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Can We Really Talk about Race?
Creating Intergroup Dialogue at Celebration Tabernacle

Mary Burchett
CST 411
Service Learning Capstone Proposal

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To the Pastors at Celebration Tabernacle,

When I first sat down to talk with Pastor Tolbert, Pastor Gordon, and Antjuan I was a little anxious. I was nervous and anxious because I am a white female from Salt Lake City, Utah, and I have spent little time in the presence of people who are different than me, and an even shorter amount of time in the presence of black people. It took me a little while to open up, but as soon as I began to listen and hear your stories about what you were doing I knew that I wanted to be involved and to somehow lend my support and myself to you. Not only that, but I wanted to get more people involved as well.

When I was talking to Antjuan, he told me that the biggest and best thing I could do was to tell my friends and classmates at the University of Portland about the church and what you guys do. He also wanted me to get people to come to the café and support the business and the people it serves. Because, he said, it was through these contacts and networks that people not only support the church financially but emotionally as well.

The programs you offer at Celebration Tabernacle (CT) have endless potential. Not a day goes by when there is no one to help or nothing to do. Throughout my limited time as an observer and server of your community I have come to realize how important it is to maintain a relationship with the community of North Portland and to develop a further working relationship with the University of Portland (UP). In order to be a resource both financially and physically to the homeless and marginalized communities that you work with, I think we agree it is important to get community members involved who may not know who you are or what you do.

As I have spent more and more time as an observer of your community at CT and the people who benefit from your programs I have a better understanding of the work

done at the church. So much is done, as you know, be it at the children's daycare or the youth empowerment graphic design company, Emyrean Perspectives. Some of your largest endeavors, Po'Shines: Café De La Soul and the 88 Keys Scholarship Foundation are so influential to not only those who benefit physically, but the entire community as well.

These programs are a wonderful asset to the children and youth who live in North Portland as well as to the entire community. The annual neighborhood clean up benefits all those who live and work in Kenton. The free Thanksgiving Feasts for the community give those who may not have a family a wonderful, welcoming place to come on Thanksgiving. You more than anyone know that the work you do requires dedication, big hearts, and big wallets. I believe that you would benefit from having a network of diverse people to spread the word about what you do so as to receive adequate support and funding for all of the programs.

The problem you've shared with me is finding that network of people and getting them to support your programs. I understand that the community of Kenton has been very accepting and understanding of the work that you do, but it may be even more crucial to reach out to those people who do not understand. I think this is an untapped resource in your journey to reach across to others who are different and others who may be left on the margins. Those North Portland community members who may for whatever reason have stereotyped thoughts about your community and possibly the black community in general are people you could most influence and teach. Talking together will help the white community members understand the black community as well as the work you all

do. I believe understanding is the first step in making change. Once there is understanding, then comes the network of support.

I propose that you the pastors of Celebration Tabernacle conduct regular conversations and intergroup dialogues with the community (I will explain exactly what this will entail a little bit later). Come to know them and who they are and in turn have CT members share their own experiences. This dialogue will include sharing equally and learning from one another. With this goal in mind I have undertaken research about intergroup dialogues and I believe this type of conversation, will be most beneficial. As a University of Portland student, I think it would also be extremely beneficial for you to tap the UP community as a resource for student involvement.

Understanding the racial barriers that may occur or be occurring is important to unite people for a common cause. In this proposal I will explain the benefits of such a program to both parties involved as well as long-term benefits for society as a whole. I will define and explain what exactly an intergroup dialogue entails as well as outline the specific plan for designing and implementing an intergroup dialogue program that best suits your needs and the structure of the church community. I will also talk about problems that may occur in implementing this type of dialogue.

If the proposal for this dialogue is approved, I believe it will positively impact the community well being. Not only will it help get more youth off of the streets and provide a safe place for people in the neighborhood to gather, but it will allow you at Celebration Tabernacle to experience growth with the community support your programs deserve, both financially and emotionally.

Background,

The community has been very good to the church and the many programs you run, and no one recognizes that more than the pastors at CT. However, not nearly enough people know about the programs and not for lack of publicity. The church, comprised of a predominantly black community, serves those of many ethnicities who are under-privileged and low-income. While many say that racism ended with the Civil Rights Movement and segregation, racism is still very evident in the gentrification that is happening in Kenton. Low-income, black families, who could afford to pay their mortgage or rent before Kenton started to thrive with new businesses, are now being forced out because the value of houses in Kenton has drastically risen.

I have recently understood more and more about the existence of racism in our society, through my trip to the South on a journey through the Civil Rights Movement, a course I took about protest and reform in the South as well as seeing first hand how racism has affected the restoration of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. All of this has lead me to realize the importance of easing tensions and negative beliefs and attitudes that many white people have about black people. As a result, these barriers prevent people from understanding and learning about others and it only contributes to racism. Learning about the African American community at CT, will not only ease racial prejudices and stereotypes, I believe it will also elicit a network of community members more willing to support the church and their programs.

Proposed Approach and Work Plan,

As a result of the conversations and interactions I have had at CT, I propose to initiate regular conversation and dialogue between white and black community members in North Portland and at the church. I have seen my own stereotypes and anxiety dissolve

as I spend more and more time talking with black community members at CT. I have researched anxiety and the effect it has on communicating across social barriers such as race. The fact that my anxiety lessened as I spent more time in contact with you all at CT was explained and affirmed in other studies that I researched.

Using the design elements and goals of the University of Michigan's intergroup dialogue program, the dialogue program I propose to you is as follows. The dialogues will be comprised of ten to sixteen participants per session with an equal number of black and white members in the session. I propose one dialogue session to start out with, and depending on the initial turnout, additional sessions in the future. The sessions will meet once a week for one hour and will continue for six months, for a total of 24 dialogues. I believe that for your community a number of options for the topics of these intergroup dialogues exist. These options include a bible study, a book club, or the discussion of a prominent historical figure.

I recognize that it would be most valuable for you to develop the exact content of the discussions. I appreciate that you have a firm understanding of the topics of discussion I will recommend. That is why my ideas are merely a starting point and I look forward to working with you to develop them further. I will now present some of the ideas I have for the content.

Because your church community has such a strong Christian faith, partnering with another church, or other members of the community to have a Bible study, might work well for the discussions. Since you already conduct a weekly Bible study at the church, it would be beneficial to incorporate these into your intergroup dialogue sessions. While I am no theologian, discussion could be about passages from the Bible such as the

Beatitudes. Topics like, “Who are the poor? Who are considered marginalized in today’s society?” could then be discussed. Let me re-emphasize that the exact content would be up to you. Another option I would suggest is to conduct a book club on a book such as The Color Purple. Topics could include overcoming racism and the nature of racism. An additional discussion topic could include a look at prominent leaders during slavery (Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Tubman), the Civil Rights Movement (Martin Luther King Junior, Ella Baker), and today (Barack Obama, Jesse Jackson) and how they have contributed to ideas about race in America.

These specific discussion topics would help you attract more people and create interest for the program. I think any of these ideas would be a great opportunity for you to use your knowledge on various subject matters, which include but are not limited to, the Bible, literature about race, and various influential leaders. The goal of the discussion topics would be to cater to your specific interests as well as community needs.

A trained Pastor, or possibly one of the ministers, and a trained member of the white community will facilitate each dialogue. Participants will only need an open mind, questions, a Bible or a book depending on the type of discussion you choose, and some pens and paper to write down their thoughts. Discussions should include issues of social and racial identity. Discussions should examine individual and cultural beliefs about the various themes from whichever topic you choose. Discussions should identify diversity among individual responses. Discussions should challenge prejudices and biases that participants may have. While these instructions may seem daunting or far-fetched, stick with me as I describe ways in which other intergroup dialogue programs have been implemented and have produced positive results.

Rationale,

Many studies show the effects of extended contact with members of an outgroup on reducing prejudices through a multitude of mediators including, reducing intergroup anxiety and self-disclosure (Turner, Hewstone, & Voci, 2007; Brown, Eller, Leeds, & Stace, 2007; Turner, Hewstone, Voci, & Vonofakou, 2008). Self-disclosure is the sharing of personal information with another person, voluntarily (Turner et al., 2007). Intergroup Anxiety is any anxiety felt as a result of negative expectations of rejection or discrimination during an interaction with a member of a different group than your own (Turner et al., 2007).

Anxiety is often felt anytime we communicate with others. Stephan et al., (1999) explains that there is a minimum and maximum threshold for anxiety. The minimum is the least amount of anxiety one can feel and still be concerned about their interactions with others. The maximum is the most amount of anxiety one can feel and still feel comfortable with their interactions with others. Anxiety should be between these two thresholds in order to make the communication interaction most effective (Stephan et al., 1999).

Interacting with members of an outgroup can create anxiety, which has negative effects on intergroup relationships (Stephan et al., 1999). If people from outside the community of Celebration Tabernacle feel anxious in anyway, it will have negative impacts on the community as a whole. Therefore it is essential that anxiety be between the minimum and maximum thresholds so that communication can be most effective. How then do we reduce anxiety and keep it at an effective level, so that effective communication between groups can occur.

Many studies have looked at ways to combat the problem of anxiety. Many of them agree that extended contact with members of an outgroup, reduces feelings of anxiety (Brown et al., 2006, Turner et al., 2007, Turner et al., 2008). Turner et al., (2007) studied the role of self-disclosure and intergroup anxiety on reducing prejudices through extended contact. The same research did an additional study about extended contact and the role of intergroup anxiety, ingroup and outgroup norms, and the inclusion of the outgroup in the self (Turner et al., 2008).

Turner et al., (2007) found that the more time students spent with members of an outgroup, the less anxiety they felt. This was true for me, as I have spent more and more time at CT. They also found that self-disclosure played a large role in eliciting positive outgroup attitudes. The more participants were able to disclose of themselves and share personal stories with another person heightened the intimacy of the relationship between two people (Turner et al., 2007). In this study, self-disclosure was found to be an important factor in eliciting positive outgroup attitudes, because it produced empathy. It also brought a deep sense of trust to each member who was disclosing.

Brown et al., (2007) also studied intergroup contact. They wanted to see if extended contact brought about a change in attitudes towards the outgroup, or if having positive attitudes resulted in a desire for more contact. They gave students a questionnaire in which they were looking for the amount and quality of intergroup contact, how typical the person of the outgroup was perceived to be, and the desire for closeness with the outgroup (Brown et al., 2007).

They concluded that the higher the quality of the contact, the greater desire for closeness and the less negative evaluation of the outgroup member. Also, the amount of

contact with an outgroup member showed positive attitudes towards the entire outgroup, even considering initial attitudes. Therefore, initial negative attitudes of the participant, according to this study, do not seem to have an impact on desire for contact. It was also found that the correlation of the quality of the contact and positive attitudes was a result of how ‘typical’ of the outgroup, the member was perceived to be (Brown et al., 2007). This study shows that the quality of intergroup contact directly impacts the results. In other words, the greater the quality, the more positive the interaction and also the results.

Each of these studies suggests that intergroup contact has great impacts on reducing racial prejudices and easing tensions that may exist. Understanding the importance of intergroup contact is the first step in putting into action an intergroup dialogue. I believe that reducing prejudices through intergroup contact are not enough for your situation at Celebration Tabernacle. It now becomes important to actually conduct dialogues in which members of different groups come together for more than just contact, but for dialogue and discussion with one another. In turn, these dialogues will hopefully bring about a desire for social change among all those involved in the process.

According to Nagda and Zuniga (2003), “intergroup dialogues bring together members of two or more social identity groups that have a history of conflict or potential conflict” (p. 113). This definition is similar to most others I have found for intergroup dialogues. Some put specific parameters on their definition such as the dialogue being face-to-face communication, (Sevig & Zuniga, 1997). For the purposes of Celebration Tabernacle and this proposal I will use the definition that requires the communication to be face-to-face.

Sevig and Zuniga (1997) highlight five design elements of the University of Michigan's intergroup dialogue program that are key in order to ensure effectiveness of intergroup dialogues as well as similar programs. These five elements are, "The personalized peer-learning structure," "the size and diversity of the group," "the opportunity to work across differences," "the emphasis on communication and constructive use of conflict," and "the curricular aspect of the intergroup dialogues" (Sevig & Zuniga, 1997, p. 26-27). These key ingredients for effective intergroup dialogue will also be beneficial to use for the dialogue program at CT. While these ingredients were effective for students at the University of Michigan in intergroup dialogues, I believe they could have similar effects on community members for the dialogues at CT.

The personalized peer-learning structure that Sevig and Zuniga (1997) discuss is explained as, "having adequate time set aside, meeting regularly, and paying attention to both 'intellectual and emotional selves'" (p. 26). Sevig and Zuniga (1997) also stress the importance of a small and equally diverse group, and that the group be willing to work across differences by asking questions and not simply ignoring those differences. The next ingredient they give is to make sure that communication as well as conflict is used in a constructive way in order to allow participants to take risks and work through big emotions that may come up through the course of the dialogue. The last design element of an effective intergroup dialogue is a curricular or academic aspect. This includes combining course work with the intergroup dialogue experience (Sevig & Zuniga, 1997).

The extensive intergroup dialogue program at the University of Michigan was established in 1988. Some of goals of this program were to,

“Develop awareness as members of social groups in the context of systems of privilege and oppression; explore similarities and differences between and among participants and link these differences to issues of oppression at the cultural and institutional level; examine the origins of beliefs, attitudes and behaviors at individual, cultural and institutional levels; challenge ignorance, misinformation, biases and oppression through reflective learning, honest feedback, critical analysis of issues, and input from facilitators; and to identify actions which facilitate alliance and coalitions in order to work toward just social change” (Sevig & Zuniga, 1997, p. 24).

These goals will be used in establishing and maintaining an effective dialogue program for you to use at CT. Learning about social identity and differences in identity allows those involved to explore areas of oppression at all levels and challenges those involved to really think and learn about their preconceived ideas and information. Not just that, but it should also allow for action to occur as a result. After participating in an intergroup dialogue, members should feel the energy and desire to work toward social change. This could include simple things for the church such as volunteering to wash dishes on Saturdays at the café, or working in the daycare a few times a month, or making a yearly financial contribution to the church.

Nagda (2006) studied five groups of students in a Social Welfare course in which the students participated in an intergroup dialogue session. The groups were asked to fill out a pretest and posttest survey regarding their identity in the group as well as their perceived performance in the session. Nagda (2006) hypothesized that communication processes will help bridge differences by serving as a mediation tool in intergroup

encounters. The study found four types of communication processes, alliance building, engaging self, critical self-reflection and appreciating differences. The study also found support for the Theoretical model that, “the communication processes comprise part of the mechanism through which intergroup encounters lead to increased motivation to build bridges” (Nadga, 2006, p. 565).

The study opens up a new component in the theoretical model that of communication processes. It suggests that self-evaluation as well as building alliances contribute to bridging cultural and racial differences. Dialogue must be used to engage people across barriers. For the dialogue to succeed everyone involved must be engaged. This study suggests that dialogic listening in alliances is key to shared activity and ultimately the bridging of differences. An important aspect is that this type of listening must be related to the willingness of the alliance to make social change happen (Nagda, 2006).

Nagda’s (2006) study also emphasizes the importance of the four communication processes, appreciating differences, engaging self, critical self-reflection, and alliance building in order to promote involvement in the dialogue process. The findings suggest that integrating the four communication processes with listening in accordance with dialogue, intergroup education efforts leads to effective and positive social change rather than simply reducing intergroup prejudices. Again, this study emphasizes the importance of intergroup dialogue programs in inspiring and enacting social change. It is my intention to have Celebration Tabernacle receive additional and lasting support from the community upon participating in intergroup dialogues.

DeTurk (2006) conducted a study with participants from a previous intergroup dialogue. The purpose of this study was to uncover the specific benefits of intergroup dialogues on “building alliances in the interest of social justice” (p. 33). DeTurk (2006) also hoped to understand how face-to-face communication, in these additional dialogues, influenced factors of cultural diversity.

After talking directly with participants who had previously completed an intergroup dialogue experience, DeTurk (2006) found that after participating in an intergroup dialogue, participants were able to understand and take on different perspectives than their own; they had an increased awareness of diversity and thought more deeply and complexly about diversity. Participants also had greater confidence with intergroup interaction, and a greater commitment to action towards social justice.

Other results of the study included benefits of members of the minority groups. DeTurk (2006) found that participants enjoyed being in groups with others who had similar experiences to their own. These people found validation of their beliefs as well as someone who knew what they were going through. Participants also found that the dialogue gave them a voice to share and educate others about their culture or beliefs. All of these things gave the participants encouragement and energy. The dialogues also gave participants confidence to communicate with others out of their social and cultural norm as a result of comfort attained within the dialogue.

DeTurk (2006) concluded that the structured face-to-face communication of the present study’s intergroup dialogue, allowed for an increase of storytelling among all participants. In the conclusion to her article, DeTurk (2006) makes an important statement, that, “the relational nature of dialogue encourages us to embrace each other’s

perspectives and concerns, while at the same time building our capacity for action” (p. 49). These results are another example of the positive effects that intergroup dialogue has on the participants. And provide further evidence that a dialogue program at Celebration will result in positive benefits for you and the greater Kenton community.

In a study by Nagda and Zuniga (2003) they extend research on intergroup dialogues by addressing the effects of interracial/interethnic dialogue on the participants and then how the learning process shapes the results. They hoped to test for the impact of an interracial/interethnic dialogue on white and black students and also to better understand the differences in the way white and black students learn in this type of dialogue setting.

Nagda and Zuniga (2003) use three ways to engage across differences, critical social awareness, dialogic communication, and building bridges in order to hypothesis about effects of intergroup dialogue. They hypothesized that for each of the three domains, after students participated in the dialogue there would be an increase; in social awareness, in ability to engage in dialogic communication, and in intent to build bridges (Nagda & Zuniga, 2003). The learning process for the study’s intergroup dialogues included being in a small group and meeting on a consistent basis, having a diverse leadership team made up of peers, and having a curriculum based experience with discussion, individual journals, and assignments (Nagda & Zuniga, 2003).

Nagda and Zuniga (2003) concluded that intergroup dialogues have a positive impact on racial identity and that the more students valued the dialogic learning process, the more they benefited from the intergroup dialogue. Their results were skewed however, because of the short length of the study, only seven weeks long, and the fact

that students chose to participate in the study and therefore might already have been keen to racial issues and have previously participated in intergroup dialogues.

Implications,

I understand that many challenges exist in implementing an intergroup dialogue program at Celebration Tabernacle. First, most of the present studies regarding intergroup dialogue were conducted in a classroom situation with students and professors and the support of a University. Very few studies exist that discuss the impacts of neighborhood-based intergroup dialogue programs. These would show not only the effects of such dialogue, but also ways of implementing community based intergroup dialogue.

Some other challenges that may come up include the fact that implementing and training facilitators of an intergroup dialogue could be very labor intensive and while it would not cost money, the time needed to put into training the facilitators would be valuable. Another issue, one that came up in quite a few of the studies (DeTurk, 2006, Nagda & Zuniga, 2003, and Sevig & Zuniga, 1997) is finding a diverse group of people from the community who would most benefit from an intergroup dialogue, to actually volunteer to be a part of the dialogue. It is important to present this type of dialogue in such a way so that no one feels pressured to participate. You would need to recruit people from outside CT's community who would most benefit, to be a part of the dialogue. I could be a resource for you in recruiting UP students to come to the dialogues. This could ease the challenge of finding people who will be willing to participate. Involvement of UP students in this dialogue program would create a doorway for them to get involved in other aspects of the church.

Another issue with this type of program is analyzing and assessing the progress and results of the study. This process would be important in understanding how the community has benefited upon completion of the dialogue, but would be difficult and time consuming. This may be something that you personally decide not to do because of the daunting nature. It would however, be something a graduate student at the University of Portland, or myself, could facilitate. This process of analysis is important for your dialogue and to further the current research.

I think hardest of all is allocating resources to fund this type of program. As it is, however, I believe that this program can be done with little to no money spent. Conduct the dialogue on a weekday in the church, ask the facilitators to volunteer their time, and pick a book that is available at the library or look into getting a set of books donated. Ideally, the most you will have to spend would be a few dollars for pens and paper. It is my hope that the possibility and likelihood of amazing benefits to your community as a result of this program would outweigh all of these challenges.

Closing,

I have presented you with specific examples of how intergroup dialogue has helped ease anxiety and racial tensions through self-disclosure, extended contact, asking questions and being open and honest with other members of the group. It is my hope that with these models in mind, you find it necessary to implement an intergroup dialogue at the church.

Weekly dialogues will hopefully help ease any prejudices or unjust thoughts that neighbors and community members may have about your community at Celebration Tabernacle. The dialogues also would be beneficial for the community because they will

not be generic discussions, but ones influenced by topics from the Bible, literature, and historical figures that the group can learn about together. Additionally, these conversations will create a forum for discussion about race, a topic that remains taboo in today's society.

Intergroup dialogue at CT has the potential to bring about a call for social change in its participants. This call could be anything from spreading the word about the dialogues, to thinking more critically about addressing issues of race in our country. Social change also could come about from learning about ways to support the church and all of the programs you offer. Above all, this dialogue will be another way in which you, the Pastors at CT, reach across social and racial barriers in order to unite all people for the common good.

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