

SESSION 4: Theological Reflection with a Group

Session: Allows participants to practice using the Theological Reflection Circle in a group setting.

OUTLINE OF SCHEDULE:

05 min: Gathering Prayer

08 min: Homework Processing

12 min: Presentation: Cross Cultural Communication

20 min: Segment 1

20 min: Segment 2

20 min: Segment 3

05 min: Assignment and Closing Prayer

COPIES THAT NEED TO BE MADE:

1 copy per participant:

Communicating Across Cultures (1 pg)

Theological Reflection Circle for Use with Several Participants (1 pg)

Extended Practice Session (2 pgs/ duplex)

Closing Prayer/ Homework (1 pg)

INSTRUCTOR'S CONTENT

05 min: Gathering Prayer

This is a very short guided meditation. You will be asked to use your imagination to clear away troublesome things and to plant holy things. If you get distracted, focus on your breathing to come back to the meditation.

Let us just take time and make the inner space to let your minds rest, to set your hearts still.

We begin by simply paying attention to our breathing—not controlling it, just sinking into it.

(Pause for 30 seconds)

We bring to mind and surround with care all whom we miss and all the unspoken burdens we carry.

We bless our interfaith neighbors celebrating _____.

(Name any feasts or holy days that are being observed.

Use www.interfaithcalendar.org if you need help to identify these.)

We pause in the midst of life—taking time, making space—

not just to empty out the things we bring with us, but to open space to refresh our spirits.

In this meditation, we bid the clouds, “Disperse!”

As I name these things, breathe them out of your day and breathe in peace.

If you already feel at peace, then use your meditation to breathe these out of the community and world.

Disperse pain and worry. *(Pause 30 seconds)*

Disperse distraction and weariness. *(Pause 30 seconds)*

Disperse anxiety and depression. *(Pause 30 seconds)*

In this time, in this space that we have opened up within us,

we breathe in the light, the love, and the peace we need to be new and start fresh.

We gather light, love, and peace close not to possess it,

but to plant it deep in our hearts, our community, and our world.

In your mind's eye yourself, see yourself going to the wounded spots you've just cleared

And picture planting light, love, and peace for yourself and future generations.

(Pause for 30 seconds)

In the clearing we have made, we can see our truest selves:

We stand strong in our desire for integrity and committed to our best work,

We trust our minds and hearts to listen to wise counsel, to commit to deep values,

and to bend to grace.

In this light, in this love, in this peace,

we remember that we are beautiful, we choose the good, we pursue the just—

And we desire this company to help us build a sacred life together. Let us make it so: Amen.

08 min: Homework Processing

If possible, get at least one set of answers from each Homework option (Research, Interview, Reflect.) Sum up the sharing by asking: What did your homework reveal about your assumptions and Hermeneutics?

12 min: Presentation: Cross-Cultural Communication

James Cochrane is a South African public theologian and professor emeritus at Cape Town University. His present work is mostly on the intersection of religion and public health. For the past 20 years, he has been researching, writing, and teaching about identity, communication, and mobilizing resources and assets for public good across cultural boundaries. In 1999, he released a book entitled, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection*. In that book, he noted the significance of difference if you truly want to engage the Other and change something. It boils down to this: If you see the Other as “the same” or an extension of yourself, then your interaction will produce sameness. If you are honest about difference then you have the potential for change—in the participants or in the situation.

This may appear obvious: Sameness begets sameness; difference opens the door to change. However, when we don't know each other, we try to manage our uneasiness by minimizing difference. This means we often rush to diminish distinctions. How many times have you heard someone say, “We are going to find out

that we're all really just the same"? Left unchecked, that strategy will undermine the work we are trying to do. We are trying to recognize difference and employ it. Yes, this is risky. But it is essential that it be included for polite conversation to advance into real dialogue. You have to truly invest as your distinct self and you have to risk change to communicate across cultural boundaries of any type including religious. There is a caveat to this; namely, being distinctly yourself is not the same as being a prima donna, privileged elitist, or general pain in the neck!

As noted in our last session, your role as Ambassador may be as participant in or facilitator of a group. As a participant, you will be modeling a desire for change. If you are a facilitator, you are asking others to take a risk for change. Stella Ting-Toomey, professor of Human Communications at California State University at Fullerton offers us a simple outline of how to keep all of this in perspective. *Distribute the handout Communicating across Cultures*. The first point is incredibly simple: You want to develop a quality relationship. No matter which role you are playing, quality is important to an Ambassador; you don't want your approach to be shoddy. The second point is almost as simple: The key to quality is mindfulness.

This is how Ting-Toomey breaks down the components of mindfulness (column on the far left):

First is knowledge. This knowledge is both information and attitude. So not only do you have to know "real stuff" about yourself and other cultures, you also have to cultivate your desire to know more and have a fascination with the world of ideas.

Second is motivation. For Ting-Toomey, motivation is internal movement; it is how I know-myself-personally interacts with what-I-am-doing here communicating with you. This is an important insight to utilize in your work. It means you must regularly "check in" with yourself to see how the process is working for you. For example, you may begin a dialogue feeling fairly comfortable and confident because you're facilitating on home ground but as the process unfolds you realize someone in your group has more experience with this topic than you. "Checking in" with yourself you also realize it would be very easy for you to defer to this person. This is an important perception because if you abdicate your role, this person is robbed of the work he or she came to do. Conversely, you might feel threatened by this person's knowledge and realize you could easily limit his or her participation and again be a robber baron. Being aware of your own shifting motivations is key to mindfulness.

Third is skill. Obviously many of the things we have worked on fall in this category. But it is important to note that Ting-Toomey privileges valuing the identity of the Other as a skill. She is very clear that unless you are able to appreciate the 'otherness' of the Other and communicate your appreciation, your fostered skills will fall flat.

In the center column you see three very simple criteria for judging the success of communication across cultural boundaries. Did we behave appropriately for the setting? Were we effective in coming to a shared meaning or desirable outcome? Are the participants satisfied that their contributions to the process were appreciated and utilized?

And finally, in the column on the far right, Ting-Toomey returns to a theme that Cochrane would surely appreciate: Mindful engagement converts our risk into a bolstered identity. This means that even if I did not get all the results I wanted in this dialogue, I know that my contribution was heard, my efforts and intentions respected were respected, and my 'otherness' was actually considered an asset. About each of these outcomes is named as a feeling, it is worth noting they can be described in more than emotional terms. Each of these outcomes can be directly related to a facilitator's behaviors or to specific points in the process.

I would encourage you to take advantage of this session devoted to practicing a group process of theological reflection by periodically pausing to step out of your roles and offer each other feedback. Offer feedback especially if a facilitator has taken an action or made a comment that makes it easy for you to "feel" an identity outcome. If something hasn't worked well for you, be sure to offer this feedback with an "I" message

so as not to violate dialogic practice. Because we are very familiar with each other at this point, we sometimes forget to offer each other our best skills!

One more thing: Ting-Toomey discusses a natural competence cycle in intercultural communication. In the first phase we are unconsciously incompetent. In other words, I make mistakes because I don't know any better. In the second phase we are consciously incompetent. In other words, I know I'm not particularly astute but I haven't done anything significant to improve my abilities. The third stage is conscious competence and the most mindful stage. At this point I have devoted time and attention to learning about other cultures and to acquiring skills to communicate more fluently. I truly desire to integrate my knowledge, motivation, and skills in effective dialogue. The fourth stage is unconscious competence. At this point I am comfortable in my role and skills with these people or this group and I do not have to check every word choice or behavior before implementing it. Experienced cross-cultural communicators usually move back and forth between the third and fourth stage because they aren't interested in becoming complacent. Our goal for Ambassadors is to help you work on the third stage. So feedback is important and practicing your skills as you offer feedback is equally important!

Extended Practice Session

These directions appear on the handout.

A scenario and six character profiles are offered. This is an extended dialogue that will take a full 60 minutes. In other words, you have time to develop new characters in each segment.

Working in groups of three, use the Theological Reflection Circle for Several Participants:

- Each person will facilitate the reflection for one practice segment. It doesn't matter in which order this happens. The facilitator is expected to keep the process moving and contribute to the conversation as a character.
- Each group member will play a different character in each segment. You may keep the same three characters throughout *if you want*.
- Your goal is to get deeper into the dialogue with each round. After 15 minutes in each conversation, time will be called for you to evaluate how well you've been doing the process: How well could you play your characters? What can you affirm for your facilitator?

20 min: Segment 1—Call time at 15 minutes for process questions

Your goal is to come to a common metaphor.

20 min: Segment 2—Call time at 15 minutes for process questions

Your goal is to go the next step and articulate something you can say together.

20 min: Segment 3—Call time at 15 minutes for process questions

Your goal is to go the final step and decide on something you can do together to help your city.

05 min: Assignment and Closing Prayer

COMMUNICATING ACROSS CULTURES

New York: Guilford Press, 1999.

Dr. Stella Ting-Toomey

“To develop a quality intercultural or interpersonal relationship, communicators need to integrate knowledge and skills and practice mindfulness in their communication process.” p.16

IDENTITY NEGOTIATION THEORY

The Key Is: Mindfulness

Primary Identities: Culture, Ethnicity, Gender, Personal

Situational Identities: Role, Relations, “Facework” (Shame/Honor,) Symbolic Interaction (Verbal/Non-verbal)

COMPONENTS OF MINDFULNESS	CRITERIA OF SUCCESS	IDENTITY OUTCOMES
<p style="text-align: center;">KNOWLEDGE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep self-awareness • A fairly broad culturally-sensitive ‘database’ PLUS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Openness to new information and ideas ○ Awareness of multiple perspectives in viewing a situation and own ethnocentrism ○ Combining and/or integrating divergent viewpoints or ideas 	<p style="text-align: center;">APPROPRIATENESS:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Are behaviors proper for this setting?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Do behaviors match expectations within the culture?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">FEELING UNDERSTOOD:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Empathetic engagement with me Validation of my contribution but not necessarily agreement Accuracy of identity information about me</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">MOTIVATION:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do our Primary identities and Situational identities intersect? FOR EXAMPLE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Am I doing this because of my conviction or for my group? ○ Am I fully engaged personally or am I a delegate with specific limitations? ○ Is this a choice or a duty? ○ How fluid are my identities in the situation? 	<p style="text-align: center;">EFFECTIVENESS:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Have we achieved shared meaning or understanding? Have we come to a mutually desirable outcome?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">FEELING RESPECTED:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Being treated with courtesy and dignity Recognition of my/our best intentions/desirable choices as legitimate and credible</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">SKILL:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity valuation of Other • Adaptive abilities: Values’ clarification, observation, listening skills, verbal empathy and nonverbal sensitivity, dialogic and collaborative skills • Ability to share own perceptions in a mindful way 	<p style="text-align: center;">SATISFACTION:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Have we managed the process and the plans for outcome so that all participants have been tended and recognized? (If so, Identity Outcomes will be as noted in the next column.)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">FEELING SUPPORTED:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Being valued by verbal and/or non-verbal communication Authentic endorsement of my worth while recognizing my group-based identity</p>

EXTENDED PRACTICE SESSION

A scenario and six character profiles are offered. This is an extended dialogue that will take 60 minutes. In other words, you have time to develop new characters in each segment. Working in groups of three, use the Theological Reflection Circle for Several Participants:

- Each person will facilitate the reflection for one practice segment. It doesn't matter in which order this happens. The facilitator is expected to keep the process moving and contribute to the conversation as a character.
- You may choose to keep the same three characters throughout but each group member will play a different character in each segment. (e.g. If you decide to do this: If you're A in Segment 1, someone else will be A in Segment 2) The grid below allows you to track roles and feedback.
- Your goal is to get deeper into the dialogue with each round. After 15 minutes in each conversation, time will be called for you to evaluate how well you've been doing the process: How well could you play your characters? What can you affirm for your facilitator?

20 min: Segment 1/ Facilitator 1

Your goal is to come to a common metaphor. You will guide the conversation through the first couple of levels of sharing personal perspectives and then work on the metaphor.

What metaphor do you think describes the situation or good framework for understanding this?

20 min: Segment 2/ Facilitator 2

Your goal is to go the next step and articulate something you can say together. You will take the metaphor and help the group to play with how you would explain or describe it to others.

What would you like to have the Ministerial Association say to the city about this?

20 min: Segment 3/ Facilitator 3

Your goal is to go the final step and decide on something you can do together to help your city. You will take the metaphor and the message you've reached and help the group to discuss what actions go with them.

What would you propose be done and how would you recommend the Ministerial Association participate in or support that? What can you do together?

Characters

- A) I am attuned to the cycles and seasons of the earth. In fact they are a spiritual resource and authority for me. I have become more and more concerned with environmental and ecological issues because of this.
- B) I have completed my Student phase and begun life as a Householder. I have been faithful to my yoga and I am doing well in providing for my family and being able to give to charity. However, I am very concerned that our society is out of whack and wealth and security are inappropriately emphasized.
- C) I am deeply committed to God's understanding of the radical equality of all human beings and to making an honest living. When I'm not at work or with my family and community, I am volunteering at the Disaster Relief Service Office.
- D) I experience life as sacramental. My God-given spiritual gifts are in discernment and organizing. I try to offer my skills to short-term or emergency projects.
- E) I began to understand how enlightenment could be possible when I discovered walking meditation. Now I do it in two ways—on a walking path in the woods and around my community. I have seen my neighborhood in a very different way because of this and I practice much more compassion for the residents around me.
- F) I plan my life around my prayer obligations. This keeps me aware that God is the center of my life and that God intends good for all the people around me. I get involved in projects that help people choose to do what's right and good for their families and our community.

Scenario

An old Post Office has been “abandoned” by USPS because it doesn’t suit new sorting machinery. Because of a weird local zoning situation, the property can only be used for public service for the 25 years remaining on what should have been the Office’s lease. The city Advisory Council has prioritized needs for senior programming, youth job training, and a drop-in center for recovery services. The local postmaster has announced they will accept proposals for the property to be used addressing one of these three needs. The winning proposal will be awarded a lease transfer for \$12/year for 25 years.

The 10,000 square-foot Post Office is adjacent to a shopping center with a box grocery store, a Dollar Bill’s dollar store, and a 24-hour diner. There is a grade school (K-6) a half-mile away and a small public park (4 acres) a half-mile the other direction. The local high school is 15 minutes away by bus. Three religious organizations are within a mile of the site. (Is yours one of these? Claim it if you want.)

You can assume that there are several organizations ready to write proposals for all three categories of concern so you don’t need to figure out if there’s interest in all the priorities. You can imagine there some upheaval since these programs aren’t normally grouped together.

You are part of today’s Ministerial Association forum as a representative of your religious organization. The Ministerial Association would like to find a way to split usage of the old Post Office so that at least 2 programs are housed. (NB- The Senior Center needs at least 3200 sq. ft. to be certified.)

TRACKING & FEEDBACK FORM		
SEGMENT	CHARACTER	GROUP MEMBER NAME
Segment 1		
Facilitator		
Member		
Member		
Metaphor We Chose:		
Feedback for your facilitator & characters:		
Segment 2		
Facilitator		
Member		
Member		
What We Can Say Together:		
Feedback for your facilitator & characters:		
Segment 3		
Facilitator		
Member		
Member		
What We Can Do Together:		
Feedback for your facilitator & characters:		

CLOSING PRAYER
Excerpt of *Interfaith Poem for Peace Between Religions*
by Robert Gresak (South Africa)

Read responsively: Leader/Assembly

Go in peace, live in peace,
 my Christian child, my Jewish child,
my Muslim child, my Hindu child,
 my Buddhist child, my Islamic child.
my Humanist child,
 my Pagan child.

Go in peace, live in peace whether you live in the East or the West,
 whether you live in the North or the South.

Go in peace, live in peace, whether you call me Christ, or Jesus, Allah or Maitreya,
 Whether you call me Jehovah, Buddha or Brahma, Meaning or Mother, and worship me as such.

I am the One, Omnipresent, Omniscient, before whom even
the greatest of spiritual Lords and Masters stand in awe.

Through my breath and my word was and is creation and evolution brought into being.

Go in peace, live in peace,
 for such is my law.

HOMEWORK

Choose and complete ONE of the following:

OBSERVE

Watch others in conversation this week. Can you tell if the encounters met the criteria of success? If so, which one was strongest: APPROPRIATENESS, EFFECTIVENESS OR SATISFACTION? How were you able to see that? What did you hear that affirmed that? If not, what conveyed the failure?

REFLECT

Make journal notes for yourself about a time when you FELT UNDERSTOOD, RESPECTED, AND SUPPORTED in a dialogic setting. Who communicated them to you and how? What were the specific ways you identified each of these: Being understood, being respected, being supported? How can you offer the same to others?

STUDY

Read the article: Cross Cultural Communication by Michelle LeBaron @ Beyond Intractability
Make note of what this article contributes to your understanding of Situational Identities.

Full reference:

LeBaron, Michelle. "Cross-Cultural Communication." *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. Posted: July 2003
<<http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/cross-cultural-communication>>.

Or watch the Theology as a Second Language video interview with Interfaith Spiritual Director, Andr e Grafstein. Write a brief description of how Grafstein explains entering into someone else's spiritual world.