics — particularly Mexican Americans — have lower incomes than the population at large. On average, a Hispanic congregation needs two or three times the number of members of an Anglo European congregation in order to sustain a full-time minister. This challenge is compounded by a paternalistic mentality that still permeates certain sectors of the churches of the Movement, where people volunteer to share “their” funds with Hispanics, as if Hispanics were outsiders.*²⁵⁴

We continue to see, then, evidence of the critique Daisy Machado offered years earlier: we need to increase access to theological education and financial resources in order to help Hispanic Disciples flourish.

Part 2: Disciples and Race in Arizona

Historical Timeline

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

The first Disciples congregation in Arizona was formed in 1886 when the American Christian Missionary Society sent an evangelist to Phoenix to organize a church.²⁵⁵ Though Disciples began missions just a few years later to Mexican people in and beyond Texas in 1888 and to Puerto Rico in 1899,²⁵⁶ it would be more than 100 years until the Disciples began to consider organizing a Hispanic congregation in Arizona. Minutes from meetings of the New Church Development Committee (NCDC) of the Arizona Region in the 1970's and 1980's show much discussion about starting new churches, and the successful launch of six new congregations, but no mention of starting Hispanic congregations.

The first Hispanic Disciples congregation in Arizona began as a congregation renting space from the Disciples that eventually affiliated with the Disciples in 1991. Gilbert Marez, the pastor of this congregation, was invited to join the New Church Development Committee in 1992 – the first Hispanic to serve in Regional leadership.²⁵⁷ Marez's presence raised the team's awareness: "The New Church Development Committee is aware that there needs to be emphasis on racial/ethnic congregations—particularly Hispanic ministries due to the increasing population of Hispanic persons in Arizona."²⁵⁸ Consultants from the New Congregation Establishment ministry in Indianapolis were brought in, including an invitation to David Vargas, the National Hispanic Pastor. On March 29, 1993, consultant Rev. Anibal Burgos spoke with the committee about the history of Disciples Hispanic ministry over the previous 100 years. Discussion continued throughout the 1990's, and at least one Anglo congregation

²⁵⁵ The information in the rest of this chapter, unless otherwise noted, is from unpublished internal documents of the Christian Church (DoC) in Arizona and from interviews with people directly involved.

²⁵⁶ Jha, 19, 28-29.

²⁵⁷ According to records we can find.

²⁵⁸ Notes from NCD meeting, Sept 21, 1992. Note the use of "racial/ethnic" shows the presence of white normativity that "others" Hispanics.

offered to “nest” a Hispanic new church start, but no action was taken. One Hispanic leader began a bible study at an Anglo congregation in 1998, hoping it would lead to a new worshipping community, but after a few years of trying she expressed that she was “concerned about the lack of support from the Region and from the Anglo congregations.” The pastor of that Anglo congregation shared that “the members of the congregation are hesitant to talk about Hispanic ministry as part of their identity.”

A new millennium brought a new commitment, however. The Regional Minister stated that “we are called to respond to the increasing ethnic diversity in our region especially the growing Hispanic population.” The NCDC added three Hispanic members and created a “Hispanic Ministry Sub-Committee.” Coinciding with the 2020 Vision’s goal to start 1000 new churches, Arizona’s Regional Minister and the NCDC created a new position beginning on January 1, 2001: Regional Pastor for Hispanic Ministries. The new Regional Hispanic Pastor,²⁵⁹ the first one in the denomination, was charged with creating new worshipping communities of Hispanic people. He brought enthusiasm to the job and worked hard to communicate with the whole Region the excitement and commitment to Hispanic ministry, writing in the *Arizona Disciple*:

The Spirit of God has been moving among the Hispanics in the Arizona Region, and the Region has exuberantly responded to the Spirit’s call to establish Hispanic congregations in Arizona. For years, God’s Spirit has moved in Tucson through Iglesia Cristiana Ebenezer in planting the seeds for Hispanic ministries. The New Church Development Committee has called a Regional Pastor for Hispanic Ministries, making the Arizona Region the only region in the country to have established such an office.

²⁵⁹ The formal title of “Regional Pastor for Hispanic Ministries” intended to convey the connection and support of the Region. In common usage, however, the title was shorted to “Regional Hispanic Pastor” which became interpreted to some degree as parallel to rather than part of the Region. This subtle difference in the names exemplifies some of the challenge to create unity and not division within the Region.

From 2001-2009, thirteen Hispanic congregations were started or chose to affiliate with the Disciples.²⁶⁰ In the next decade another four would start. In 2004, the Arizona Convención was formed to provide support and fellowship for Hispanic Disciples in Arizona. In the last 20 years, then, Hispanic Disciples have become a major part of the Arizona Region.

The enthusiasm and optimism continued throughout that first decade, as the Regional Hispanic Pastor shared in his annual report to the Region.

Arizona has made an impact throughout the Region and around the country with the establishment of the office for Hispanic Ministries and development of new Hispanic churches. People around the country have been calling and asking questions about Hispanic ministries in Arizona. Other regions want to know how we have accomplished what we have done so far, how we have done it, and how they can do the same thing in their regions. Scripture says: “preach the gospel in Jerusalem, Samaria, and into all the world.” The Arizona Region is doing that. We have impacted our local area, but we have also impacted our nation.

The Arizona Regional Assembly in 2002 was celebrated as our first ever bilingual assembly. They also celebrated the creation of a Regional anti-racism team. The 2002 Regional Assembly also celebrated the creation of the Regional Office of Hispanic Ministries of the Christian Church in Arizona. The mission was declared to be threefold: (1) identify potential leaders, (2) equip them for ministry, and (3) establish new Hispanic congregations. They also listed the desire to “bring unity in all the manifestations of the Christian Church, especially among Hispanics and Anglo communities.”

As Hispanic Disciple presence grew in Arizona, so did the desire for unity, as evidenced by this report from a Regional leadership planning retreat in March 2009:

²⁶⁰Several of these new congregations were reported by the Regional Hispanic Pastor to the NCDC but did not necessarily go through the formal process of becoming Disciples and being registered in the Yearbook. There was some confusion/disagreement throughout this period on what officially constituted a Disciples congregation.

The top priority was to develop a 5-year strategy for creating a true multi-cultural Region.

Leaders called for our region's Pro-Reconciling/Anti-Racism Team to lead a region-wide effort of education, training and work with each ministry team to make this priority an intentional part of all of the ministry of the region.

For years the Arizona Region has worked to be multi-cultural in our ministries, events, and mission. In our Regional Assemblies we have focused on topics and invited speakers that were relevant to different cultures. We have worked to provide worship, training and events that were either bilingual or have provided translation. This has been true with our Women's events as well.

Now our regional leaders are calling on us to extend this priority. They look forward to the day when all regional events are equally available and desirable to the different cultures served by our Arizona Disciples congregations. They have called on our Pro-Reconciling Team to also work with regional ministries and congregations to combat racism and promote reconciliation among all of God's people.

The task of “creating a true multi-cultural Region,” however, was more difficult than they had expected. From 2008-2012, six of the new Hispanic congregations either closed or ceased affiliation with the Disciples. In November of 2012, Hispanic Disciples in Arizona celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Regional Office for Hispanic ministries by bringing Justo L. Gonzalez to Arizona for two days of worship and workshops. Shortly afterward, however, the Regional Hispanic Pastor was terminated from his position, resulting in much heartache. Different stories are told about the reasons for the termination, and confusion and hard feelings linger to this day.

The Region responded to this painful situation by creating a new Hispanic/Regional Task Force consisting of three Hispanic and four Anglo leaders. They began by suggesting “that we need to start at ‘zero,’ as we understand that we have not connected in the past.” A Hispanic leader “expressed that an attitude of ‘nobody even cares if we are

here or not' currently exists." Another "stated that a negative image of [the] Regional Minister exists and that changing that is the priority issue." The question was raised: "How do we move past the right or wrong image that has been created in the past?"

It seems significant progress was made, as evidenced by this Annual Report presented by the Arizona Convención at the Regional Assembly in November of 2014:

Through a difficult year of transition, the Convención has worked to bring unity and to grow through the circumstances. Several steps were taken this year towards bridging the gap between the Convención (Hispanic Ministries) and the region...

- 1. Hispanic Youth leader served in the Camps of the region in a leadership role.*
- 2. 11 Hispanic women attended the WOW Regional Conference in Colorado, building relationships and opening doors for expanding women's ministry, with 4 being under 30 as we strive to increase the participation of younger women.*
- 3. 2 Hispanic young women... attended the Women to Women Worldwide trip to Mexico in 2013.*
- 4. A regional women's conference was held this year for the Convención with women from 5 churches participating.*
- 5. One additional church ... joined the region and the Convención in 2013 ...*
- 6. The Administrative Council of the Convención was an active participant this year, a committee which was not functioning in a leadership role previously...*
- 7. Reconnection in the annual Executive Board meeting for the Obra Hispana was also established with the participation of the Moderator of the Convención AZ attending the meeting in Indianapolis this December.*
- 8. Overall a more connected and consistent communication with the regional office and staff has increased relations for the Hispanic ministries and the region in general.*

It is the general desire of the Hispanic ministries to continue to work together to better integrate into the region, while maintaining our identity as a Convención, bringing together the work of the kingdom through Women's Ministries, Youth ministries, leadership opportunities and more.

Culture

Throughout the development of Hispanic ministries in Arizona, there has been much discussion about different cultural needs and expectations, especially in relation to resources and theology. Indeed, there seems to be a significant divide in understandings of a basic business model of what it means to be a congregation. Basic questions include the following: Do congregations need an ordained pastor? What level of formal theological education is necessary to be called a “pastor?” Should pastors be paid as professionals or serve out of a sense of calling and make their living outside of the church? Do congregations need to have property and church buildings of their own? Arizona’s NCDC continues to wrestle with these questions. How we resolve these questions has major implications for what we consider fair and equitable use of resources in supporting congregations. More about that in the next section.

In the 1993 NCDC meeting, notes indicate that the Hispanic consultant stated that “Hispanic congregations do not need a \$250,000 site and a seminary graduate to get started” – needs that at the time were basic to Anglo expectations. Rather, he listed the needs as:

- 1. A place to meet. A home would be just fine*
- 2. Leadership with Christian maturity and biblical knowledge. A good lay leader who has been called by God and loves people is adequate.*
- 3. A nucleus of committed lay people.*
- 4. Hispanic congregations can nest in existing churches*
- 5. Use of a bilingual, bicultural pastor who also could focus on Hispanic ministry while serving an Anglo congregation*
- 6. Call a nesting congregation a Hispanic congregation, not a “Hispanic” department of the church*
- 7. An advisory group of all interested parties is essential to develop work plans, budget, salaries, and resources*
- 8. Be intentional in educating people about cultural differences. Avoid paternalism*

Ten years later, the Regional Hispanic pastor stated that “the signs of a strong and thriving Hispanic congregation are completely different from an Anglo congregation.” In addition, he said that “the most important issue is finding a place to worship. The pastoral salary support is a smaller amount while the need for more leadership training in many forms is very important, for both pastors and lay leaders.” What do we make of these contrasting expectations between Anglo and Hispanic congregational needs? How do we practice justice if there are profoundly different expectations of who needs what?

An additional complication was also raised in 2005. The Regional Hispanic Pastor wanted to be clear that cultural difference makes necessary a different approach to organizational relationship and planning. Some congregations face issues such as not being able to get bank accounts, or numbers required by the IRS, because no one in congregation is “legal,” meaning they do not possess the necessary documents to live or work in the United States. A congregation of undocumented immigrants faces challenges that most Anglo congregations cannot begin to understand. The NCDC struggled with whether to hold the same organizational requirements for Hispanic congregations that they do for Anglo congregations in order to charter them as a fully recognized Disciples congregation. This struggle continues. The Region wants to be both sensitive to cultural differences in needs and expectations, but also able to be clear and consistent about certain requirements and processes.

Theological differences also exist between the cultures, though here we should not generalize. Many, but not all, of the Hispanic congregations are evangelical in orientation, emphasizing moral behavior and individual salvation, having been influenced by evangelical missionaries to Mexico. Most, but not all, of the Anglo congregations

have a different orientation, leaning toward social justice and progressive theology. These differences were apparent at a 2009 NCDC meeting with the pastors of an affiliating Hispanic congregation. The chair of the NCDC “shared some of the issues that are important for the Anglos, such as women in leadership roles and an acceptance of people regardless of sexual orientation.” One of the Hispanic pastors stated that he “believes that the Hispanics are about 10 years behind the thinking of the Anglos on some of these issues.” Theological differences also arose during a clergy retreat over the use of alcohol, an event which drove a wedge between Anglo pastors who drank alcohol and evangelical-minded Hispanic pastors who saw that as a violation of Christian faithfulness. Disciples do not require theological agreement to live in unity, but intense theological disagreement can test our commitment to staying at the table, engaging in conversation, and working toward prophetic unity.

Worship styles also differ. Most of the Hispanic worship services begin with 30-45 minutes of praise music. The services run about two hours, often include an altar call for prayer and healing, and only sometimes include the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Anglo services, in contrast, are usually much more emotionally subdued, finish in an hour or less, and always include communion. Many of the Hispanic services are bi-lingual, with the sermons preached in Spanish but translated into English. None of the Anglo congregations provide translation into Spanish. Differing worship styles present both a challenge and an opportunity when planning Regional assemblies and events.

Several of the Hispanic pastors serve their churches on a voluntary basis, without financial support. Some of these say it is their calling, and they do not believe in receiving financial support – a cultural/theological difference with Anglo pastors. Their

need to earn money from an outside job makes them less available for clergy gatherings and Regional meetings than their Anglo counterparts, another challenge to building deep and healthy relationships.

It is also worth noting that the majority of Hispanic Disciples in Arizona are from Mexico and Latin America. This contrasts with the historical Puerto Rican hegemony of the Obra Hispana. One challenge this presents is that many Arizona Disciples are not U.S. citizens. Some do not even have documents to live and work legally in the United States and therefore live with a level of vulnerability many of us cannot understand. Arizona Disciples were proud when one of their own, Rev. Lori Tapia, was elected as both the first woman and the first person of Mexican descent to the position of National Hispanic Pastor.

Financial and Property Resources

As noted above, cultural differences around church business models have led to a great disparity in the allocation of financial resources. In the 1970's, NCDC leaders estimated that it took about \$100,000 "to get a new church up and running." The estimate included bringing in a seminary graduate, purchasing property, and building facilities – all basic expectations for starting an Anglo congregation. That number obviously increases as the years go by, due to salary and property inflation. In the late 1990s, over \$200,000 was spent over four years to launch an Anglo congregation that was then abandoned for lack of success. But when a consultant told the NCDC that: "Hispanic congregations do not need a \$250,000 site and a seminary graduate to get started," it seems the NCDC took those words to heart. An analysis of the NCDC budget during the

first decade of the 21st century, the apex of the founding of Hispanic congregations, is telling. The 2004 NCDC budget reported allocations of \$12,000 total for five Hispanic projects and \$225,000 for two Anglo churches. Later that year a \$500,000 gift was received by the Region to help pay down the debt on the properties of the two Anglo churches, with \$25,000 allotted for Hispanic projects. These wide discrepancies continued, as the 2006 budget lists \$89,000 spent on the one Anglo congregation and \$14,000 total on the five Hispanic congregations. In total, the NCDC invested over \$500,000 to launch the only new Anglo congregation of this millennium, while spending less than a third of that on the 20 new Hispanic congregations. These discrepancies led Gilbert Marez, the only Hispanic on the committee, to observe that “we have projected several years of property payments for Chalice CC and Coolwater CC but haven’t allotted any money for new Hispanic properties in Arizona.”

By 2009, the entire NCDC budget went to support Hispanic ministry, as now all the new congregations were Hispanic. But by then the NCDC budget was much smaller – about \$25,000 in total. A “Jubilee Plan was set for 2009,” as the NCDC decided to “forgive” one month’s rent for each Hispanic congregation. The total cost for this Jubilee Plan was \$4,000. While the Arizona Region invested to bring in the Regional Hispanic Pastor to start congregations, and the Region and several Anglo congregations provided substantial financial assistance to some of the new Hispanic congregations, the overall discrepancy in financial support is striking. Is this due to each culture having different needs? Or is it due to blindness, historical neglect, and the imbalance of power?

It is also worth noting that each of the 15 Anglo congregations control the property on which they worship, while the same can only be said for one of the Hispanic

congregations. Two share a property, three rent (including two from Anglo congregations), and one exists online and in borrowed space. In addition, since many of the Hispanic new congregations originally nested in/rented space from Anglo Disciples congregations, there was a power differential built into the very beginning of the relationship. How does this affect their stability, their potential for ministry, and their sense of importance and mutuality?

CONCLUSION

Currently there are 22 congregations in the Christian Church in Arizona: 15 of them are primarily Anglo, 7 of them are primarily Hispanic – up from 1 in the year 2000. In terms of individual members in the Arizona Region, over one-third are Hispanic. The vast majority of children, youth, and young adults in the Region are Hispanic. The vision to call a Regional Hispanic Pastor in 2001 and seek to begin Hispanic ministry in Arizona has been a success.

We are not ready to declare success, however, on becoming “an inclusive, pluralistic, and multicultural church, the body of the living Christ in the midst of North American society.” Sincere efforts have been made to build relationships and work together, achieving some success. But differences of language and theology, differing expectations and understandings of church business models and worship styles, and historical differences in power and control have continued to keep Anglos and Hispanics from full communion-in-otherness. In many cases, outside of Regional staff and a few Hispanic leaders, there has been little significant interaction between Hispanic and Anglo

Disciples. At the extreme, this disconnect led one retired Anglo to interject: “Oh, are you counting the Hispanic churches?”

Recent efforts have been made to continue working toward a healthy unity. Having heard that theological education is a priority for Hispanic Disciples, the Region offered scholarship support to over 20 students who have attended and graduated from Lexington Theological Seminary’s “Certificate of Hispanic Ministries” program in the last 8 years. The Regional Nominating Committee in 2019 was nearly 50% Hispanic and worked to include more Hispanics in Regional leadership than ever before, including electing our first Hispanic officer who will serve as vice-moderator for 2 years and then moderator for the following 2 years. The NCDC is asking all new congregations to engage in the new “Disciples Covenant Curriculum” to explore what living in covenant means for us. And, as mentioned in chapter 1, the position of *Enlace Regional* was created to help keep the Region focused on intentional efforts to overcome power differentials and relate with mutuality.

The conflict that led to the termination of the Regional Hispanic Pastor in 2013 exposed an underlying problem: the Region had only one bridge between two cultures. Once that bridge is burned, how do we cross between? That pattern repeated itself when one moderator of the *Convención* moved out of state and then another was arrested and deported. In each case, the critical link between Anglos and Hispanics in the Region was lost. Clearly, we need a deeper bench of leaders, both Anglo and Hispanic, who are committed to building meaningful relationships with each other. Towards that end, my project is focused on relationship building between the young adults of our Region in the

hopes that they, if they choose, will serve as bridges between Hispanic and Anglo Disciples.

CHAPTER 5: The Project

Transformation through Leader Development

Summary of the Problem, Contextual Analysis, and Theological Vision

The goal of this project is to help build the capacity of Disciples in Arizona to embody what I call “prophetic unity.” Prophetic unity means we become “The Church” -- a church based on mutual respect and shared power, a church which practices “communion-in-diversity,” a church bound together by a covenant of love. The previous three chapters have explored the vision of prophetic unity, aspects of the racialized culture of the United States which inhibit unity, and efforts and missteps by Disciples to live into unity and “be the church we say we are.” These chapters lead to some important conclusions that point the way forward and form the rationale for the “young adult leader retreat” I proposed for this project.

First and foremost, from a sociological point of view, we need to be able to see and name our own place in the racialized society of the United States. For Whites, this means learning to see our Whiteness, to learn that we have a race and ethnicity, that we are not just “normal” or “generic,” that our experience is a particular White experience and not a universal or superior experience. For Hispanics, who are much more likely to see Whiteness and experience othering, it may mean developing a healthy *mestizo* self-identity, embracing the gift of being part of two cultures rather than feeling ostracized by both. We all have anti-racism and anti-oppression work to do, but our work is different.

Next, we must decenter Whiteness. We must overcome White normativity and embrace a particularist ethic. This involves both seeing particularities and valuing them

in a relationship of mutuality. Decentering Whiteness means we stop expecting Hispanic Disciples to assimilate into White ways of being church. Rather, we must learn to affirm Hispanic culture, identity, language, and worship as authentic and valuable. We must learn to be more “both/and” and less “either/or.” We must learn to take a *mestizaje* approach to relationships rather than an assimilation approach. Being united does not mean being the same, and we can all learn from each other. *Mestizaje* is for all of us.

We must also realize that there is no prophetic unity without shared power. White Disciples need to be willing to listen to and learn from Hispanic Disciples in a relationship of mutuality. Administrative boards and committees need to be balanced decision-making bodies rather than predominantly White with a token Hispanic. We must make a critical analysis of finance, property, and educational resources and work toward fixing all imbalances. Toward these ends, investing in theological education for Hispanic Disciples is one way to begin to develop leaders and equalize a leadership imbalance.

Finally, while the above steps are based on a sociological point of view, our desire to be “The Church” is primarily driven by a theological vision. The Disciples’ historic desire for unity can serve us well if we learn to always seek prophetic unity rather than cheap unity. We must engage in multi-cultural theological conversations, sharing ourselves with each other, challenging each other, learning from each other, and respecting the image of God within each other. If we can do so, we will provide a witness to our God-given unity, a challenge to our racialized society that racial difference does not necessitate racial division, that God calls us to a life of communion-in-diversity. My project is one attempt to move us along these steps, to bring Hispanic and Anglo Disciples together to explore our racial self-identities, to value each other in our own

particularities, to consider the mission of the church to address inequities and divisions, and to build healthy and joyful relationships that embody unity and glorify God. Towards these ends, I designed a weekend retreat for young adult leaders across Arizona to begin to build relationships and to explore these issues together.

The Importance of Relationship Building

Before focusing on the content of the retreat, I want to highlight the importance of bringing people together in shared mission, of inviting Hispanics and Anglos into the same space to dialogue and work together. Specifically, I want to highlight two aspects of importance. The first is that we learn better when we are together because we can learn from each other. Indeed, some things we can only learn through encountering others. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier emphasizes this point, echoing our previous analysis of White blindness to their Whiteness and suggesting that transformation is not a destination but an ongoing journey in solidarity with each other:

*Practices and forms of racial dominance are invisible to the dominant group – racism self-perpetuates and self-corrects without the people realizing it. Generating a new consciousness involves coming to an awareness of one’s cultural blinders and ideological filters through which we interpret the world. This may sound like an unending academic exercise of critique. However, the strongest critique takes place not in a classroom but in seeking to identify with the oppressed – through solidarity. It is this lived-out exercise of discipleship that transforms perspective.*²⁶¹

When we are intentional about gathering together, when we walk a mile in each other’s shoes, when we can begin to see the world through each other’s eyes, we can begin to decenter White normativity and work toward mutuality. Preston Taylor made this point

²⁶¹Elizabeth Conde-Frazier. “Siempre Lo Mismo,” in *Can White People Be Saved?: Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, ed. Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, and Amos Yong (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 144.

over 100 years ago:

*The Disciples of Christ, strange as it may seem, need the colored people, if for no other reason, as the acid test of Christian orthodoxy and willingness to follow the Christ all the way in his program of human redemption. For if the white brother can include in his religious theory and practice the colored people as real brothers, he will have avoided the heresy of all heresies.*²⁶²

The second important aspect of building relationships is perhaps self-evident: the aim of all our critical analysis is to learn to live together in community. We seek to create a world of mutually satisfying relationships. So, we need to gather in retreats, worship services, and mission projects to have experiences together that result in shared history and shared memory. If we don't ever come together, all the analysis is just an academic exercise. We must put theory into practice, reflect on our experiences, and grow into deeper relationships. In the words of Amos Yong:

*If we are ever to overcome the heresy of whiteness, the heterodoxy of European colonialism, and the heteropraxis of American manifest destiny, then we will need not to just hear and understand but also come alongside and practice with the witness of others, especially those on the margins. ...By extension, Christian mission in a postcolonial, post-Enlightenment, postmodern, and post-Christendom world can only be redeemed if carried out by eschatological peoples from every tribe, nation, and people who, by being filled with the Spirit of Pentecost, can live in multivocal mutuality and solidarity with one another in anticipation of the reign of God that is coming and will come.*²⁶³

Yong's call to "come alongside" is what Roberto Goizueta speaks of as a "theology of accompaniment" in *Caminemos con Jesus* ("Walking together with Jesus").²⁶⁴ Although most of this chapter will focus on the educational content of the retreat, I cannot highlight

²⁶² D. Newell Williams, "The Disciples of Christ in One Sentence" (Indianapolis: Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministry, 2021), 3. I have kept Taylor's original language but feel compelled to mention that his normative use of male language is jarring and indicates that efforts to decenter male normativity in the church and society are also imperative.

²⁶³ Amos Yong, "Conclusión," in *Can White People Be Saved?: Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, ed. Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, and Amos Yong (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 317.

²⁶⁴ Goizueta, title and subtitle.

strongly enough that the informal conversations that occur over meals, relationship building through activities, and community worship experiences are an essential component of this attempt to bring together and develop young adult leaders. Our shared experience will have impact beyond our planned encounter.

The (Original) Project: A Weekend Retreat for Young Disciples Leaders in Arizona

Because of the aforementioned importance of mutual experiences and relationship building, the original plan for this project was to be the creation and implementation of a leadership development weekend retreat for Disciples young adults (ages 20-30), to be held September 24-26, 2021. As the Delta variant of the Covid-19 virus was surging in September, however, our planning team had many discussions and decided to condense the retreat into a one-day Saturday event. The goals of the event remained the same, and we retained much of the educational content, but we had to cut several activities and lost most of the informal relational time that would have allowed our experiences together to simmer and develop. The loss was substantial. In the following description, I will describe plans for the Saturday-only event, while inserting aspects of the original weekend retreat plan that would have enriched the experience. The word “retreat” refers to the original weekend plan, while the word “event” refers to the Saturday-only event that took place. I will save some of the analysis of the changes for chapter 6. Final plans for the event are included in Appendix 1.

The intention was to bring Anglo and Hispanic young adults together for a time of relationship building via self-reflection and group-reflection, all with an eye toward

anti-racism work and leadership development.²⁶⁵ There are several reasons for choosing this age group. The Arizona Region is blessed with many Hispanic young adults who are second- or third-generation immigrants. Most are bilingual and are already serving as bridges for their parents and their congregations. Their fluency in English and their experience in the U.S. educational system makes it much easier for them to engage in deep conversations with their peers than it is for their parents and grandparents. Many are already serving as leaders in their congregations: preaching, leading music, and evangelizing. And since the pursuit of prophetic unity is a long-term process, building relationships among our young leaders lays the groundwork for generational transformation.

Planning the Retreat -- Balanced Leadership

Before detailing the content of the event, I want to focus on the planning process.

Eric Law warns of an inherent danger when planning multi-cultural activities:

*Whenever two or three culturally diverse groups come together, the white English-speaking group most likely sets the agenda, does most of the talking and decision making, and, in some cases, feels guilty that the other ethnic groups do not participate in the decision making.*²⁶⁶

Law shares several anecdotes about events that were designed to promote multicultural growth but ended up causing pain and reinforcing division. As noted, a flaw in many of these events is that they are designed and led by the dominant group who are often blind to their White normativity. I made three conscious attempts to avoid this mistake. First, I drew heavily on Robert Chao Romero's *Brown Church*, meaning that much of the content

²⁶⁵ Although the vast majority of Arizona Disciples are either Anglo or Hispanic, there are certainly other racial/ethnic members in our congregations, and they will be welcome at this retreat.

²⁶⁶ Eric Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993), 2.

itself was written by a professor from a non-dominant culture. Second, the event was planned and led by a diverse team of leaders consisting of:

- a Hispanic male, our *Enlace Regional*
- a Hispanic female youth leader from our largest Hispanic congregation who has long-standing relationships with a great deal of Hispanic young adults
- an Anglo female pastor, and
- myself, an Anglo male who serves as Regional Minister

Though my project paper has focused on the racial divide between Hispanic and Anglo Disciples, it was important that our team was balanced by gender as well as ethnicity. Practicing intentional mutuality and shared power, this team both planned and led all sessions of the event. Third, we decided to use a discussion methodology that Eric Law created for use in multicultural gatherings called “Mutual Invitation.”²⁶⁷ This methodology has every person in the group speak once before anyone is allowed to speak a second time, gives each person the choice whether to speak or pass (it is not “share or die”), gives each person who speaks (or passes) the power/authority to choose/invite the next speaker, and fosters more attentive listening than simply going around in a circle. Mutual Invitation helps address the power differential between extroverts, those who are more inclined to speak publicly, and introverts, those who are more hesitant to speak and therefore are seldom heard. As the name “Mutual Invitation” implies, this very process of discussion will facilitate the mutuality we are seeking to embody.

Retreat Plans

At the event, in addition to time for relationship building through food,

²⁶⁷ Law, 113-114.

fellowship, fun, and worship, young adults engaged in dialogue and self-reflection in an opening welcome and three sessions.²⁶⁸ The Opening Welcome introduced us to each other and to themes of racial identity and our calling toward prophetic unity. After some ground rules common to group activities, we began to decenter whiteness by remembering the indigenous nations who lived on the land we are meeting on (a land acknowledgement). The event took place on land that was the ancestral homeland of the O’odham Jewed, Akimel O’odham, and Hohokam peoples. We intended for this reminder to help us all be more open to learning new ways of seeing the world. The Opening Welcome continued with a small group activity in which participants are invited to share the stories behind their names. Event leaders modeled this sharing as we introduced ourselves, then we broke into small groups for people to share. Names often connect us to our family and heritage, and this manner of introduction allows people to share what they want to about their own identities without “othering anyone (by asking, for example, “where are you FROM?”). Participants were invited to share any insights when they returned to the large group. We then, as a group exercise, completed and discussed a terminology worksheet (Appendix 2) in which participants explored words they use to identify themselves and others, as well as words that they do not like to use.

Session One is entitled “Living in a Racialized World.” We read four short passages (Appendix 3, Handouts 1-4) to explore racial self-identity, asking participants to reflect on how the stories resonate with their lived experience. The first three stories come from Romero’s *Brown Church* and tell the stories of Hispanic young adults struggling with their identity as Christians, the pressures they face from various external forces, and how they often are not sure where they belong. There is Rosa, the daughter of

²⁶⁸ A detailed schedule of the event plans and handouts are included in Appendix 1.

devout Christian immigrants who credit Jesus with helping them survive their difficult journey to the United States. Rosa experiences identity conflict in college when her professor states: “Christianity is the white man’s religion.” She asks: “Who was right about Christianity? Was it her working class, immigrant parents who loved and followed Jesus? Or was it her professor who had his PhD from Harvard and had written many famous books over the past twenty years?”²⁶⁹ Second, there is the story of Carlos, who left behind his mother’s Catholic faith after learning about systemic oppression and Chicano activism and declared himself an atheist.²⁷⁰ Third, there is the story of Edwin, the son of a pastor. While attending a predominantly White Christian college, Edwin’s world was shattered upon learning that his father and mother had been arrested and deported. The next day he walked into school, where he felt like he had made some good friends, only to hear a classmate say: “I support Donald Trump ... because he wants to deport all those ‘illegals’ and ‘rapists’ that are taking our jobs.”²⁷¹ The fourth reading is a passage from DiAngelo about how she as a White person was not taught to see her racial particularity and assumed her experience was universal.

Participants then broke into small groups and were asked to share ways in which they relate to these stories. Specific questions were suggested to facilitators:

- “What challenges did the young college students face in how to think about the church?”
- “Is Christianity the colonizers’ religion?”
- “What are reasons to stay involved in the church OR to see religion as a hindrance?”

²⁶⁹ Romero, 1-2.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 2-4

²⁷¹ Ibid., 5.

- “What do you think of DiAngelo’s claim that white people have a more difficult time seeing themselves through a racial lens and that they need to build up the stamina to do so?”

Following the small group discussions, we then returned to a plenary session and shared insights from each small group.

These passages led participants to (1) reflect on their own racial identity and its impact on others, and (2) to become more aware of challenges that people from other cultures face. For instance, Hispanic young people who are keenly aware of the way race affects their lives in the United States may be surprised by how blind White people are to their own Whiteness. Conversely, White young people may not be aware of the “caught in between” pressures many young Hispanic people experience, as exemplified by Goizueta’s friend who said that she feels “most at home on an airplane.” Session one closed with a worship experience involving a reading of and reflection on 1 Corinthians 12 and Paul’s metaphor of the church as the body of Christ.

Session two is entitled “Exploring our Racialized World” and continued to explore our own experiences of racial self-identity through three activities. We began with the “privilege bead” activity (see Appendix 4). In this exercise, each participant traveled to seven different tables, read a list of questions on each table about privileges they have, and took a bead from the center of the table for every question to which s/he answered “yes.” Each of the seven tables covers a different aspect of human identity that might come with privileges: race, class, sex, gender identity, physical ability, religion, and nationality. Participants were challenged to see (1) that they may have privileges in some areas and may lack them in others, (2) that we do not all have the same privileges, and (3) that an unjust balance exists.

Following the privilege bead activity, we “caucused” as two groups: White Disciples and Disciples of Color. The two Anglo leaders met with the White Disciples group, while the two Hispanic leaders met with the Disciples of Color. This purpose of caucusing, a feature of many anti-racism trainings, is to provide safe space for each group to reflect on their experience and to ask questions or share thoughts and feelings they might hesitate to share in the multicultural setting. Participants were asked how they were feeling at the event, what they may have been learning, and if there were any concerns that need to be addressed. Following the caucuses, we gathered as a whole group for a timeline exercise, looking at a number of events pertinent to the church and racial history in the United States.

Session three is entitled “Church in a Racialized World.” This session asked our young leaders to reflect together on the mission of the church. We focused in particular on theologies that emphasize pietistic faith and individual salvation and theologies that advocate for social engagement and communal salvation. In this session, we again read and reflected on several short passages from Romero’s *Brown Church*, introducing the contextual theology that Romero claims is essential to the “Brown Church.” The first set (Appendix 3, Handout 5) outlined “Three Ancient Approaches to Injustice,” or what Romero calls “three major responses to the oppression of Roman cultural, political, and economic colonialism.”²⁷² The first response Romero identifies is that of “compromise,” as exemplified by the Sadducees and the Herodians we know from the gospels. Romero identifies them as “the sellouts,” people who colluded with Roman authorities for their own gain while abandoning their own people. The second response is identified as “withdrawal” and characterized by the Essenes who in Jesus’ day removed themselves

²⁷² Romero, 34.

from mainstream society and created a community in the desert in order to live in spiritual purity. Romero names the third response “counterstance” and identifies this approach with the Zealots who resisted Roman oppression in the first century, using violence when necessary.

After reading these approaches, participants again broke into small groups for discussion. Participants were encouraged to summarize these three ancient responses to injustice. Then we asked, “Why might one decide to compromise/sellout; withdraw, or resist?” and “Which approach seems most appealing to you in your faith journey?” We were attempting to help participants engage in contextual theology and begin to connect ancient religious approaches to their own lives. Participants were asked: “Thinking about stories of Jesus, which approach do you think he was closest to?” Following the sharing of insights in another plenary session, we read Luke 4:16-30 and briefly discussed Jesus’ call to bring “good news to the poor” in light of the 3 ancient approaches.

After a short break, we read “Galilee” from *Brown Church* (Appendix 3, Handout 6). Romero suggests that Jesus offers a “4th approach” – love for all, resistance to oppression, preferential option for the poor. Participants were asked to notice that in pushing back against the status quo, Jesus made people angry, and he was eventually killed in an attempt to silence his resistance. Romero highlights Jesus’ status as a *mestizo* and his life in Galilee as much like life on the southern border of the United States with Mexico, not a full outsider but not fully accepted in Jerusalem because of his outsider Galilean heritage and accent. “Like Latino/as in the United States, Jesus and his Jewish sisters and brothers lived as colonized people in what was once their own land.”²⁷³

Thinking of Jesus as a product of borderlands and a leader of active resistance was new

²⁷³ Ibid., 32-33.

for many of the participants. We processed this way of understanding Jesus together, introducing both contextual theology and liberation theology.

Continuing along this path, we shared “Three Modern Approaches to Injustice” (Appendix 3, Handout 7). Romero writes: “In the twenty-first century, we see these three basic approaches reflected in the Latina/o community in the United States.”²⁷⁴ Romero compares the Sadducees to “numerous Latina/o clergy who stood in alliance with Donald Trump ... and who downplayed the squalid conditions of border asylum camps.”²⁷⁵ He compares the Herodians to “Latina/o politicians who assimilate into the American mainstream and pass laws and policies with little regard for the devastating impact on the lives of most Latina/os. Think Ted Cruz.”²⁷⁶ Romero compares the Essenes, “those who withdraw,” to many modern Latina/o religious communities.

*Modern day Latina/o Essene churches do a good job of connecting their members with personal Christian spirituality and relationship with Jesus. Their great blind spot, however, is that they tend to dismiss legitimate and pressing issues of social justice as ‘liberal’ and ‘worldly.’*²⁷⁷

Lastly, Romero compares the Zealots to Chicano activists who work to liberate “*La Raza*” by any means necessary. Romero goes on to claim that many young Hispanics are not satisfied by any of these approaches and are not sure what to make of a church which doesn’t address social issues.²⁷⁸

Following the presentation of these three modern approaches, participants again broke into small groups to discuss the approaches. Specific questions included:

- “Do you see evidence of these approaches?”

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 35.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 35-36.

- “Do you identify more with one of these groups?”
- “Which approach most resembles your own congregation?”
- “Which approach would you LIKE your congregation to take, and why?”

Again, we returned to the plenary group and shared insights, exploring especially our thoughts on the mission and purpose of the church and what approach we might take together as Christians. Specific questions included:

- “What is the role of the church in response to injustice?”
- “What comments do you have for the Region’s clergy about church mission, your role, challenges and opportunities for the church in a racialized world?”

Session three closed with a re-reading of Luke 4:16-30, an opportunity to hear the same scripture in a new way following our discussion.

Participants were informed that as a follow-up to this event, we will offer a retreat for their pastors. We asked participants to fill out a Feedback Questionnaire (Appendix 5) in order to collect thoughts they would like to share with their pastors in light of the themes we explored in the retreat. This in particular gives young people who have made a multicultural connection with each other the opportunity to begin to lead as part of our Regional church. The event closed with an offsite dinner and an evening fun activity chosen by the participants from a list of options, offering both a release of sorts for a day of intellectual and emotional work and an opportunity to bond and create memories together.

I want to highlight two important parts of the content of the original retreat plan that were lost when we condensed the weekend retreat into a one-day event. We had planned an experiential opportunity to reflect on the theology of some of the songs sung

in worship services at their respective congregations. We planned to ask participants to name a favorite worship song and then analyze the lyrics in light of our discussion about responses to oppression. Collectively, we would choose a song to re-write and break into small groups and ask each group to write new lyrics for the song based on their theological preferences. Each group would then share their verse with the whole group, and together we would sing all the verses. This activity aims to help participants begin to reflect theologically on their own familiar worship songs. It also offers participants an opportunity to work together on a theological and church leadership project.

Our final activity was planned to be attending worship together. We had chosen to worship at the closest Disciples congregation to our retreat center, which also happens to be the congregation pastored by our white female retreat leader. She invited our *Enlace Regional* to preach in the congregation that morning, and we had planned for the participants to sing the new lyrics to their worship song. Following the service, participants would join congregation members for a fellowship lunch.

This event served the intention of my project by bringing Hispanic and Anglo Disciples together to explore our racial self-identities, to witness and decenter Whiteness, to value each other in our own particularities, to consider the mission of the church, and to begin to build healthy and joyful relationships that embody prophetic unity and glorify God. Although the original weekend retreat would have allowed more time and opportunity to work toward these goals, the goals did not change when switching to a one-day event. In the final chapter I will explore what happened at the event, lessons learned, and next steps in our journey toward prophetic unity.

Chapter 6

Analysis of the Event, Lessons Learned, and Next Steps

In the beginning, there was a dialogue (see p. 1). It was a painful dialogue, but it set in motion this project: a journey to develop and share a theological vision of what it means to be “the Body of Christ” and to begin to build the capacity to make the vision a reality. The journey took me to a deeper and more appreciative understanding of the Trinity than I ever expected, having previously only experienced Trinity as a static doctrine to be “believed” rather than a dynamic image of primordial relationship, a *familia*, a communion-with-otherness. The journey took me deeper into the work of anti-racism, calling me to witness my Whiteness, decenter Whiteness, and begin to appreciate the beauty of a *mestizaje* approach to relationship. The journey blessed me with the opportunity to read and learn from Hispanic theologians who were, sad to say, glaringly absent from my previous education. The journey led me to explore and hear the deep pain experienced by many Disciples of Color in what is supposed to be a movement for unity and wholeness. And the journey led me to encounter and engage with Hispanic and Anglo Disciples as we seek to create a new, more hopeful community here in the Arizona Regional Church.

This final chapter will unpack the lessons learned from the project, beginning with the young adult retreat. Although the retreat did not happen exactly as originally planned, and the loss of informal relational time was substantial, the event addressed some of our goals and paved the way for future events to go more in-depth. I will begin with an analysis of the planning process, then describe the event, and lessons I have

learned. I will describe a follow up event and conclude with a look at next steps on the journey toward prophetic unity.

The Planning Process

In planning this retreat, I experienced firsthand the wisdom of having multicultural leaders work as a team to plan and lead multicultural events, as suggested by Eric Law.²⁷⁹ I wrote the initial retreat plans as an assignment for a class entitled “Religion, Race, and Ethnicity.”²⁸⁰ When we began to discuss this retreat, I met with the new *Enlace Regional* of the Arizona Region who would serve as one of my co-leaders and as my primary dialogue partner. While he was excited about the basic curriculum offerings from *Brown Church*, he had several suggestions to improve the retreat. He suggested a “land acknowledgment, remembering the first inhabitants of the land we walk on, as well as several experiential activities he learned as an anti-racism trainer for our denomination. Given our multicultural setting, he suggested we include more experiential learning alongside the more traditional intellectual activities of reading and reflection.

Most striking for me, however, was our discussion around the original plans for the Sunday morning worship. Since we were going to worship in an Anglo congregation, I suggested having several of the Hispanic young adult musicians lead music at the worship service. He winced. He explained that in his experience, whenever Whites plan a multicultural worship service, they usually invite Hispanics to bring music in order to add an exotic flavor while excluding them from the more “authoritative” preaching, teaching

²⁷⁹ Law, 2.

²⁸⁰ The class was taught by Dr. Edwin Aponte and taken as part of the Doctor of Ministry program at Lexington Theological School.

and priestly roles in the liturgy. Further, he taught me that much of the worship music currently used in our Hispanic worship services originated as the music of White evangelical colonizers and does not reflect the perspectives of liberation theology or of the current context. A few days later, I began to share this story with my project advisor. As soon as I mentioned that I had planned to invite the Hispanics to lead music in the worship service, he winced! Two wincing are important non-verbal evidence that all multicultural events require multicultural planning and leadership. Shared power and shared leadership are essential and should characterize our planning processes across the life of the Regional Church.

Curiously when I told this story to our two female co-leaders at a planning lunch, the Hispanic youth leader said: “Oh, that would have been fun. We’d love to do music.” Once again, I was reminded of the diverse perspectives within the group that we call “Hispanic.” In this case, two Hispanic leaders with graduate theological degrees and experience in critical historical analysis of race issues winced at the prospect of an action that may be rooted in colonialism or “exoticization” or tokenism, while a younger Hispanic leader with less formal education and experience in critical race analysis reacted positively at the prospect of being included. The conversation that followed was rich for all of us. We explored issues of tokenism and exoticization as well as a critical historical/theological analysis of evangelical worship music. Our *Enlace Regional* claimed that U.S. evangelicals colonized Mexico with a form of “withdrawal” theology akin to the Essenes of Romero’s assessment, and that such theology is reflected in the worship music now used in many of our Hispanic congregations in Arizona. He therefore does not believe that asking them to share their music in a multicultural setting brings an

authentic Hispanic voice to the gathering, and he would prefer music with lyrics inspired by liberation and contextual theologies. This analysis was new to the other Hispanic leader and helped all of us see that diversity of theologies and historical analysis, and not just race/ethnicity, will be part of the challenge on the road to prophetic unity.

The Event

I will begin with an analysis of the social, relational, and demographic aspects of the event, before discussing the more academic content. Sixteen young adults registered for and attended the event: fourteen were Hispanic, mostly ages 20-24, and two were Anglo, ages 33 and 19. The Hispanic participants came from two congregations, one of which is served by our female co-leader, and the other a new church start that was launched by the first. Most of the Hispanic participants already knew each other well and expressed that they were somewhat disappointed not to be meeting new people. The strong participation of these two churches testifies to the importance of having leaders with a direct connection to potential participants. While the other three co-leaders all tried to recruit participants, none of us had a large base of young adults from which to draw. It also brought to light the generational change in demographics of the Arizona Region: while 35% of current Arizona Disciples are Hispanic, over 75% of Arizona Disciples under age 30 are Hispanic.

While most of the Hispanic participants already knew each other well, the experience was much different for the two Anglo participants. Both were surprised to walk into a room where they were obviously in the minority. Both had to adjust their expectations, as just walking into the room began to decenter Whiteness. The younger

Anglo reported that he had been looking forward to seeing friends from church camp, so he was surprised and somewhat disappointed not to see anyone he knew, although he was happy to meet new people. He claimed that the ethnic balance of the participants was not uncomfortable for him – until we did the privilege bead exercise.²⁸¹ As the two white males in the room, he and I collected far more beads than everyone else, symbolizing that we have far more privileges. During the caucus period which followed the privilege bead exercise, he expressed that when he returned to his table with over 50 beads, while several participants had 8-12, he felt “conspicuous, over-privileged, and kind of guilty.”

The other Anglo was at least eight years older than any other participant, and she is fairly new to the Disciples movement. In a follow-up interview, she shared her first impressions:

At first it was uncomfortable walking into the room and being one of the only white people. People were sitting around tables and speaking Spanish and I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to sit down with them and say: "Hi, I'm here now, so we have to switch to English." I tend to have social anxiety anyway, so it's part me and part the situation. So, I gave myself a little pep talk – talked myself through feeling uncomfortable. I asked myself: "What the worst thing that can happen?" And then it was fine once the program and activities started.

Having been a former middle school teacher in Tucson, she also had the thought that most of these participants were of an age where they could have been her former students, so she recognized she had to work at first to see them as colleagues and co-participants. Another insight she offered may be helpful for planning multicultural events.

What seems to be most awkward is the unprogrammed time, the time where we are not sure of the expectations. "What are we supposed to do?" What are we supposed to know or get or understand that we don't? When you first arrive it is awkward because you don't know what to

²⁸¹ See Appendix 4.

expect. Once you get doing activities with people it is much easier to relate because you know your role.

Her self-identification as having social anxiety is a good reminder of the importance of particularism rather than universalism. Every participant is going to experience an event in their own way. Most notably, perhaps, she shared that before this event, she “did not know there were Hispanic Disciples – not just in Arizona, but anywhere.” One successful outcome of our event, then, is that for this one Anglo participant, and potentially for all those she talks with in her local congregation, we have a new awareness of the diversity of our Disciples movement.

It is worth noting that both Anglo participants discussed whether they felt “comfortable,” while this topic did not come up in feedback conversations with Hispanic participants. Anglos may be more likely to assume they will be comfortable in a Regional Church setting. In planning the event, our leadership team discussed the importance of allowing participants to feel uncomfortable, as such moments often lead to growth. We particularly noted how topics involving race and ethnicity tend to be more uncomfortable for Anglos, so we were not surprised at the above comments. We planned to allow discomfort to sit in the room for a while, but not to allow it to be so overwhelming that it threatened to shut down the relationships we were trying to build. For both Anglo participants, it seems that the degree of discomfort was manageable and did not lead to terror or shutdown.

In Session 1, participants were actively engaged in the discussion about racial self-identity. The stories of Rosa, Carlos, and Edwin, the three Hispanic young adults whose Christian identity was challenged by collegiate experiences, and the paragraph

from DiAngelo and her discovery that she had a racial identity too,²⁸² prompted discussion around each participant's experiences related to race and faith. Both Anglo participants shared that they have not thought about their racial identity all that much, so this event was an important step to begin witnessing their Whiteness. The stories also made them more aware of what Hispanic young people may be facing. Several Hispanic participants shared challenging experiences around racial identity similar to those of Rosa, Carlos, and Edwin. They were also interested to hear more details about the way Anglos have been socialized to feel superior. Many people expressed that they enjoyed reflecting on their identity development and that they would think more about it.

Animated discussion continued about what terms they preferred to use to self-identify and when referring to others.²⁸³ Although "Latinx" is often the preferred term in academic writing, none of the Hispanic participants identified with that term, and some outright dismissed it. Neither did they like "BIPOC"²⁸⁴ or "Chicano." One really liked "Brown," while another said it was "offensive." Most preferred to use the generic "Hispanic" or to be referred to their country of origin (e.g. "Mexican" or "Puerto Rican.") One Hispanic participant had been called "White" as an insult by other Hispanic people. She said: "I would NEVER call anyone White." Another thought "mestizo" was a pejorative term. The two Anglo participants both acknowledged that they have not spent much time thinking about their own racial identity. They were especially interested to hear their Hispanic colleagues' reflections on identity terminology and were surprised to hear a Hispanic colleague say they would never use "gringo" because they thought it was an insult. But for themselves, they mostly accepted "White" as how they think of

²⁸² These stories are included in Appendix 3, Handouts 1-4.

²⁸³ The terminology worksheet is included in Appendix 2.

²⁸⁴ BIPOC = "Black, Indigenous, and People of Color."

themselves. One objected to the use of “Anglo” because her ancestry is a mix of German and Irish, rather than English. When explained, she understood we were using “Anglo” to refer to “English-speaking” rather than “from England,” but she still preferred “White” to “Anglo.” She recognized that her greater interest in the discussion around terms for Hispanic people is an indication of White-normativity in action. After that reflection, she went on to say that instead of “White” she would prefer to have a more specific term based on her German-Irish ancestry. She did not have a term in mind, however, and would have to think about it.

The entire discussion of terminology reinforced the conclusion in Chapter 3 that all people should have the right to self-identify and claim their identity. Recall Segovia’s frustration of being defined by others, defined according to norms and understandings of another culture. Recall also Gracia’s words: “There is nothing so destabilizing than being treated and regarded as something other than what one thinks of oneself.”²⁸⁵ Prophetic unity begins with the establishment of mutuality, with a relationship based on an encounter between authentic subjects. Being free to define oneself is the foundation of being an authentic subject.

Discussions around the mission of the church were also engaging. Several Hispanic participants expressed that they wished their congregation would engage more with the needs of the community. One said: “All our church does is focus on moral behavior. I wish we would talk more about how to make sense of everything that is going on around us.” Another said she wished her church would talk more about political issues and how they should think as Christians about the different candidates and policies because she would like some guidance. An Anglo participant said that her church is quite

²⁸⁵ Gracia., 26.

involved in a variety of social justice issues, especially LGBTQ rights, but that the congregation is more likely to avoid talking about race.

The presentation of Romero's analysis of three ancient and three modern ways of responding to oppression came late in the day, after a lot of heavy discussion. We tried to press participants to go deeper into a discussion about Liberation Theology, a perspective that was new to most of them. The participants were trying their best to engage, but fatigue was setting in, and we could tell we were reaching a point of diminishing returns. What may have been just the right amount of content for a weekend retreat was too much for a one-day event. A full weekend would have allowed time to refresh, to process, and to engage this material more deeply.

The post-event trip to a pizza parlor and laser tag provided some of the informal relationship building time intended in our original plan for a Friday to Sunday retreat. For example, three participants had a discussion with the *Enlace Regional* and myself over pizza about what seminary is like and what steps they might have to take in order to become a minister. They were interested in hearing about some of the things we learned in seminary about interpreting scripture through various critical lenses. We would have cherished more time to have such conversations.

One significant issue emerged in three separate ways: white people hesitating to bring their full selves to an interaction, unsure of their role, their place, or how to strike a proper balance. One of the white participants said they "tried to be in listening mode and not dominate conversation as White person. I have been part of groups before where that happened (Whites dominated) and I didn't like it." She said she felt "way more progressive" than most of the people at her table, but she decided to swallow her thoughts

and “be in listening mode.” Sensitivity to White domination is good, but hyper-sensitivity can lead to holding back our true thoughts and feelings and failing to be authentic in relationships. Another instance occurred during a small group discussion, when a white leader heard a Hispanic young adult say: “I know people are gay and all, and that’s okay if you have to be, but you sure shouldn’t pretend to be a Christian.” The white leader who heard this comment strongly disagrees and likely would have engaged the speaker in further conversation on this topic had the speaker been white. Instead, she swallowed her thoughts and later shared that “we’re trying to build bridges with each other, so I didn’t want to argue.”

Perhaps the most glaring example of a white person failing to be fully authentic, though, was my own. Before the retreat, the leaders had agreed that in the midst of a global pandemic, we would require masks for the entire event to protect all present from the new Delta variant. We communicated that expectation to all participants ahead of time, and as the first people arrived, they were all wearing masks. Just before the event was scheduled to begin, however, one of our leaders and several participants that came with her walked in without masks. Since we were all wearing masks, and since we had talked about this ahead of time, I assumed that they would put masks on immediately. They did not. Neither I, nor any of the other leaders or participants, said anything about it the entire day. We took a group photo at the end, some of us wearing masks, some of us not.

Though motivated by a genuine desire to build healthy relationships, these three instances show white people failing to bring their entire selves to a situation. The latter two examples involve white leaders who either lacked confidence or were unsure how to

exercise leadership in this multicultural setting. Not wanting to dominate, not wanting to appear to think we were superior, we failed to be authentic to what we believed was right. In the latter instance, I could have spoken directly to the leader who was not wearing a mask, or better yet called together all four leaders to discuss and present a united front. Upon reflection, I am aware that I may have done so if we had not been running behind schedule due to the late arrival of the maskless leader – meaning I prioritized the schedule over the quality of the relational experience. If we are to build the true and authentic relationships I yearn for, we will have to learn to overcome tendencies to (1) avoid conflict, (2) hide our true thoughts, and (3) prioritize “staying on time” over caring for the community’s needs. Noticing these dynamics is one way of witnessing my Whiteness.

Participant responses to the Feedback Questionnaire²⁸⁶ indicate enthusiasm for engaging in more activities that bring Disciples together across racial lines. One theme that emerged was that participants appreciated engaging with each other and hearing each other’s stories and perspectives. Most had not spent much time in their church environment thinking about racial identity and the racialized world in which we live. One noted that “we are unique” but also that “despite our differences, we all have some similarities.” Another noted “what I learned is race has been an ongoing subject in culture, and people are struggling with their own battle with race.” Another theme that emerged was a desire for both Anglo and Hispanic church leaders to seek each other out more and be open to learning from each other. Several asked for more opportunities to bring people together, learn from each other, and embrace each other. Some expressed that their parents’ generation is too hesitant to bridge the divide and that they hope they

²⁸⁶ Appendix 5 contains the Feedback Questionnaire and Participant Responses.

will try. One said we should “come together with open hearts and be judgment free,” another asked that we “train more translators,” and another envisioned that we “come together to love like Jesus Christ commanded us to regardless of our color.” Hearing and reading of their enthusiasm for coming together, for engaging topics of our faith together, the leadership team felt like it was a good beginning as we attempt to develop young leaders who will help lead the journey toward prophetic unity. The Regional Gathering described below was one attempt to respond to their requests, and my desire, to find more ways to come together.

Outcomes and Lessons Learned from the Project and the Event

The overall project has brought outcomes both cognitive and relational. The critical analysis of our racialized society, the wisdom and analysis of Hispanic theologians, the history of Disciples and race, and research into the history of the Disciples in Arizona have offered tremendous learnings for my role as Regional Minister as I pursue prophetic unity with Disciples in Arizona. As noted, learning to see Whiteness and White normativity, learning to decenter Whiteness, trading notions of assimilation for a *mestizaje* approach, in which individuals and groups both retain their own particularity and learn from each other, are among the significant outcomes of this project. These, along with intentionality in the sharing of power and resources equitably, are necessary approaches to building the capacity to transform our Region toward making our vision of prophetic unity a reality.

I also discovered that the Arizona Region had indeed made several intentional efforts to realize unity throughout the last 20 years. In planning for a “One Region, One

Church” campaign in 2008, their language was similar to what I have proposed. They emphasized the need “to build authentic relationships” and “not be paternalistic.” Arizona was the first region to bring in a “Regional Hispanic Pastor” to start Hispanic churches and develop a Hispanic ministry. And yet despite these efforts, we still have Anglo Disciples who are not aware of the existence of Hispanic Disciples or wonder if I am “counting them.” Realizing the efforts made by previous leadership, I am more aware than ever that overcoming generations of racial divide and inequity will require long-term adaptive change and not a quick fix.

I am excited, however, at the relationships that have been and are being built. As noted in the conclusion to chapter 4, Regions cannot afford to only have one or two people serving as bridges between cultures. Many bridges help build community. Before this event, I had met many of the young adults, but I had not had an opportunity to sit and engage in dialogue and deep conversation. Now I have. Though a full weekend retreat would have allowed for so much more, I now have the beginnings of a working relationship with 16 young adults and three co-leaders as we seek to work toward prophetic unity. Attempting to build on the new relationships, I attended both Hispanic congregations the following day (one meets at 9:30 a.m., the other at 1:30 p.m.). At the first, I heard one of our participants preach while another translated. I was delighted that he weaved in several of the topics from our event the day before, and our relationship only deepened as I was able to affirm him for his preaching. At the second, six participants formed the worship band, and they smiled and welcomed me warmly both before and after the service. These new relationships between the Regional Minister and young Hispanic Disciples are a joy in themselves, but with God’s grace they will allow us

to work together to help lead the region toward prophetic unity.

A Follow-Up Event: *Juntos*, a Regional Gathering

Two events were originally planned to follow the young adult retreat to continue building relationships and the capacity to transform the Region toward prophetic unity. One was a clergy gathering at which we were going to present a summary of the young adult retreat and share the comments they had for clergy. The clergy gathering continues to be postponed due to the Covid pandemic, the demands it has placed on our clergy, and our caution at not hosting an overnight event. The second event was a Regional Gathering for people of all ages across the Region called *Juntos*. Originally scheduled for October 2, 2021, one week after the young adult retreat, this event was postponed to January 15, 2022, due to the Delta variant of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic. Despite a new spike from the Omicron variant, *Juntos: A Regional Gathering* was held with careful Covid protocols. This event represents the next step in my project of Regional transformation. The following is a brief description and analysis of *Juntos: A Regional Gathering*.

The Regional Gathering was advertised under the name *Juntos*, the Spanish word for “together.” The historic divide between Hispanic and Anglo churches in Arizona was made painfully evident once again when one of our Regional officers, upon being encouraged to sign up for the Regional Gathering, said: “Oh, is that for White churches too? I saw the title in Spanish and didn’t read any further because I figured it was for them and not us.”²⁸⁷ Nevertheless, 90 people registered and 65 attended, with many

²⁸⁷ This comment was communicated both to me in a personal email from the officer and to our Regional Ministry Administrator through a phone call.

staying away due to yet another Covid surge. Among those who attended were 33 Hispanic Disciples and 32 Anglo Disciples. Of the 65 Disciples present, 25 were bilingual, 10 spoke only Spanish, and 30 spoke only English. The majority of Anglo participants were over 60 years old, while the majority of Hispanic participants were under 40.

As participants arrived, it appeared that both Hispanics and Anglos were somewhat uncomfortable being around people they didn't know. There was very little multicultural interaction. Hispanics stayed with Hispanics, Anglos stayed with Anglos, and many people were staring into their coffee rather than making eye-contact with each other. This was reminiscent of the "awkwardness" that a white participant discussed during our young adult event. White normativity was again decentered from the beginning, and that brings discomfort. As at the young adult event, however, once the event got going and the activities started, the discomfort seemed to disappear.

Resolving to be firm about Covid protocols and not let anxiety get in the way of leadership, we informed all participants via email ahead of time that masks would always be required. We posted signs requiring masks and had a diverse team of leaders welcoming participants and enforcing mask wearing. It worked. Masks were worn the entire day.

Juntos: A Regional Gathering was planned primarily by myself and our *Enlace* Regional and divided into three main parts: "world café"²⁸⁸ style conversations around tables, lunch, and a service of worship.²⁸⁹ After initial instructions, the event began with

²⁸⁸ "World Café" refers to a discussion process for large groups in which participants are seated in group of 4-6 around round tables. A "table host" initiates the discussion and takes notes. Every 10-15 minutes, participants move to new table with different groups of people. The name "world café" comes from the idea that people from all over the world mingle and get to know each other around small tables in cafes.

²⁸⁹ Plans for the Regional Gathering, including the questions asked at the table discussions, the order of worship, and the sermon I preached, are included in Appendix 5.

participants gathering in groups of five around one of 13 tables. Each table had a “table host” who was bilingual and willing to translate if necessary.²⁹⁰ Hosts had a series of questions to ask, then invited participants to share using Eric Law’s process of Mutual Invitation. After fifteen minutes, participants moved to new tables for rounds 2, 3, and 4. Participants were encouraged not to sit with anyone from their church, so during the morning participants conversed with sixteen different people from different congregations. The entire morning was a beautiful event, filled with laughter, story-telling, and spontaneous applause and prayers as groups transitioned from one round to another.

It was particularly noticeable that the lunch period lacked the awkwardness of the arrival period; participants felt much more comfortable interacting with each other in the bilingual setting. This observation mirrored the comments from the white participant at the young adult event. Once we get past initial awkwardness, once activities begin and people know how they fit in the process, their anxiety diminishes, and they are able to enjoy the experience, building new relationships in the process. Curiously, I noted the same dynamic in the children’s program that day. I noticed the tears of a ten-year-old girl as her mother dropped her off in a new environment, but when I checked in on the children an hour later, she was all smiles and soaring through the air on the playground swing. Disciples of all ages need to be brave enough to come together and “hang in there” through initial moments of awkwardness in multicultural settings until we begin to discover the joy of sharing life together.

²⁹⁰ When participants registered, they were asked if they were bilingual. If they answered yes, they were asked if they were willing to help translate at tables if necessary. Registration questions were worded this way to allow participants to choose how they wanted to participate and if they wanted to help be a language bridge. 25 people said they were bilingual. 13 of them said they were willing to translate. Two of the translators were bilingual Anglos, while 11 were bilingual Hispanics.

The third phase of the day, our worship service, was a fully bilingual event. Hymns were sung in Spanish and English, Hispanic and Anglo pastors took turns leading the service, everything was translated, and my sermon allowed me to begin sharing the vision of “Prophetic Unity,” including presenting *Unidad Profetica* as the theme of our upcoming Regional Assembly in November. No one present will ever say again: “I didn’t know there are Hispanic Disciples.” I am not fooling myself into thinking that we have arrived, but it felt very good to take another step forward in building relationships and community among all Arizona Disciples.

For me, this gathering was my first in-person opportunity to serve as pastor to the Regional church. Most of my tenure as Regional Minister has come during the global pandemic, and we have not been able to gather the Region in person since my installation. As I stepped into the pulpit, I realized I was about to preach to my Regional congregation for the first time. I was excited to be surrounded by Hispanic and Anglo Disciples from 18 different congregations and to get to begin to share my vision of prophetic unity. I look forward to continuing this journey, and I will now share some of the next steps that are on our horizon.

Next Steps

Both the young adult event and the *Juntos* Regional Gathering resulted in new working relationships between the Regional Minister, Regional leaders, and members of Hispanic congregations which have been severely underrepresented in Regional leadership. One concrete next step will be offering the names of the young adult participants and Regional Gathering participants to the Nominating Team which will recruit leadership for our next Regional Administrative Council, Mission Focus Team,

and Regional officers. These two events have greatly expanded the pool of leaders who have connected with the Regional church. With this connection, we now know and can invite them to join Regional leadership, a major step toward creating a culture of shared power. This step is particularly important at this moment in the Region's life, as the sale of two properties have given the Region new financial resources to spend on ministry. Decisions on which ministries to fund will no longer be made by a predominantly Anglo group.

There also seems to be a hunger for more events that bring Hispanics and Anglos together for meaningful discussion. As soon as possible, we plan to schedule a clergy retreat where we will discuss some of the feedback from the young adult retreat and begin theological discussions about the mission of the church. We will be careful to have a diverse team of leaders plan the clergy event, as past clergy retreats have made some missteps which resulted in dividing clergy rather than bringing them closer together. We will also plan another young adult retreat and work hard to recruit more Anglo participants.

Another next step is to continue and deepen the work of our Regional Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciliation (ARPR) initiative. These two events have allowed us to identify persons from our congregations who are interested in serving on the ARPR team. We also have enough momentum to fully fund Regional ARPR work. We intend to build a team that can bring training and analysis to our local congregations, engaging them in the work of decentering Whiteness and understanding that prophetic unity means sharing power, affirming each other, and practicing mutuality.

Another of our next steps is our 2022 Regional Assembly. While seeking a theme that

would communicate a commitment to unifying our Hispanic and Anglo Disciples, one member suggested that we avoid using the word “unity.” She claimed it was a “tired” word and so often is used superficially and ignores injustices that exist. That discussion led to the modifier “prophetic” as a way to communicate that the unity we seek must both address injustice and serve as a witness for wholeness to a fragmented world. The research for this project will serve as the theological foundation for the planning of our Regional Assembly. We have invited Rev. Paul Tch   of the Disciples’ “Commission on Unity and Interfaith Ministries” to be our keynote speaker and workshop leader. He and I will be in dialogue throughout the year focused on the practical challenges and goals of prophetic unity. We expect to offer a time for bilingual table conversations since they were so engaging at the Regional Gathering. We are committed to having a diverse leadership team do the work of designing and implementing our Assembly.

In the beginning, there was a dialogue. It was a painful dialogue that set in motion this project. As I close this writing, I turn to the vision Sandhya Jha offers for a new dialogue, a dialogue based on a *mestizaje* approach to unity, a dialogue that we might call “prophetic unity:”

Ultimately, it is my hope we can have a conversation about unity in diversity that does not require anyone - Latino/a, Black, White, Asian, Native American, Haitian – to deny the challenges to (as well as the resistance that made possible) the thriving Christian unity movement that we have all chosen to call home.²⁹¹

And so now, as we move to a new beginning, I share a new dialogue, a dialogue filled with the love, joy, and hope that was evident at the Regional Gathering ...

²⁹¹ Jha, 2-3.

Dialogue for a New Beginning

In the new beginning, there was a new dialogue.

The scene: The “Welcome” to the Worship service at the *Juntos*, A Regional Gathering, on January 15, 2022.

The characters: Myself -- the Regional Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arizona

 The *Enlace Regional* - a Hispanic pastor serving as a cultural liaison

 33 Hispanic Disciples
 32 Anglo Disciples

The new dialogue:

Enlace Regional: (Channeling his inner football coach voice:)_

 “When I say ‘one,’ you say ‘Juntos.’” “ONE!”

Congregation: “JUNTOS!”

Enlace Regional: “When I say ‘uno,’ you say ‘Together.’” “UNO!”

Congregation: “TOGETHER!”

Enlace Regional: “ONE!”

Congregation: “JUNTOS!”

Enlace Regional: “UNO!”

Congregation: “TOGETHER!”

Later that day ...

- An Anglo Voice: “Thank you for the great regional event! Getting to know people in Arizona became a special time! I loved the young people and also the bilingual focus of the day.
- A Hispanic Voice: “I loved the questions we got to discuss. I enjoyed hearing funny stories from everyone.”
- An Anglo Voice: “I enjoyed it very much and everyone I interacted with seemed to be doing so as well.
- A Hispanic Voice: “Muchas gracias por este evento. El Espíritu de Dios y el amor de Jesucristo están aquí en nuestra comunidad!”
- This Smiling Regional Minister: “Pues, sí. Claro. Estamos comenzando en un viaje juntos. Dios nos bendiga!”²⁹²

²⁹² “Well, yes. Absolutely. We are beginning a journey together. God bless us!”

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APPENDIX 1 –Event Plan

Learning to Be “The Church” Together

A Leadership Event for Young Adult Disciples Leaders in Arizona

September 25, 2021

at First Christian Church (Scottsdale, AZ)

Theme and Purpose

- The theme of the retreat is “Learning to Be “The Church” Together.”
- Participants in this retreat will have the opportunity to grow individually in their awareness of the “Church” and its context and in their relationship to each other as Disciples leaders journeying toward prophetic unity.

It is designed for young adults ages 18-35 from both our Spanish-speaking and English-speaking congregations to attend together.

The retreat will be offered free of charge to young adult participants and led by a diverse team made up of the four adults who also served as a planning team.

An annotated format for the event appears below.

ANNOTATED RETREAT FORMAT FOR SATURDAY ONE-DAY EVENT

Greetings, Nametags, and Icebreaker Activities

- a. To help participants begin to meet each other as they arrive.

Welcome and Announcements: Big picture stuff & logistical housekeeping

- a. Welcome
- b. Origin of event – recognizing that young leaders are in different place than previous generations of church leaders; learn, build relationships
- c. Goals – build relationships, grow individually, grow together, reflect critically on church mission -- open, honest, non-judgmental conversation
- d. Schedule, breaks, expectations, free time, bathrooms, etc.

Opening Worship: Prayer, Song, and Land Acknowledgement

Introduction to Racial Identity (divide into 3 or 4 small groups)

- a. “Tell us about the history of your name?”
- b. “Why did your parents choose it, and what significance does it have for you?”
- c. Terminology Exercise Sheet – discuss list of racial/ethnic terms in small groups, having participants identify which they prefer (see Appendix 2)

Session 1: Living in a Racialized World: Four Stories (see Appendix 3)

- a. Tell group we are reading some stories about people making discoveries about themselves and how they fit in a racialized world. After reading them we will discuss them in small groups
- b. Read the stories of Rosa, Carlos, & Edwin from *Brown Church* (Handouts 1-3)
- c. Read Robin DiAngelo’s “We Don’t See Ourselves in Racial Terms” (Handout 4) -- briefly highlight DiAngelo’s claim that white people have a more difficult time seeing themselves through a racial lens and that they need to build up the stamina to do so.
- d. Break into groups of 4-6 – try to be in group with people from other churches
- e. Ask participants to share ways in which they relate to the stories
- f. What challenges did the young college students face in how to think about the church?
- g. Is Christianity “the colonizers’ religion?”
- h. What are reasons to stay involved in the church? To see religion as a hindrance?
- i. Return to plenary session to share insights from small group discussions

Lunch

Session 2: Exploring our Racialized World

- a. Energizer activity to re-engage after lunch
- b. Anti-Racism experience: “Privilege Beads” – (see Appendix 4). Participants visit 7 stations, each with 8 questions on a particular aspect of identity: race, class, sex, gender identity, physical ability, language, religion, and political affiliations. Participants take one bead for every question they answer “yes.”
- c. Caucus by race. Divide group into two: one group of White participants and leaders, the other group of Brown participants and leaders. Have each group caucus to discuss:
 1. How are you feeling?
 2. What have you learned so far?
 3. What is challenging you at this moment?
- d. Plenary – timeline activity -- create Timeline on the wall with important dates from Mexican-U.S. history in the Southwest, important church events, and their own personal history

BREAK

Session 3: Church in a Racialized World

- a. Introduction to thinking about mission & purpose of church in racialized world
- b. Read “Three Ancient Approaches to Injustice” from *Brown Church*. Provide some extra historical context on the Herodians, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots as needed. (Appendix 3, Handout 5,)
- c. Break into small groups to discuss these 3 ancient approaches.
 1. Summarize what each group did
 2. Why might one decide to compromise/sellout; withdraw, or resist?
 3. Which approach seems most appealing to you?
 4. Thinking about stories of Jesus, which approach do you think he was closest to? (Turning water into wine? Dining with tax collectors and Roman centurions? Bringing good news to the poor? Turning over moneychanger tables? Being crucified?)
- d. Return to plenary session, share insights
- e. Read “Galilee” from *Brown Church*. Discuss Jesus’ “4th approach” – love for all, resistance to oppression, preferential option for the poor. Notice that in pushing back against the status quo, Jesus made people angry, and he was eventually killed in an attempt to silence his resistance. (Appendix 3, Handout 6)
- f. Read “Three Modern Approaches to Injustice” from *Brown Church*. (Appendix 3, Handout 7)

- g. Break into small groups to discuss these 3 modern approaches.
 - 1. Clarify how you see not only the Latina/o groups Romero mentions, but also White groups, acting in each of these three ways today.
 - 2. Do you identify more with one of these groups?
 - 3. Which approach most resembles your own congregation?
 - 4. Which approach would you LIKE your congregation to take, and why?
- h. Return to plenary session, share insights. Discuss the role of the church in response to injustice.

BREAK

Closing Session: (see Appendix 5 for Feedback Questionnaire and Participant Responses)

Explain that we are having an upcoming retreat for clergy in the region and that a large part of the retreat will be designed around hearing insights and questions from our young adult gathering. Give each participant paper and 5 minutes to write down thoughts, then meet in small groups to discuss, then return to large group to share on newsprint. Some specific questions:

- a. What comments do you have for the Region's clergy about church mission, your role, challenges & opportunities for church in a racialized world?
- b. What do you understand about Anglo-American culture (religious and secular) that your parents/grandparents should learn and accept as well?
- c. What do you understand about Hispanic-American culture (religious and secular) that your parents/grandparents should learn and accept as well?
- d. What they wish Anglo church leaders would do differently?
- e. What do they wish Hispanic church leaders would do differently?
- f. What ideas do they have for next steps, for moving forward together as One Region?
 - i. What does "reconciliation" look like in our context?
 - ii. How would we like to worship at Regional Assembly?
 - iii. Do we still keep doing church camp, or do we come up with a new model for the spiritual and communal growth of young people?

Close by reading Luke 4:16-19 and closing prayer.

Offsite Dinner and Informal Relationship Building Recreation

APPENDIX 2 – Terminology Worksheet Exercise

(This sheet will be used as a discussion starter for participants to explore the terms they use to refer to themselves and others.)

When you think about your race/ethnicity, and that of others, which terms do you prefer to use? Which terms do you dislike? What would you prefer people to call you/NOT call you? Which do you think other people prefer/dislike? Write thoughts for each term & add others:

White

European-descent

Caucasian

Anglo

American

North-American

Gringo

Others _____

Hispanic

Chicano/a

Latino/a

Latinx

Brown

Mexican

Latin-American

Person of Color (POC)

BIPOC

Mestizo

Others _____

APPENDIX 3 –The Stories

Handout 1

Robert Chao Romero: Rosa's Story – from *Brown Church* pp. 1-2

Rosa was excited about attending her first college lecture. She was the first of her family to attend college and was the valedictorian of Roosevelt High School. Her 4.2 grade point average had earned her a full ride to Pitzer College, one of the best liberal arts colleges in the United States according to *U.S. News and World Report*.

Rosa's Mom and Dad were deacons in their local church and had brought her up to be a Christian. They told many stories of how God had taken care of them when they made the dangerous journey to the United States across the Sonoran desert. Her dad worked two jobs – as a short order cook during the week and a gardener during the weekend. He also collected cardboard to raise extra money for the family. Her mom was a nanny to a rich family in San Marino and also managed their family of four kids. Church provided one of the few spaces of social respect for Rosa's parents. They had *dignidad* (dignity) when they walked into church, and were addressed as deacons, and *hermano* (brother) and *hermana* (sister) Ramos.

Rosa's first class in college was a Chicana/o history class, and her professor began his lecture by saying: "Christianity is the white man's religion." The professor went on to detail how the Spaniards used Christianity to colonize the Aztecs and the millions of indigenous people of the Americas. Rosa also learned about how the Bible was used to justify ethnic genocide, murder, and the oppression of women. Rosa left class devastated. She didn't know what to do. Who was right about Christianity? Was it her working class, immigrant parents who loved and followed Jesus? Or was it her professor who had his PhD from Harvard and had written many famous books over the past twenty years?

As the first few weeks of classes continued, Rosa felt lonely because most of her classmates came from affluent backgrounds and she could not relate to them. She was also one of the few Latinas on campus. To try and find friends Rosa went to a meeting of the Chicana/o activist group on campus. She met great friends there – peers from South Los Angeles, Long Beach, and East LA who also grew up in working class immigrant communities. She felt a special solidarity with them. There was one problem: whenever the topic of religion came up, most of her friends repeated the same things they heard in class – "Why are you a Christian? Christianity is the colonizer's religion!"

In her second year of college, Rosa was undergoing clinical depression. She saw a psychiatrist to help her with the deep loss and the emotional conflict she was experiencing trying to reconcile the faith of her youth with the perspectives of Christianity she was learning in her classes and from her Chicana/o friends.

Handout 2

Robert Chao Romero: Carlos's Story – from *Brown Church* pp. 2-4

Carlos was a transfer student at UC Berkeley. He grew up with learning disabilities and most of his teachers didn't think he was smart. Carlos was raised in La Puente and came from a tough family background. His dad was an alcoholic and left the family when Carlos was fourteen years old. After his dad left, Carlos's mom, Lupe, worked two jobs to try and keep the family afloat. Although she didn't earn much money from her part-time jobs at Walmart and McDonald's, somehow she always managed to put enough food on the table. She credited it all to God. Lupe, you see, was a strong Catholic. She never missed a Sunday at church and was a leader for charismatic Catholic retreats where people worshiped God and spoke in tongues. And she was always praying; for Carlos and his brothers and sisters. Although Carlos wouldn't consider himself too religious, he had turned to God throughout his childhood for strength in the midst of all his family's troubles. If asked, he would say he was "spiritual" and, if push came to shove, he'd say "Catholic."

The drive up to the Bay Area from La Puente was like a dream for Carlos. He had taken a few road trips to Tijuana and San Diego, but other than that he hadn't journeyed outside of LA. He decided to take the scenic route on the Pacific Coast Highway, and on the way up he stopped at beautiful Carmel and Monterey Bay. He loved it so much. It was like a new world opening up. While walking around the town of Carmel, he got a few weird stares from white people, but for the most part it was an amazing trip.

As an ethnic studies major at Berkeley, Carlos learned about Chicana/o history in the United States. His professor taught him about the "unjust" Mexican American war, which was justified by the strange idea of "Manifest Destiny." According to Manifest Destiny, many Anglo Americans in the 19th century believed that God had ordained them to conquer the Native Americans and Mexicans who lived in what is now Texas, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah. God's destiny for them was to seize these western territories so that they could spread their version of democracy and Christianity. Carlos also read about the segregation of Mexicans in housing, education, juries, parks, and pools during the era of Jim Crow segregation. He was inspired to learn about the many ways in which Mexican Americans successfully challenged segregation as part of cases such as *Mendez v. Westminster* and *Hernandez v. Texas*. He was especially inspired to read about the Chicana/o civil rights movement of the 1960s and such civil rights heroes as Dolores Huerta, Cesar Chavez, and Corky Gonzalez. Like Rosa, however, he was told that Christianity was one of the main sources of historical oppression of Chicana/os. Also like Rosa, he didn't know what to do with it all, so he stopped attending Mass and declared himself a Marxist and atheist.

Handout 3

Robert Chao Romero: Edwin's Story – from *Brown Church* pp. 4-5

Edwin was a pastor's kid. His parents immigrated to the U.S. from Central America to escape gang violence and the poverty that has eclipsed El Salvador in the wake of its brutal civil war. Edwin's dad was the pastor of a Pentecostal church in Pico Union, and Edwin grew up playing piano on the church worship team. Wanting to shield Edwin from some of the "worldly" teachings that he might encounter at a public university, Jorge instead decided to enroll him in the local Christian college. Arriving in the freshman dorms, Edwin felt a little uncomfortable because none of his roommates were Latino and they all came from fairly privileged middle-class backgrounds. They were nice, though, and after a short while they started hanging out in the cafeteria and going to the movies, and they became friends.

The first year was going pretty well until one tragic day in May 2019. Edwin had been up late studying for finals one night when he received a phone call that would change his life forever. It was his 14 year old sister Angelica. In tears, she reported to him that their mother and father had just been arrested by ICE, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and they were going to be deported. Edwin's family had fled to the U.S. as refugees because the *maras* (gangs) in El Salvador had targeted Jorge for recruitment, shot their uncle, and burned his grandfather's house down. Because they did not have enough money to hire an immigration lawyer, however, they were unable to prove to ICE that they qualified for asylum. As a result they were being deported according to President Trump's draconian immigration policies.

After hearing the terrible news, Edwin fell to his knees and prayed to God for strength and for the safety of his parents. A million questions raced through his mind: Would his mom and dad be safe while in custody with ICE? Could he talk to them? Did they have any legal recourse to block their deportation? When would he see them again? Who would take care of his young sister?

Fortunately, when the raid occurred, Angelica was at their aunt's house and was not apprehended by ICE. Where would she now live? How would he support her? Would he be able to stay in college? Because their family's asylum application had been denied, Edwin and Angelica were also both subject to deportation.

After a restless and sleepless night, Edwin stumbled into his political science class the next morning. The topic of the presidential elections came up. One of his classmates said: "I support Donald Trump because he tells it like it is. He doesn't care about political correctness. He wants to build 'the wall.' He wants to deport all of those 'illegals' and 'rapists' that are taking our jobs and causing crime to go up."

Edwin was stunned. He didn't know what to say or how to respond. The most painful part was that he felt rejected by his Christian peers he had come to know and respect.

Handout 4

Robin DiAngelo: “We Don’t See Ourselves in Racial Terms” – from *White Fragility*, p. 1

I am a white American raised in the United States. I have a white frame of reference and a white worldview, and I move through the world with a white experience. My experience is NOT a universal human experience. It is a particularly WHITE experience in a society in which race matters profoundly; a society that is deeply separate and unequal by race. However, like most white people raised in the US, I was not taught to see myself in racial terms and certainly not to draw attention to my race or to behave as if it mattered in any way. Of course, I was made aware that *somebody’s* race mattered, and if race was discussed, it would be theirs, not mine. Yet a critical component of cross-racial skill building is the ability to sit with the discomfort of being seen racially, of having to proceed as if our race matters (which it does). Being seen racially is a common trigger of white fragility, and thus, to build our stamina, white people must face the first challenge: naming our race.

Handout 5

Robert Chao Romero: Three Ancient Approaches to Injustice – *Brown Church* pp. 34-5

In Jesus' day, there were 3 major responses to the oppression of Roman cultural, political, and economic colonialism. The 1st was COMPROMISE. This approach was characterized by the Sadducees and the Herodians. These ruling religious and political elites secured for themselves a place of socioeconomic comfort and stability in imperial society by colluding with the Romans. The Sadducees were the priestly class, and the high priest was appointed by the Roman governor. The Herodians supported the puppet political rule of Rome. These were the "SELLOUTS."

The 2nd approach of Jesus' day was that of WITHDRAWAL. The Essenes, of Dead Sea Scrolls acclaim, embodied this approach. They felt that the best response to the oppression and religious impurity of the day was to move out into the desert and live a holy life in isolation and community. In God's time, God would act as God saw fit.

The Zealots represent the 3rd approach common in Jesus' day. Largely overlapping with the Pharisees of the time, Zealots prayed hard and sharpened their swords. They felt that the best way to respond to Roman oppression was to draw close to God, live highly religious lives, and prepare for war. Their approach was to COUNTERSTANCE, to stand on the opposite side of the river bank locked into a duel between oppressor and oppressed. The Zealots believed that as long as they remained close to God, God would give them military victory over their enemies and reestablish his kingdom.

Handout 6

Robert Chao Romero: Galilee – from *Brown Church* pp. 36-37

Jesus began his movement in Galilee ... a borderlands region and symbol of cultural *mestizaje* and multiple rejection. Jesus was a young adult, working class, mestizo from the “hood.” He was conceived to a single mom. God became flesh and launched his *movimiento* among those who were despised and rejected by both their Roman colonizers and the elite of their own people. Jesus didn’t go to the big city and seek recruits among the religious, political, and economic elite. He didn’t go to Beverly Hills or Harvard or the Upper East Side of Manhattan of his day. He didn’t go to a modern day Latina/o Beverly Hills like South Florida or Hacienda Heights. He started in what today would be East L.A. or Spanish Harlem. To change the system, Jesus had to start with those who were excluded from the system. This also reveals the intentionality and inclination of God’s heart toward the poor and marginalized of every society. In fact, from a biblical standpoint, although God loves all people equally, he shows unique concern for immigrants, the poor, and all who are socially marginalized. One Brown theologian calls this the Galilee principle: “What human beings reject, God chooses as his very own.”

[Jesus] came to establish the long awaited rule and reign of God on the earth, which would transform every aspect of our lives and the world. The “good news” was that Jesus came to make us and the whole world new. This includes everything messed up and broken in our world – whether personal, familial, social, or global. It includes our personal emotional brokenness and dysfunctional family relationships, but also poverty, colonialism, racism, white nationalism, slavery, human trafficking, oppression of immigrants, warfare, lack of clean water, AIDS, gang violence, and lack of educational opportunity. God wants to transform all of us and all things. This holistic focus of the “good news” is referred to by Brown Theologians as *mission integral*. In the words of Brown Theologian Rene Padilla, *mission integral* is “the mission of the whole church to the whole of humanity in all its forms, personal, communal, social, economic, ecological, and political. This is Brown soteriology – a Latina/o view of salvation.

Although the good news of Jesus is for the whole human family, it goes first to the poor and all who are marginalized. Like a loving father, God loves all his children equally, but shows special concern for those of his children who suffer most. Immigrants, refugees, and the poor bear the brunt of a sinful and broken world, and they feel firsthand the destructive effects of sin most directly. God’s unique concern for them is reflected in more than 2000 verses of sacred Scripture. It is clearly reflected in Jesus’ “Nazareth Manifesto” – Luke 4:14-30 - as well as in his famous Beatitudes.

Handout 7

Robert Chao Romero: Three Modern Approaches to Injustice – *Brown Church* pp. 35

In the 21st century, we see these 3 basic approaches reflected in the Latina/o community in the United States. We have our Sadducees – religious leaders who COMPROMISE, partnering with the ruling political establishment to maintain the status quo. Think of the numerous Latina/o clergy who stood in alliance with Donald Trump for the US presidency, and who downplayed the squalid conditions of border asylum camps. We have our Herodians – Latina/o politicians who assimilate into the American mainstream and pass laws and policies with little regard for the devastating impact on the lives of most Latinas/os. Think Ted Cruz.

Latina/o Essenes, those who WITHDRAW, are probably the most common within the Latina/o religious community. Modern day Latina/o Essene churches do a good job of connecting their members with personal Christian spirituality and relationship with Jesus. Their great blind spot, however, is that they tend to dismiss legitimate and pressing issues of social justice as “liberal” and “worldly.” To make matters worse, many modern day Latina/o Essenes and Sadducees have formed a partnership with Latina/o Herodians in support of the status quo and modern day empire.

Chicana/o activists are the secular Zealots of our day, seeking the liberation of La Raza “by any means necessary,” but often without a spiritual foundation.

APPENDIX 4 – Privilege Beads Exercise: Unpacking Whiteness

Sexuality Privilege

1. I have formalized or could formalize my love relationship legally through marriage and receive the benefits that accompany marriage.
2. I can move about in public without fear of being harassed or physically attacked because of my sexuality.
3. I do not have to fear that if my family or friends find out about my sexual orientation there will be economic, emotional, physical or psychological consequences.
4. If I want to, I can easily find a religious community that will not exclude me for my sexuality.
5. No one questions the “normality” of my sexuality or believes my sexuality was “caused” by psychological trauma, sin, or abuse.
6. People don't ask why I “chose” my sexual orientation.
7. I can go for months without me or anyone else referring explicitly to my sexuality.
8. I easily can find sex education literature for couples with my sexual orientation.

Ability Privilege

1. I can assume that I will easily have physical access to any building.
2. I have never been taunted, teased, or socially ostracized due to a disability.
3. I can do well in challenging situation without being told what an inspiration I must be to other people of my ability status.
4. I can go shopping alone and expect to find appropriate accommodations to make the experience hassle-free.
5. I can hear what's going on around me without using an assistive device.
6. I can easily see the letters on this page.
7. I am reasonably certain that others do not think that my intelligence is lacking, just because of my physical status.
8. If I am fired, not given a raise, or not hired, I do not question if it had anything to do with my physical or mental ability.

Gender/Sex Privilege

1. If I have children and a successful career, few people will ask me how I balance my professional and private lives.
2. My elected representatives are mostly people of my sex. The more prestigious and powerful the elected position, the more this is true.
3. When I ask to see "the person in charge," odds are I will face a person of my sex. The higher-up in the organization the person is, the surer I can be.
4. I do not have to think about the message my wardrobe sends about my sexual availability.
5. In general, I am not under much pressure to be thin or to worry about how people will respond to me if I'm overweight.
6. I will never be/was never expected to change my name upon marriage or questioned if I don't change my name.
7. Most individuals portrayed as sexual objects in the media are not the same sex as I am.
8. Major religions in the world are led mainly by people of my sex.

Race Privilege

1. I can look at the mainstream media and find people of my race represented fairly and in a wide range of roles.
2. Schools in my community teach about my race and heritage and present it in positive ways throughout the year.
3. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or closely watched by store employees because of my race.
4. I can take a job with an employer who believes in Affirmative Action without people thinking I got my job only because of my race.
5. When I use credit cards or checks for a face-to-face transaction, I don't have to wonder whether someone will challenge my financial reliability because of my race.
6. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
7. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
8. I can consider many options -- social, political, or professional -- without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.

Religious Privilege

1. I can assume that I will not have to work or go to school on my religious holidays.
2. I can be sure to hear music on the radio and watch specials on television that celebrate the holidays of my religion.
3. My religious views are reflected by the majority of government officials and political candidates.
4. Food that honors my religious practices can be easily found in any restaurant or grocery store.
5. Places to worship or practice my religion are numerous in my community.
6. Most people do not consider my religious practices to be “weird.”
7. Implicit or explicit references to religion where I work or go to school conform to my religious beliefs.
8. I do not need to worry about the ramifications of disclosing my religious identity to others.

Class Privilege

1. I can be sure that my social class will be an advantage when I seek medical or legal help.
2. I am reasonably sure that I or my family will not have to skip meals because we cannot afford to eat.
3. I have a savings account with at least a month’s rent and bills set aside in case of emergency.
4. I have taken a vacation outside of the country within the past three years.
5. I have never been homeless or evicted from my place of living.
6. I have health insurance.
7. I don’t have to rely on public transportation to travel to work or school; I can afford my own vehicle.
8. The neighborhood I live in is relatively free of obvious drug use, prostitution, and violent crime.

Nationality Privilege (U.S.)

1. When I apply for jobs, my legal right to work in this country probably will not be questioned.
2. People generally assume that I can communicate proficiently in English.
3. I have never been told not to speak in my native language during everyday interactions.
4. People do not assume I am poor because of my nationality.
5. The history of my country is an integrated part of the basic U.S. education curriculum.
6. People from my country are visible and positively represented in politics, business, and the media.
7. If I wanted to, I could travel freely to almost any country.
8. People where I live rarely ask me what country I’m from.

APPENDIX 5 – Feedback Questionnaire

- a. Did you learn anything today about your own racial identity & all that means in our racialized world – or that of others?
- b. What do you understand about Anglo-American culture (religious and secular) that your parents should learn and accept as well?
- c. What do you understand about Hispanic-American culture (religious and secular) that your parents should learn and accept as well?
- d. What do you wish Anglo church leaders would do differently?
- e. What do you wish Hispanic church leaders would do differently?

What ideas do you have for next steps, for moving forward together as One Region?

- i. What does “reconciliation” look like in our context?
- ii. How would we like to worship at Regional Assembly?
- iii. Do we still keep doing church camp, or do we come up with a new model for the spiritual and communal growth of young people?

PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

1. Did you learn anything today about your own racial identity & all that means in our racialized world – or that of others?
 - A. What I learned is race has been an ongoing subject in culture, and people are struggling their own battle with race
 - B. Yes
 - C. Understanding real issue we so often forget or ignore
 - D. No new learning but reminders of what privileges I have enjoyed.
 - E. I learned that there's a lot of people that love others out of pity. Which was sad to me.
 - F. I learned that my own racial identity goes through many difficulties, but so do other races.
 - G. I learned we aren't as different as we seem
 - H. We are unique, each individual has their own background. Despite of our differences, we all have some similarities. We should learn to love our neighbor.
 - I. The fact that our color (skin color) affects how we as the Christian community are and how we see others.
 - J. I identify as Hispanic and I think we all have prejudice. I believe it is important for the church to integrate.
 - K. I'm sitting on an unfinished thought. White churches ARE political, but are more willing to participate outwardly in things that aren't overly racial
 - L. Yes. I learned that even between us, as maybe (Hispanic people) we also like to discriminate each other by getting offended if someone calls us "Mexican."
 - M. I learned that it's important to keep your eyes open to others' struggles "racial, "social, and "spiritual."
2. What do you understand about Anglo-American culture (religious and secular) that your parents should learn and accept as well?
 - A. Anglo-American culture is a predominant culture and parents need to understand that they are two complete different cultures.
 - B. Honestly, just to be more accepting – financial strategies, develop schools
 - C. That there are more perspectives to consider
 - D. That there are Anglo-American people that are actually trying to understand minorities and include them in the things they've been excluded for before
 - E. I believe my parents should not guilt the American culture for the difficulties they put upon Hispanics.
 - F. They go through stuff as well and an Anglo-Americans are different
 - G. I learned that the Anglo-American culture is more involved in their community and I think the Latinos should also get involved

- H. Culture has been engraved over many years and change is slow. Looking at ourselves honestly we must acknowledge that there is a level of hypocrisy in our expectations. If the system works for you it's difficult to want to bring it down.
 - I. Why "Anglo?" I'm not really anglo, a little I guess, more German and Celtic. Anyway, we need to accept that doing nothing is just as much of a statement as doing something
 - J. That maybe they don't empathize with the issues of others well. Simply because they have not experienced the same issues other groups have.
 - K. Anglo-American culture are now trying to open up their minds and thoughts about the Hispanic church.
3. What do you understand about Hispanic-American culture (religious and secular) that your parents should learn and accept as well?
- A. Different customs than the anglo-american church
 - B. I appreciate the opportunity to gather with the Hispanic churches in our region
 - C. That they have so much to lose
 - D. I want them to understand Hispanics struggles and how they can play a part in it
 - E. We all can be racist towards each other, Mexican-americans & vice-versa
 - F. We can be racist too
 - G. Hispanics are hard working
 - H. We need to come together Hispanics and other people in order to move forward spiritually
 - I. I think white churches can learn a lot about community care from Hispanic churches
 - J. Everything we go through as we adapt to the different groups also shapes us into being like others ... it doesn't mean we don't value our roots
4. What do you wish Anglo church leaders would do differently?
- A. Something different would be open-minded and do all with love
 - B. Invest in the Hispanic church
 - C. Visit us, as we visit them
 - D. More ecumenical involvement
 - E. Make notice of more
 - F. I wish they'd be more open to including minorities into their community and have open conversations with people different from them
 - G. Leaders were great. I just wished we experience more individual worship with God
 - H. I wished they included every other group even if it maybe hard because of language barriers ... to every activity
 - I. Focus on helping growth in Hispanic church
 - J. Care more about others

- K. I would like to see some worship dancers
 - L. I would like to see fellowship that is multi-racial. I would like our core values to be held
 - M. Lots. Side with the oppressed. The middle isn't necessarily sacred ground. (Neither is L or R)
5. What do you wish Hispanic church leaders would do differently?
- A. Be also open-minded and do everything with love
 - B. Accept new ideas and to use new technology
 - C. Talk about real issues, do more outreaches to help the community with no agenda
 - D. Take into account all sides not just the victims
 - E. I wish they'd stop separating themselves and fearing different communities. I wish they were more open with the younger generations to consider their differences
 - F. I wish Hispanic church leaders to speak more about the Bible and conflict
 - G. Bring more colored and whites
 - H. More events
 - I. Accept other races that aren't their own
 - J. For them to adopt the culture of a nation that they willingly came into and care about the nation and the role we play in it
 - K. I wish they understood that isolating from Americans isn't going to better the situation between us
 - L. The Hispanic leaders should try harder to build bridge with the anglo church
6. What ideas do you have for next steps, for moving forward together as One Region?
- A. What does reconciliation look like in our context?
 - I. Coming together with open hearts and be judgment free
 - II. Train more translators; give more education resources
 - III. Working with the sins of the past
 - IV. We come together to love like Jesus Christ commanded us to regardless of our color. Struggles and experiences. We all serve the same God
 - v. Unity. Come together to spread love!
 - VI. Doing activities today and getting to know each other
 - VII. Love one another and help each other grow spiritually
 - VIII. White churches should help white people learn Spanish
 - ix. Be active, do more events with a focus on togetherness

- B.** How would we like to worship at Regional Assembly
 - i.** Worship God in unity and demonstrate love of God
 - ii.** Mix of both kinds of worship
 - iii.** All cultures involved
 - iv.** With music, worship service, with a sermon
 - v.** Life lessons are great, but would like more worship and preaching & music
 - vi.** Singing, praying, story telling about Jesus
 - vii.** Different genres of music and more instruments

- c.** Do we still keep doing church camp, or do we come up with a new model for the spiritual and communal growth of young people?
 - i.** Come up with a new model for the spiritual and communal growth of young people
 - ii.** Camp sound cool with me
 - iii.** Camp! But planning camp all together
 - iv.** A new model may be needed to meet the needs of a changing population
 - v.** Church camp
 - vi.** Both! The more the better! This is the first time I experience something like this in my 10 years of being a Christian. I feel very privileged to have this experience.
 - vii.** It would be nice if multiple churches, youth leaders, come together and had a night of just worship and sermon, 3 day camp
 - viii.** Keep doing church camp it helps a lot
 - ix.** Yes, keep doing them! They sound fun and I've never gone so I would like to attend a church camp
 - x.** I think camp or retreat for young people is always beneficial
 - xi.** Millennials are in a weird middle child age. I felt old around these 18 year olds but I feel like a baby at other church events. No one is ever my age. I feel too old for "camp." But I want "something." Not sure what. Also please consider offering child care.
 - xii.** Keep doing church camp

APPENDIX 6 – Follow Up Event: Regional Gathering: *Juntos*; January 15, 2022

This follow-up event for the entire Region consisted of three main parts: bilingual conversations around table (World Café style), Lunch, and a bilingual worship service in which the author preached.

Questions for Table Conversations ("World Café style")

(5 people per table; 15 minutes per round; then switch to new tables)

Reminders to table hosts:

- Use Mutual Invitation – it's a simple process and works very well – please share the questions and invite someone to speak first, reminding them to invite next speaker when they are finished
- Once everyone has talked, and you are invited to share, invite whoever went last to speak again on another question or to follow up on anything that was said (open conversation is okay if it's going well)
- If necessary, remind people to share about THEIR experiences, not try to fix others, give advice – we are just having conversation
- It's okay for people to pass – but they still invite another person to speak
- Try not to go in the same order every time – invite different people to speak
- You can ask these questions one at a time, or read all 3 and let the group choose which they'd like to talk about first – or each person can talk about any of them they want

ROUND 1:

- Tell the story of your name. What does it mean to you? Why were you named that?
- Tell about a time in your life when you felt great joy.
- Tell about a time in your life when you stood up for yourself. OR ... Tell about a time in your life when you failed to stand up for yourself.

ROUND 2:

- Tell about the first time you attended your current church. What made you come back a second time?
- Tell about a time in your life when you felt afraid -- and how you got through it.
- Tell us about one of your greatest successes in life

ROUND 3:

- Tell about the most surprising thing you ever experienced in a worship service.
- Tell about a memorable time you spent in the natural world
- What keeps you up at night?

ROUND 4:

- Tell us about something you are looking forward to
- Tell about the last time you interacted with law enforcement. What happened?
- What would you like us to pray for?

ROUND 5:

- With your new group, discuss any previous questions you would like to discuss again in this new group, or one that you didn't get to -- or make up your own questions!

Regional Gathering Order of Worship

1. Praise Music -- Young musicians from Casa de Adoracion - Te doy gloria
 0. Welcome - (bilingual)
 0. Opening Hymn --- “Holy, Holy, Holy” (CH4) Verses 1 (Spanish) & 4 (English)
 0. Pastoral Prayer time + Lord’s Prayer (English/Spanish alternating)
 0. HYMN - Spirit of the Living God (CH259) -- Twice through - English/Spanish
 0. Sermon/Vision – Jay Hartley (BC translates)
 0. Hymn -- Unidos (CH496) - once through, in Spanish
 0. Offering moment -- TWO OPPORTUNITIES
 - a. Give money – Reconciliation Ministries -- our anti-racism work – instructions – check to CCAZ or online
 - b. CHILDREN’s service project today while we were meeting — kits for the homeless
 0. Hymn -- Unidos (CH496) - once through, in English
 1. Invitation to Communion - (Bilingual– bread from border trip to Casa de Misericordia)
 - a. Prayer for Bread - (Spanish)
 - a. Words of Institution for Bread – (English)
 - b. Prayer for Cup - LN (English)
 - c. Words of Institution for Cup - MG (Spanish)
 - d. Communion Music (Amazing Grace) while congregants exit sanctuary to form large circle in parking lot
11. Benediction & Sending Forth (OUTSIDE)

January 15, 2022

Sermon Outline for Regional Gathering
(Jay Hartley, preaching; BC translating)

- Intro: Ven, Espiritu de Dios, cae sobre nosotros
- Hoy quiero compartirles una de mis escrituras favoritas, de Juan, capitulo 13, versículos 34 y 35
 - <<< **Read John 13:34-35** >>>
 - *Este mandamiento nuevo les doy: que se amen los unos a los otros. Así como yo los he amado, también ustedes deben amarse los unos a los otros.*
 - *De este modo todo el mundo sabrá que ustedes son mis discípulos, si se aman los unos a los otros*
 - *(I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*
 - *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.)*
1. 75 years ago, a group of Disciples were kicked out of their church
- They didn't mind, really, because the church was painful place to be
 - They'd go on Sundays, experience lots of bickering, fighting, gossiping
 - Nobody really seemed happy
 - Congregation didn't embody God's love
 - Power of Holy Spirit seemed forgotten
 - Some people, when they're kicked out of church, never go back
 - They give up on God, give up on church, get all cynical and bitter
 - But not these people
 - They knew that God is love, & that God wants church to be place of love, joy
 - So they channeled their inner Thomas Jefferson, decided to write their own "Declaration of Independence:"
 - *"When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the bonds which have connected them with another A decent respect to the opinions of humankind require that they should declare the courses which impel them to the separation.*
 - *"We hold these truths:*
 - *The service in Christ's Church should be joyous*
 - *That bickering, bitterness, dissension and malicious talk have no place in Christ's Church*
 - They went on to start a new church, a church dedicated to embodying God's love
 - A church that emphasizes love & joy, not bickering & bitterness
 - They built a new sanctuary ... and you are sitting in it right now
 - Community CC turns 75 this year --& we are so glad for your witness to God's love

2. Now, I start w/ this story not just b/c I want to thank CCC for hosting our Regional Gathering today – but b/c it introduces important conversation about character of our life together as we seek to be disciples of Jesus Christ
- As most of you know, I travel to different churches every week
 - It's a great privilege – I get to worship God in Spanish & English
 - I get to meet wonderful people and hear people tell me how it's going in their churches
 - I get to see all kinds of things Disciples are doing to share God's love, to care for their neighbors ...
 - ... like the "little big Disciples" at Casa de Adoracion, the witness of inclusive love at Foothills, a joyous Vacation Bible School at Iglesia Dios de Segunda Oportunidad
 - As I travel around, I show up and I hear laughter
 - I see people smiling, giving people hugs
 - I see a church that makes people's lives better

 - ... and sometimes I don't
 - I'm being honest here
 - Sometimes, I show up & nobody is smiling, nobody seems happy to be there, nobody even says hello to me
 - Sometimes, I show up & people are scowling at each other, looking grumpy
 - Some of our churches got in big fights over Covid protocols, arguing about whether to wear masks or whether to meet in person
 - Sometimes, I walk away saying: "Where in the world is the Spirit of God's love – b/c it sure didn't seem to be in that church!"
 - It doesn't matter to me if there are 5 people in the church or 500
 - It doesn't matter to me if people speak Spanish or English or Swahili
 - What matters to me: does this place ooze w/ the love of God – or does it feel more like Valley of Dry Bones?
 - ***De este modo todo el mundo sabrá que son mis discípulos, si se aman los unos a los otros***
 - ***By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another***

3. Now --- I want to be clear -- I don't want you to lie to me
 - When I show up at your church, I don't want you to pretend that everything is happy when it's not
 - Church shouldn't be a place where we ignore pain of living, broken relationships
 - Conflict happens – we just need to deal with it
 - God's love is based on REALITY, on what really IS – not on some fairy-tale image of perfection
 - Life is difficult
 - Church is a place where we bring our pain, where we are honest about our challenges, where we deal w/ conflict & work through things
 - But church should also be a place where are reminded that in midst of life, in midst of loss & suffering, in midst of all kinds of challenges, in midst of global pandemic – God is w/ us, & God loves us, & God calls us to love each other
 - ***Just as I have loved you, también ustedes deben amarse los unos a los otros.***

4. Most of us, when we hear the word “church,” think of our local congregation
 - But Jesus isn't just calling us to love people we see every Sunday
 - Jesus is calling us to love ALL of God's children – in our churches, other churches, & no churches; in Arizona, in Mexico, & even in Nebraska!
 - And I'm so excited that here in Arizona, we have this tremendous opportunity to show each other & world what it means to love each other
 - If you watch news, seems like a lot of world thinks Hispanic people and Anglo people don't like each other
 - A lot of people seem to think we need a big wall between us
 - A lot of people say awful, ugly, hateful things
 - But here we are – the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Arizona
 - Some of us have dark brown skin & some of us have light brown skin & some of us have pretty pale skin
 - Some of us speak Spanish, some of us speak English, & some of us speak BOTH – (and a big thank you to those of you who shared your ability to speak both languages and help us have conversations around tables today!)
 - & I am so excited to be in Arizona right now because we have this TREMENDOUS opportunity to witness to God's love by showing the world a different way:
 - ***De este modo TODO EL MUNDO sabrán que son mis discípulos, si se aman los unos a los otros***
 - ***By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another***

5. In November, theme of our Regional Assembly: *Unidad Profetica* – Prophetic Unity
- We are not looking for SUPERFICIAL unity, where we all smile for the camera and pretend like we are getting along
 - We are not looking for CHEAP unity where we trade tacos and hamburgers and think our work is done
 - We are looking for PROPHETIC unity – a unity based in mutuality, shared power, shared decision-making, appreciation for & affirmation of each other
 - We started that journey this morning, sitting around tables and starting to get to know each other – but that’s only the start!
 - Prophetic Unity is going to call us to be uncomfortable sometimes, to try to learn some words in a different language, to try to sing in another language, to try to listen deeply, learn from each other, and maybe even change some attitudes and opinions
 - Some things may not work perfectly the first time – some things may be a disaster!
 - But we’ll keep trying
 - The goal is to get to a place where we truly understand that we are what Apostle Paul described as “the body of Christ,” where if one member suffers, we all suffer together; & if one member rejoices, we all celebrate together
 - The goal is to take Jesus really seriously when he says: ***I give you a new commandment, that you love one another***
6. We’ll have lots more to say about Prophetic Unity in November
- But in the meantime, I want to say a few things about our Region
 - 1st, I believe message we preach as Disciples of Christ badly needed in our world
 - In a world filled with friction, fighting, and factions, Disciples offer a commitment to come together and STAY together around the table
 - We might not always agree, but we don’t condemn each other
 - We know that we are all children of God, that God loves us, and so we cannot cut each other out of our lives
 - Second, we need to be at our best
 - We need to believe what Jesus says and try our very best to do it
 - If we bicker and fight with each other, or if we ignore each other and just have superficial relationships – we not only lose our ability to witness to the world ...
 - We miss the whole point of what church is about
 - *I give you a new commandment*, Jesus says, *that you love one another*
 - As our General Minister and President says:
“We need to be the church we say we are”
 - Third, I will do everything in my power to help your congregation be successful
 - Covid has been hard on churches

- We've had 2 congregations close in last 6 months
- But it was a difficult time for churches even before Covid – b/c too many churches have forgotten why we exist in the first place
- We have to stop asking “how is our church going to survive” and start asking “how is God calling us to shine light and spread love in our community?”
- We have to look at ourselves and say: “If someone new walked in here, would it be obvious to them that the love of God is present?” “Would they sense the bonds of love that bind us together?”
- “Yes” is the answer we're looking for
- I'll do anything I can to help you get to that place

END. Disciples of Arizona – *Discipulos de Arizona – Estoy TAN emocionado estar en ministro con ustedes*

- I am SO excited to be with all of you
- We are on an amazing journey together, this journey of faith, this journey of trying to embody God's love in a world that often tries to squelch it
- We need each other
- We need to support each other
- We need to know each other
- *Necesitamos ser juntos*
- We need to speak the same language – the language of God's love
- And we need to speak it in Spanish and English and any other language you know
- Repeat after me: *Dios te ama y YO te ama*
- God loves you -- & I love you
- Look around the room & say it again: *Dios te ama Y YO te ama*
- ***By this everyone will know that WE are Christ's disciples, if we have love for one another***
- Dios les bendiga – God bless you -- & AMEN!