

encounter each other in true dialogue. This requires the leaders of the communities to be intentional about drawing culturally diverse people together. It also requires commitment from all participants because each person will be asked to step beyond his or her cultural boundaries. Most of them will be asked to behave in very unnatural ways. Initially there will be confusion, frustration, and conflict. But the participants need to know that if they work through the initial discomfort, they will be able to experience temporarily a true multicultural community. These communities need to be temporary because it is unrealistic to expect people to function outside their cultural boundaries all the time. Sometimes the anxiety is too great. One friend of mine described her experience in a multicultural environment as walking into a mine field. "You never know when you are triggering a bomb." People need to "go home" to their own comfortable cultural environment. That is where they can process their experience further and use what they have learned.

I have already covered in Chapter Three the different expectations that white and people-of-color communities have of their leaders. In this and the next two chapters, I want to explore what kind of leadership is needed in the second kind of community, the multicultural community. I will be describing processes that I have tested in multicultural groups, and I will be sharing the concepts and theories behind how they work. I call these processes a *spirituality* because these processes, if used regularly, become a discipline of everyday life. Let me begin by exploring the concept of invitation.

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them;

and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Mark 1:16–20

When we need participants in our programs, we usually stand in front of the congregation and ask for volunteers. Imagine Jesus asking for volunteers to become his disciples. He would stand by the seaside and say, "Anyone who is interested in hearing what I have to say, please follow me." Sounds strange, doesn't it? If Jesus asked for volunteers, James, John, Simon, and Andrew would not have followed him because voluntarism assumed that the volunteers already had a strong sense of their individual power. Fishermen in Jesus' time were probably on the lower end of the economic ladder. A fisherman would say, "He couldn't be calling me. He must have meant the well-educated, influential people standing over there." Jesus knew this; so he simply issued a direct invitation and they accepted.

An alternative to volunteering is invitation. Invitation is a way of giving away power. Accepting an invitation is a way to claim power. Waiting to be invited is a way to take up the cross. Invitation becomes a spiritual discipline for multicultural leaders.

Before discussing this topic further, it might be helpful to consider the typical ways we function in groups. Three processes dominate group dynamics. My experience has proved to me that none of these processes works very well in a multicultural setting.

First is the volunteer process. In this process, participants are asked to volunteer information whenever they are ready to share, in no particular order. An assumption of this process is that everyone has a strong sense of his or her individual power and is comfortable speaking out in a group without a direct invitation. If this is used in a multicultural group, as we have seen, most of the time the white members of the group volunteer first. Then there is an unbearable silence while the group is waiting for the people of color to volunteer. This process can be very time consuming. A lot of time is wasted in the anxiety of not knowing what the

silence means. The leader might eventually end the process without hearing from everybody by saying something like, "We need to respect people's need to be silent." Whether this "need to be silent" is real for those who do not speak is not relevant. This is usually done in the name of keeping a set schedule and very often for the sake of those who feel guilty that they have not been able to include everybody in the process.

The second typical process is "going around in a circle," in which each participant takes his or her turn to speak. This process, although it includes everybody, creates a great deal of anxiety and is not conducive to listening. If I am sitting next to the person who is sharing and I know I am next, I spend my time thinking about what I am going to say instead of listening to what is being shared. The advantage of this process is that it moves the process along. There is no waiting. In fact, there is very little silence between speakers. As soon as one finishes, the next person jumps right in. Sometimes what is shared may be brief. There is an impression that the speaker cannot wait to finish.

The third typical process is the "commander" method, in which the leader calls on whomever he or she pleases. This is mostly used in a High Power Distance culture and in large American businesses. Many people of color are quite at home with this way of functioning. Many actually need a direct invitation to speak because they need to know that they are designated as the person with authority to speak. Whites dislike this process even though they tolerate it in the hierarchical structures of corporate or church environments. Sometimes they accuse the leader of being dictatorial. This process gives too much power to one person. If the leader is sensitive to the needs of the group, this process can be very effective and efficient. However, if the leader is interested only in his or her own agenda, he or she will just call on whomever will support the leader's view. Because of the power this person has, no one will challenge what is going on.

A process I have created that works very well with multicultural groups is called "Mutual Invitation." This is

how it goes. I, as the leader, first share without projecting myself as an expert. After I have spoken, I then invite someone to share. I usually do not invite the person next to me because that might set up the precedent of going around in a circle. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege of inviting another to share. The person being invited has the option to "pass" if she does not want to say anything. After a person says "pass," he is still given the privilege to invite another to share. This continues until everybody has had a chance to share.

This process might seem very simple and insignificant, but the ramifications of it are quite incredible, even to me. I started introducing this process two years ago as an experiment in many groups that I worked with. About a year after the initial introduction of this process, I started receiving calls from people asking where this process originated. When I said I created it, they reported how this process had transformed their group's working style.

I was doing a follow-up training for a congregational development team in an Episcopal diocese. The group was organized by the executive officer of the diocese. I had introduced Mutual Invitation to the group six months earlier. At the end of a meeting that I was to observe and provide feedback, the executive officer invited a member of the group to lead the next meeting. This woman accepted the invitation and then immediately invited another person to offer an opening worship for the next meeting. The person accepted the invitation with a smile. During the break, the executive officer came to me with a sparkle in his eyes and said, "It's simple. One, two, three and it's done. Did you see that? This invitation thing is incredible. Before you came six months ago, I would ask for volunteers, and they would look at each other. That was painful. Now, I invite and it is done. The next time, she would invite the next meeting chair. Everybody knows that they would have their turns. I don't have to be in charge all the time. What a relief!"

This process of mutual invitation decentralizes the power that is usually held by the designated leader. In this process, the facilitator spends some time introducing the process,

shares, and invites the next person. At that point, the facilitator ceases to have power to control because who will speak next is now up to the person to whom he or she has just given the power to speak. This is what giving power away means. It is a practical way of practicing the spirituality of the cross. To many whites who are used to being in control, this process can be very uncomfortable. To some, it is a relief because anxiety and stress tend to come with having power all the time.

To whites, waiting to be invited is another way of practicing the spirituality of the cross. I was facilitating a diocesan staff development retreat. I described Mutual Invitation as an introduction process. After I modeled by introducing myself to the group, the bishop asked, "Can I go next?" I said, "No, bishop." You could hear the gasps in the room.

"According to the process I just described," I continued, "I now have the power to invite the next person to share and I choose to invite someone else. Your turn will come up. I am sorry for this but I think by trusting the process there is something to be learned. So please bear with me on this."

The bishop complied. He was invited to speak immediately after the next person had spoken. For the rest of the day, he respected the process. At a few rounds, he was the last person invited. The bishop, situated on top of the church hierarchy, had to wait to be invited by a support staff before he spoke. This was humility. This was an exercise of the miracle of the ear.

In this Mutual Invitation process, the lions and the wolves and the bears are asked to refrain from using their power freely. They are asked to wait for their turn. They are asked to listen to others and not worry about controlling and directing the movement of the group. They are asked to exercise humility, take up the cross, and exercise the miracle of the ear again and again. Yet, they are also given their share of time and space to exercise power so that they can maintain their sense of power. The consistent practice of this enables them to become more and more sensitive to others who might not have as strong a sense of power. This helps them appreciate others not based on their ability to

stand up to them but on what they have to share and contribute to the group.

This process also manages the silence that usually comes with the volunteer method. Silence in different cultures means different things. For some, silence is a reflective time. For others, it is anxiety-producing, and for still others it communicates disagreement. Whites tend to be very uncomfortable with silence and want to fill it with something. For many people of color, silence communicates a wide range of emotion and information that only a person from the same cultural background can read. In a multicultural group, when someone is silent, how does the rest of the group interpret it? Does this person have something to say but is too shy? Does this person not care about what is going on in the group? Is the person offended and silently protesting? Or maybe this person has nothing to say. The anxiety comes from not knowing what the silence means.

This is taken care of by the ground rule: say "pass" if you don't want to say anything. With this ground rule, once an invitation is issued, the person invited to speak is given the time, space, and power to express herself. The person can choose to be in silence first to put her thoughts together before speaking. The person is also given the responsibility to let the whole group know whether she is ready to speak by having the option to pass. In other words, if the person is silent, and he has not said pass, that means the silence is a useful and meaningful time for the person and should be respected. Here, there is no need to interpret silence. The group already knows that the silence is meaningful to the person who has the power at the moment.

I trained a young adult named Keith to conduct Community Bible Study (see Appendix C), which used Mutual Invitation as the principal way for the group to share insights about the Scriptures. Keith's group had two Japanese teenagers who passed every time they were invited to share. My guess was that because they were the youngest in the group, they did not feel they had the power to speak as equals in the group. After four sessions, they still had not said anything. Keith came to me and asked, "Am I doing

something wrong? Should I talk to them after the session and ask them why?"

"Were they given the privilege to invite after they passed?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Did the rest of the group keep inviting them even though they passed each time?"

"Yes."

"Then you have to trust the process. Keep doing it for two more sessions and if they still don't talk, we'll work on it together to find another way."

Keith went back and facilitated the group again without any procedural change. The two teenagers passed again. But after the session, they asked Keith for the scriptural passage that they would study next week. Keith gave it to them. Next week, as soon as they were invited to speak, they were ready and spoke with abundance.

When a person says "pass," that person is still given the privilege to invite. We give the message that even if you don't say anything, you are still valued as a full member of the group. The one who passes does not need to justify why he does not want to say anything. This stops people from rescuing others who have a weaker sense of their own power. In a volunteer method, some people would push and coerce the less verbal members to speak. It usually sounds like this: "Come on. You can talk. There is no need to be afraid. We really like to hear what you have to say." This kind of action is patronizing. By accepting a pass without explanation, we respect that the person is able to take care of herself. Expecting people to take care of themselves is one way of empowerment.

In the case of the two teenagers, they took care of themselves by doing extra preparation, knowing that they would be invited again. If Keith had rescued them by trying hard to get them to talk, it might reinforce their feeling of inadequacy. They might even withdraw further. By leaving them alone and not asking for an explanation, the group was giving the message that they trusted them to be able to take care of themselves. In a volunteer method, people who

do not speak very much will eventually be ignored as useless to the group. By persistent invitation, we are letting the powerless know that the window of opportunity is always there for them when they are ready to accept and exercise their power.

When I first introduced the process, I discovered that people with a weaker sense of their power sometimes forget to invite the next person to share. I had to remind them that they had that privilege. So many people, especially young people of color, are never given any power. The idea that they had the power to decide who would speak next is very foreign to them. I was conducting a conference for young adults in Miami, Florida. Everyone in this group was a person of color. The first round of Mutual Invitation was slow and uncomfortable because almost everyone forgot to invite after passing or sharing. I did not give in and invite the next speaker on their behalf. I simply reminded them that they still had that power to invite. We did Mutual Invitation for every segment of interaction all day. By the end of the day, the group was actually enjoying the privilege to invite. From the body language and tone of voice they used, I could tell that this group's self-esteem had increased tremendously. Next morning, I did not specify that the group should use Mutual Invitation. Some volunteered to speak; others were silent. Then, one of the shyest women in the group said to another participant, "I haven't heard from you. I invite you to share." That was empowerment at work.

Mutual Invitation gives everyone the experience to exercise power. It also offers the opportunity to use power again and again. The repeated experience of power enables powerless people eventually to claim their share of power with ease and comfort. Sometimes a lamb needs to be told again and again that he or she is not weak but is as strong as the lions and the wolves in the Peaceable Realm. The lamb may not believe it at first, but if the invitation to exercise power is persistently there, the lamb may eventually believe it.

Mutual Invitation is by no means perfect. For example, during each round there is always someone who comes last. This may create some anxiety for that person. I am excited

about this simple process because, imperfect as it may be, it does work better than the “traditional” ways of doing things. I am sure there are other methods that work just as well, if not better. The response to this process has been so overwhelming that I would encourage the reader to practice this process for a period of time and see if there is any change in your organization or group. One unique thing about this process is that it has a life of its own. It does not rely on the level of cultural sensitivity of the leader or facilitator to make it work. In every case, once the leader gives instructions on how Mutual Invitation works, the process takes over. This is what I called a form-centered gathering. In Chapter Eleven, we will explore this concept of leadership in depth.

CHAPTER 10

Media as Means of Distributing Power

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1 John 1:1-4

John clearly stated that the Gospel was not just words on a page. Contrary to how we in the twentieth century receive the Gospel (as written words), John emphasized what he heard, saw, and touched as testimonies. Writing it down was only a part of the whole process “so that our joy may be complete.” In order for the Gospel to come to life and empower our communities, we must enable people to see, hear, and touch it. However, most church leaders use verbal