

Unity Reconciliation and Justice

A Study Guide for the
Belhar Confession



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Introduction

The Belhar Confession was first drafted in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa. It was adopted in 1986, and later it would become one of the standards of unity (along with the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism) for the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, a merger denomination of two South African Reformed churches.

The confession addresses the following three issues: 1) the unity of the church, 2) reconciliation, and 3) the justice God desires in the world. In all three of its articles, affirmations are followed by a rejection of false doctrine (although there is no explicit mention of apartheid, except in an explanatory footnote on the motivation for drafting the confession). No other major confession combines these three issues. Indeed, the historic sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed confessions written out of that context said very little about the unity of the church, and there are no references to the biblical imperatives of reconciliation and God's intentions of justice in the world.

Thus, the implications of the Belhar Confession are far wider than its original context. And therefore, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa has invited the Reformed family worldwide to recognize the Belhar Confession as a gift to all the churches.

This study guide provides an opportunity for Reformed Christians to reflect on and consider the Belhar Confession as a living confession of faith that speaks directly to our mission and ministry here in North America. What is it that we believe God is calling us to be and do in this day and time? How might we as Christian people understand the will of God and live this out as those “called to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world”^{*}? And how does scripture guide us in these questions?

In drawing on the collective wisdom of those who prepared the Belhar Confession and of those who commended it for use in the church, we are saying our understanding of God's Word and God's will for our lives and for our world comes not individually, but through our shared discernment in the life of the church. Therefore, we must think, study, and search together, testing our own individual assumptions with each other and against Scripture, being open to the Spirit, risking disagreement, and treating each other with the mutual affirmation and admonition that the gospel of Christ demands.

This study of the Belhar Confession, then, is not the stuff of political debates, in which opposing groups too often marshal their energies and resources simply to “win.” Rather, as the church, we have the opportunity to approach the Belhar, and the challenging issues it raises, differently: to seek together biblical truth, to lovingly speak that truth to each other, and to encourage each other to walk in that truth. Let us be Christian brothers and sisters, seeking to use the greater wisdom of the church to understand more fully who God would have us be and how we might carry out effective mission and ministry together.

^{*}RCA Statement of Mission and Vision

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

If the church is to grow in faithful and fruitful ministries, and if we are to have mission-al credibility and influence in the North American context, we will need to engage the challenges of racial reconciliation and the biblical imperative of a multicultural community that bears witness in the church to God's intention in Christ for all humanity. The phenomenal growth of the early Christian church, in which "all the believers were together and had everything in common" (Acts 2:44), points to the energizing, transforming power of unity in Christ and the radical witness of God's transforming love for the world. The Belhar Confession has the potential to serve North American Reformed denominations as it does the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa, "as an instrument for profound self-examination, to help determine whether the church really lives by the faith it proclaims" (Dr. Molefi Seth Pitikoe, ecumenical representative from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa to the 2002 RCA General Synod).

Simply put, the Belhar Confession provides us with a historic opportunity to consider embracing a confession that will undergird our mission and ministry with a fuller, biblical understanding of God's intentions for the church and the world. It provides a confessional basis for our commitment to follow Christ in mission in a lost and broken world so loved by God. In concert with the working of God's Spirit, the Belhar Confession can guide our churches into further obedience to the gospel as we seek to bear witness in word and deed to the love of God in Jesus Christ for all the world.

Brothers and sisters, I trust you will reflect prayerfully on your response to the words of this confession of faith.



Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson
General Secretary, Reformed Church in America

Belhar Confession

Prologue

The Belhar Confession has its roots in the struggle against apartheid in Southern Africa. This “outcry of faith” and “call for faithfulness and repentance” was first drafted in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) under the leadership of Allan Boesak. The DRMC took the lead in declaring that apartheid constituted a status confessionis in which the truth of the gospel was at stake.

The Dutch Reformed Mission Church formally adopted the Belhar Confession in 1986. It is now one of the “standards of unity” of the new Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA). Belhar’s theological confrontation of the sin of racism has made possible reconciliation among Reformed churches in Southern Africa and has aided the process of reconciliation within the nation of South Africa.

Belhar’s relevance is not confined to Southern Africa. It addresses three key issues of concern to all churches: unity of the church and unity among all people, reconciliation within church and society, and God’s justice. Belhar is currently being studied by a number of Reformed churches. As one member of the URCSA has said, “We carry this confession on behalf of all the Reformed churches. We do not think of it as ours alone.”

Confession of Belhar September 1986

1. We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

2. We believe in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

We believe

- that Christ’s work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another (Eph. 2:11-22);
- that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God’s Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain (Eph. 4:1-16);

- that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted (John 17:20-23);
- that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of

Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity (Phil. 2:1-5; 1 Cor. 12:4-31; John 13:1-17; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; Eph. 4:1-6; Eph. 3:14-20; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 1 Cor. 11:17-34; Gal. 6:2; 2 Cor. 1:3-4);

- that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; Eph. 4:7-13; Gal. 3:27-28; James 2:1-13);
- that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

- which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;
- which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;
- which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;
- which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

3. We believe

- that God has entrusted the church with the

message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ, that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Cor. 5:17-21; Matt. 5:13-16; Matt. 5:9; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21-22).

- that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world (Eph. 4:17-6:23, Rom. 6; Col. 1:9-14; Col. 2:13-19; Col. 3:1-4:6);
- that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
- that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

- which, in such a situation, sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

4. We believe

- that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
- that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the

- destitute, the poor and the wronged;
- that God calls the church to follow him in this, for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
- that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
- that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
- that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
- that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right (Deut. 32:4; Luke 2:14; John 14:27; Eph. 2:14; Isa. 1:16-17; James 1:27; James 5:1-6; Luke 1:46-55; Luke 6:20-26; Luke 7:22; Luke 16:19-31; Ps. 146; Luke 4:16-19; Rom. 6:13-18; Amos 5);
- that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
- that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore, we reject any ideology

- which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

5. We believe that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence (Eph. 4:15-16; Acts 5:29-33; 1 Peter 2:18-25; 1 Peter 3:15-18).

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

Note: This is a translation of the original Afrikaans text of the confession as it was adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. In 1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). This inclusive language text was prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It is reprinted here with permission.

Notes to Discussion Leaders

The first session

Session 1, “Introduction to the Study Guide” (page 11), suggests a structure for your first study group session. Feel free to adapt the suggestions to your group’s needs. If participants do not all know each other, make introductions. In this event, you may also wish to have nametags available.

During the group-building activities, leaders should be first to share in order to model a response and give participants time to reflect on their own answers.

Before the “Meet the Guide” exercise, distribute the study guide to participants. Walk participants through “Using This Study Guide,” emphasizing the pre-session exercises.

Encourage participants to read the Belhar Confession (pp. 3-5), during the coming week.

At the end of the session, you may wish to request volunteers who will take responsibility for music and/or refreshments. If you wish to make assignments with respect to the pre-session exercises, review the exercises with the group and request volunteers. If people are not ready to commit to particular assignments, that’s okay. Simply emphasize again the importance of each participant engaging in some way with the pre-session material. Truly, participants will get out of the material what they put into it!

You may wish to close the session with a familiar hymn expressing unity in Christ or calling on God’s Spirit for illumination and guidance.

Before each session, read through the session material and choose which exercises to go through with your group. (You can always modify this plan according to time constraints if something goes faster or slower than expected.) This will also help you discover if you need to provide extra items for specific activities.

Handling disagreement

This study of the Belhar Confession has been prepared by the Reformed Church in America’s Commission on Christian Unity, based on its ongoing series of encounters with theologians from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. It addresses the key themes of the Belhar in relation to contemporary issues of economics, justice, and race.

We know from our life together as a church that these issues can be difficult ones for conversation, full of emotion, passion, and differing perspectives. Your task will be to create a climate in which all members of your group can be heard, a climate that will encourage active discussion of the issues, even disagreement, without demeaning persons. How is that best done?

1. Create a safe environment for conversation by encouraging questions.
2. Allow participants to wrestle with the statements in the Belhar; fight the temptation to seek or provide neat, tidy answers.
3. Encourage participants to engage seriously with the biblical texts offered in support of the Belhar’s assertions; they are the basis for the Belhar’s authority.
4. Make sure that those who hold opposing viewpoints are neither ignored nor intimidated.
5. Watch for people in the group who are silent; some people need a gentle invitation to participate.
6. Don’t be afraid of vigorous dialogue. Important issues arouse strong emotions. Be open to those emotions; encourage people to express them in ways that build community and foster deeper understanding.

Suggestion: At the end of each session, invite participants to describe what they are feeling. You will likely discover that participants approach issues from different places and with different understandings of the biblical texts. That's positive evidence of Reformed Christians seeking to make the Belhar their own!

Additional suggestions

Delegate. The study guide includes world songs and world recipes for refreshments; you may wish to delegate leadership for those to others in the group.

Take liberties. The elements of each session are intended as a guide, not as a rigid structure. Do not feel obliged to discuss every question. They are there to help the group engage with the material presented and with the confession itself. Mold the sessions to your group's backgrounds, needs, and interests.

Stay on topic. You may find yourselves wanting to leap to related issues or to related Belhar topics. Resist the urge; what isn't addressed in one session will likely be addressed later. Don't allow sessions to be derailed from the focus.

Plan ahead. You might consider assigning pre-session exercises to specific group members in order to ensure a variety of explorations.

Encourage preparation. Pre-session preparation by group members will be important to the success of the study. Encourage participants to spend at least half an hour during the week reflecting on the biblical text for that session, and at least half an hour more on one or more of the pre-session exercises.

Be sensitive. Ask periodically how people are feeling. If there is significant uneasiness, step back from the material and explore those feelings. Allow participants to evaluate each session as they go, and use those reflections in planning and leading later sessions.

Pray. As group leader, pray daily for the members of your group, for your group as a whole, and for other groups throughout the denomination engaged in this study. Make it a practice to pray at the beginning and end of every study group session. Encourage participants to pray about what they are learning and to pray for one another.

Remember: What we say is very important; so is how we say it. We must continue to talk with each other and, through the Scriptures, to seek God's guidance and grace.

Using This Study Guide



Focus



Pre-session



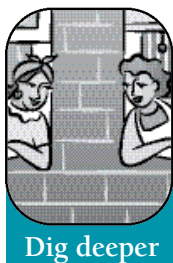
Introduction



Song



In-session



Dig deeper

There are nine sessions in the study guide. In a group setting, which is where this study guide will be most useful, you will need a minimum of nine gatherings to cover this material. However, each session could provide material for two to four weeks, depending on how deeply the group wishes to explore the issues. Here is an outline of session structure and content for Sessions 2 through 9. (As an introductory session, Session 1 has a different format.)

Focus: State the main point of the session.

Pre-session exercises

- **Scripture reading:** in keeping with the Reformed principle of *sola scriptura* (scripture alone as our ultimate authority), everyone is asked to read and reflect on the biblical text. It is suggested that approximately half an hour be set aside each week for this.
- **Other readings (see Appendix A):** These readings come from a variety of sources. Each group member is asked to read one selection or more before each session.
- **Choose one:** each group member is asked to engage with at least one question or activity in preparation for the group session.

Introduction: Briefly explain the content and direction of the session.

Song: (optional) Sing a song from the world church to reinforce the session focus and enhance appreciation for Christians from other cultures. Songs are found in Appendix B.

In-session exercises

- **Reflect:** Group members share the work they have done in preparation for the session.
- **Connect to the Belhar:** Explore the Belhar Confession from the standpoint of the session's focus.
- **Respond:** "Bring the Belhar Confession home"—explore its relevance to your own contexts and begin to make the choices and changes that will allow the Belhar to "do its work in us."
- **Further options:** Choose from alternative or additional questions and activities.

Prayer (and sometimes an activity) closes the session.

Dig deeper: (optional) There are options for those who wish to pursue the issues raised in the session in greater depth.

Ground Rules for Constructive Communication

Here are ground rules that contribute to constructive communication:

1. Speak for yourself, not for others. Use “I” statements.
2. Do not interrupt when others are speaking.
3. Listen carefully to others’ viewpoints; listen to learn and to understand, not to refute.
4. Paraphrase what you heard another say before responding to it.
5. Don’t label people. Don’t single out any individual as representing a group or point of view.
6. Address differences and challenge behaviors and ideas. Do not question another’s motives, intentions, character, or worth.
7. Don’t lay blame on yourself or others.
8. Don’t personalize issues.
9. Assume that others in the group are of equally good faith and conviction.
10. Avoid unsubstantiated comments such as “People are saying.” Instead, offer specific facts or names to support your views.
11. When you disagree with someone else’s point of view, go on to say what you believe and why.
12. Look for points of agreement.
13. The purpose of dialogue is to be open to the possibility of developing a new position together and hold on to the hope inherent in continuing the conversation.
14. After you leave, do not identify persons when discussing what is said in the group.

(Sources: *Managing Church Conflict*, by Hugh F. Halverstadt, and “Guidelines for Dialogue with Civility,” from the Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism.)

If your group chooses to use these ground rules, be ready as leaders and as group members to enforce them.

Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of love.
—Frederick Buechner

Belhar Confession

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message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ, that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Cor. 5:17-21; Matt. 5:13-16; Matt. 5:9; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21-22).

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- that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
- that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

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- that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
- that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
- that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right (Deut. 32:4; Luke 2:14; John 14:27; Eph. 2:14; Isa. 1:16-17; James 1:27; James 5:1-6; Luke 1:46-55; Luke 6:20-26; Luke 7:22; Luke 16:19-31; Ps. 146; Luke 4:16-19; Rom. 6:13-18; Amos 5);
- that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
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Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

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Session 1

Introduction to the Study Guide



Focus: Introduce the Belhar Confession study guide to the group.

Gather for welcome and introductions. Open with prayer.

Group-building activity: Spend time exploring the following questions.

- Why is each of you here?
- What are your hopes and expectations for this study?

Optional activity: Pool your knowledge. On a white board or chart paper, record what your group knows about one or more of the following:

- apartheid
- Belhar Confession
- racism

“Meet the Guide”: When everyone has a study guide, together look at “Using This Study Guide” on page 9.

Read the introduction on page 1 together. Answer the following questions.

- What are Standards (or Forms) of Unity? (See definition in Appendix D, p. 91.) What do you know about the three creeds that form this theological basis?
- What are the three main issues/themes addressed by the Belhar Confession? Which theme most interests you personally? Why?
- How do you respond to the statement that the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa has offered the Belhar Confession as a gift to the worldwide family of Reformed churches?
- What did you learn from the introduction that most surprised or intrigued you?
- How do you respond to the assertion that radical biblical obedience is the key to meaningful, significant church growth? What does radical biblical obedience mean to you?

Read “Ground Rules for Constructive Communication” on page 10 together. Reflect silently on the rules for a few minutes. Which rules would you choose as your “top three”? Which rules might you personally have the most difficulty observing?

Closing: Spend a few minutes in prayer (led either by the leader or by participants), asking God’s Spirit to guide and protect your group as you seek to explore difficult issues together with love and respect.

In preparation for the next session, review the pre-session exercises for Session 2.

Session 2

All Creation Groans: The Universality of Exclusion and Discrimination



Focus: The Belhar Confession was created in the context of apartheid, but racism and other forms of exclusion are universal.

Human beings have an extraordinary ability, and seemingly, even a desire to break down the world into “them” and “us.” We do not know who “we” are, it seems, until we know who “they” are. And once we have identified “them,” it is open to us to disclaim responsibility for their welfare, their rights or, in extreme cases, their very existence.

Each of us inhabits a personal commonwealth, often more than one. Membership in each commonwealth defines for us those with whom we share a common dignity, common rights and common obligations. At the root of exclusion in all its forms lies the drawing of boundaries around that commonwealth for reasons of personal comfort, economic advantage or political power.

—“Exclusion, Inclusion and Participation,” by David Lawrence;
included in study texts for the 24th General Council of the
World Alliance of Reformed Churches: www.warc.ch



Pre-session exercises

Scripture reading: John 4:1-30 (Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman)

Read the passage through once, and then again, slowly. On second reading, pause throughout to visualize in your mind the events of the story. Then reflect:

- What things about the Samaritan woman might have caused her to be excluded in her world?
- What do the woman's responses to Jesus tell you about her?
- What do the woman's responses to Jesus tell you about Jesus?

In your imagination, finish the story. How do you think the woman's life changed after her encounter with Jesus?

Further exploration: Imagine Jesus in conversation with someone you know or have read about who is excluded. What living water might Jesus offer? What is the person's response, and how could things change for that person? Record your thoughts to share with your group.

Readings: In preparation for Session 2, please read one or more of the selections in the appendix under “Session 2 Readings” (p. 55).

Choose from these options in preparation for Session 2.

1. List as many forms of exclusion as you can think of. Divide a piece of paper into two columns. Label the first column “same,” and list things that the various examples of exclusion have in common. Label the second column “different.” What are some of the ways the examples differ from one another?
2. Pay particular attention this week to how people from various excluded groups, particularly minority racial groups, are portrayed in the media. Are there distortions, imbalances, or injustices?
3. Talk to someone from a group often excluded or discriminated against in our culture (a person of color, an immigrant, etc.). What have their experiences been? How have those experiences made them feel? What do they wish was different?
4. Think about the animal world. What similarities can you find between animal and human behavior toward creatures who are different? How are humans different from animals in behavior and in potential?
5. Find or create a photo or a song or a work of art that expresses how you feel after reading the stories in the appendix of exclusion and discrimination.



Introduction

Introduction: As the quote on page thirteen suggests, exclusion of humans by other humans is universal across cultures and down through history. It is an ever-present expression of the sinful human heart. Though the Belhar Confession arose in response to exclusion in a particular cultural and historical context, it speaks God’s truth to all forms of exclusion, and is thus universal in application.

In this session we will begin to explore what exclusion “looks like”—some of the forms it takes. Before we can be receptive to God’s truth, we must perceive the need for that truth in our own context and our own lives.



Songs:

“Perdon, Señor”/“Forgive Us, Lord”
“Nkosi! Nkosi!”/“Lord, Have Mercy”
“Psalm 51”

(Songs are found in Appendix B.)



In-session

In-session exercises

Reflect: Break into groups of two or three and share the results of your pre-session exercises. (Take two minutes per person.) You may wish to use the following questions to guide you.

- Which of this session’s readings or exercises particularly impacted you? Why?
- What did you learn from the readings and presentations?
- What questions have arisen in your mind as a result of what you’ve experienced?
- What do you want to think or learn more about in the coming weeks?

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

Connect: On chart paper, white board, etc., make two columns. Title one column “hopes” and the other “fears,” then share as a group, writing down the responses to these questions:

- What do you hope to gain from the study of the Belhar Confession?
- What fears, doubts, or hesitations do you have as you begin this study?

Respond to what you’ve learned with one or more of the following exercises:

1. Share:
 - What is your earliest memory of an incident of prejudice or exclusion? How did it make you feel?
 - Have you ever been personally excluded by other people? How did it make you feel?
 - How do you think a lifetime of exclusion and prejudice would affect a person?
2. What color(s) best expresses your feelings about what you’ve learned this session?
Pass around a basket containing crayons of various colors and let everyone choose a crayon or crayons. Then share and explain your choices.

Further options: Spend time trying out some of the songs included in this study guide. What is the value of using songs from other cultures in worship? Discuss how these songs might be included in your congregation’s worship.

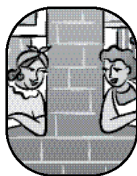
Prayer: *Read the following prayer together, or have one person to read it slowly, pausing between sentences. Afterward, spend some time in silent prayer or brief spoken prayers.*

Lord, as you have taught us, we bow down before you in all humility, gentleness and patience, supporting each other with love and trying to keep the unity of the spirit by the bonds of peace, that we may become “one body and one spirit,” according to our common calling and vocation.

With one voice, repenting of our divisions, we commit ourselves to working together for reconciliation, peace, and justice, and we stand together in imploring you: help us to live as your disciples, overcoming selfishness and arrogance, hatred and violence; give us the strength to forgive. Inspire our witness in the world, that we might foster a culture of dialogue, and be bearers of the hope which your gospel has implanted in us.

Make us instruments of your peace, so that our homes and communities, our parishes, churches, and nations might resonate more fully with the peace you have long desired to bestow upon us. Amen.

—From the World Council of Churches’ liturgies for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 2004; based on Syriac liturgy used by Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches; www.wcc-coe.org.



Digging deeper: Further explore (through books, magazines, film, and the Internet) one of the forms of exclusion you read about, or another form of exclusion that concerns you. (See suggested website below.) What are possible reasons for the discrimination? What are results of the discrimination?

The Understanding Prejudice website contains helpful information for educators and others on raising awareness of prejudice, including lists of organizations working against various forms of prejudice; print and multimedia resource lists; a directory of experts, exercises, and demonstrations; teaching suggestions; web links, etc. Go to www.understandingprejudice.org.

Exclusion does not end with the recognition that it is undesirable. Exclusion ends when the root causes are removed. Drawing the boundaries more widely involves more than a decision, it involves the practical action necessary to make inclusion a reality.

—“Exclusion, Inclusion and Participation,” by David Lawrence;
included in study texts for the 24th General Council of the
World Alliance of Reformed Churches: www.warc.ch.

To prepare for the next session, please go through the pre-session exercises for Session 3.

Session 3

One God, One Church: The Belhar Confession As an Affirmation of Unity



Focus: The Belhar Confession is first and foremost an affirmation of Christian unity.

In the book of Deuteronomy we find that God's people were to be different, setting no boundaries to their care because they themselves knew what it was like to be excluded: "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, a great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:17-19).

—"Exclusion, Inclusion and Participation," by David Lawrence;
included in study texts for the 24th General Council of the
World Alliance of Reformed Churches: www.warc.ch



Pre-session exercises:

Scripture reading: John 17:6-26 (Christ's high-priestly prayer)

Read the scripture passage for this week using *lectio divina* (pronounced LEX-ee-oh dih-VEE-nuh), which is Latin for "divine or sacred reading." *Lectio divina* is a pattern for reading scripture prayerfully, or praying with scripture. The pattern is described below. Focus particularly on Jesus' prayer for the unity of the believers.

Lectio Divina

Read—Slowly read a brief passage of scripture. Read it as though you are hearing it read to you. Read it silently and aloud. Experiment by reading it with different emphases and inflections.

Meditate—Mull over the text; internalize the words. Listen for the phrases that stand out for you as you read the passage. Turn them over in your mind. Reflect on why these words catch your attention, what they bring to mind, and what they mean for you today. Jot down the meaningful words, noting associations, reactions, feelings, or challenges.

Pray—Turn your meditation from dialogue with yourself to dialogue with God, which is prayer. Share with God in all honesty your reflections, questions, or feelings. Offer your thanksgiving, confession, petitions, or intercessions as they arise within during your dialogue with God. Listen for God's response and inner nudging.

Contemplate—Rest your mental activity and trust yourself completely to God's love and care. Relax in God's presence. Pick a phrase from the text to which you can return again and again as you keep your attention on God. Allow this prayer-phrase to sustain your presence to God throughout the day. After a few minutes of "practicing the presence of God" in this way, you might close with the Lord's Prayer, a song, or a final moment of grateful silence.

Capture your meditation, prayer, and the new insights and possibilities God gave you in writing. Consider one token—one small act—you can offer today in grateful response to God's life-giving word to you during this special time with scripture.

—*Companions in Christ, a Small-Group Experience in Spiritual Formation*,
Gerrit Scott Dawson, Adele Gonzalez, E. Glenn Hinson, Rueben P. Job,
Marjorie P. Thompson, Wendy M. Wright (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2001)

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

Other readings: In preparation for your study session, please reread the Belhar Confession (at the front of the study guide) in its entirety. We recommend you read it several times during the week to become thoroughly familiar with its language and content.

Choose one of the options below in preparation for the upcoming session.

1. Write down five phrases or sentences from the Belhar Confession that particularly impacted you.
2. Outline the structure of the Belhar Confession, including main points and sub-points. Write your outline on chart paper or poster board to share with your group.
3. Choose one or more favorite sections of the Belhar Confession and study the biblical texts listed. Reflect on how they support or augment the Belhar's assertions.
4. Write a song or poem based on phrases from the Belhar Confession.
5. Choose a specific portion of the Belhar Confession and rewrite it in your own words. You may wish to make specific reference to a situation in your own context.
6. What situations in your world cry out for the prophetic challenge and hope contained in the Belhar? Record what you see and hear this week in the media or closer to home in your own church, family, workplace, etc. Consider making a brief audio-visual presentation or a collage of newspaper and magazine articles.
7. Draw a picture or design a graphic that illustrates the connection between a "gathering, protecting, and caring" God and the human pursuit of unity, reconciliation, and justice.
8. One of the blessings of Christian unity is the rich gifts we receive from other Christians. Look for something from a racial group different from your own that has enriched your life, particularly as a Christian. It might be a song, a work of art, clothing, food, a household item, a dance, a tool, a story, etc. Bring it to the next session to share with the group



Introduction: In this session we explore the text of the Belhar Confession, noting that the central theme of the confession is the unity of all believers in Christ.



Song:

"¡Miren que Bueno!"/"Behold, How Pleasant"—Psalm 133
(Song is found in Appendix B.)



In-session exercises

Reflect: Share your explorations and creations from the pre-session exercises. What did you learn from your observations, reflections, and creative engagements with the Belhar Confession over the past week? What questions did your explorations raise? What do you want to explore further?

Connect: Reread paragraph 2 of the Belhar. The writers of the Belhar refer to unity as a gift. What does the word “gift” mean to you? Explore the meaning of this together using one of the following exercises:

- On chart paper, white board, etc., list all the connotations or meanings the word “gift” has for your group. Which of these meanings relate to unity as a gift from God? Do the same thing for the word “obligation.”
- Break into groups of two or three. Invite each group to create a pantomime that depicts the gift of unity being offered by God and accepted or rejected by humans, and the consequences of each action. Share your depictions with the entire group.

Respond to what you’ve learned with one or more of the following exercises:

1. The Belhar states that unity is a reality “which the people of God must be continually built up to attain.” The scripture reference is Ephesians 4:11-13. Read these verses together. Then, on chart paper, white board, etc., list the various leadership roles and groups in your congregation (pastor, Sunday school teacher, choir director, evangelism committee, consistory, etc.). Discuss ways each of these leaders could help your congregation grow toward greater unity with other Christians in your community, especially with congregations that have a different racial composition than yours. Be as specific as possible. For each idea shared, place a puzzle piece from a simple children’s puzzle on a flat surface. When all the pieces have been set down, distribute them and assemble the puzzle as a group. Afterward, discuss how the process of putting the puzzle together is like working for unity.

(Suggestions: Have someone record your group’s ideas to share with your pastor, consistory, etc. If you don’t have a puzzle, make your own, or do the exercise without it.)

2. Discuss why Christians have had such immense difficulty honoring the “last request” of our beloved older brother and head, Jesus Christ, as stated in John 17:20-23. On a white board, chart paper, etc. list as many impediments to unity as you can think of as a group. Then list specific examples of disunity among Christians. To stimulate thinking, you may want to create your lists under headings such as: 1) our world, 2) our nation, 3) our community, 4) our church.
3. Share personal struggles by completing the following statement: “It’s hardest for me to love Christians who (or when)…”

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

Further options:

As a group, add your own verses to the song “Behold, How Pleasant.” What is it like for you when God’s people live together in unity?

Prayers:

Read the following prayer (John 17:20-23, 26, paraphrased) slowly, pausing between phrases.

O God, who calls us all, we pray for all who follow Jesus. May we all be one, as the Father and the Son are one. May Christ’s followers be one with each other and with God, so that the world may believe in Jesus. May Jesus’ glory be seen in our oneness, as God’s glory is seen in Jesus’ glory, as God’s love is known in Jesus’ love. May God’s name be known in the words, actions, and love of all in whom Jesus lives, in all who follow Jesus. Amen.

Follow this prayer with your own sentence prayers asking forgiveness for dissension and lack of love toward other Christians.

Close with this prayer: “May the almighty Son of God, Jesus Christ, who prayed in deepest anguish to his eternal Father that we in him might be one, mercifully unite us all” (Phillip Melanchthon).

Close the session, if you wish, by singing “Behold, How Pleasant,” “Bind Us Together,” “Blest Be the Tie That Binds,” “We Are One in Christ Jesus,” or another song that speaks of unity in Christ.

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches links more than 75 million Reformed Christians in more than one hundred countries around the world.

Region	Member Churches	Countries
Africa	58	31
Asia	57	14
Caribbean	8	6
Europe	40	27
Latin America	25	13
Middle East	4	2
North America	12	2
Pacific Islands	14	12
Total	218	107

What does this information tell you about the diversity of the Reformed family? What surprises you? What challenges you? What gives you hope?

For more information go to www.warc.ch.



Digging deeper

1. Is there one phrase in the Belhar Confession that you would like to post in your home, your workplace, or your church? If you are gifted in calligraphy, needlepoint, wood-burning, decoupage, banner-making, etc., why not do so? Consider offering your gift as a service to the others in your group as well, rendering their favorite Belhar excerpts creatively. Or create a “Belhar banner” for use in your church.
2. The Belhar Confession asserts that unity is both a gift and an obligation. Reflect on the meaning of the words “gift” and “obligation.” In what way might unity be a gift? In what way is it an obligation?

The Belhar Confession is the confession of a particular denomination, but it has important ecumenical significance and potential...It has, in fact, opened up fresh possibilities for the emergence not only of a united Reformed church but also of an ecumenical confessing church that transcends traditional confessional boundaries.

—*Liberating Reformed Theology*, John de Gruchy
(Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001)

Ubuntu: an African word meaning “I am who I am because of who we all are.”

To prepare for the next session, please go through the pre-session exercises for Session 4.

Session 4

The Belhar Speaks to Us: RCA Experiences of Prejudice and Exclusion



Focus: The Belhar Confession helps us explore ways in which exclusion and disunity are present among us.

Every man has reminiscences which he would not tell to everyone but only his friends. He has other matters in his mind which he would not reveal even to his friends, but only to himself, and that in secret. But there are other things which a man is afraid to tell even to himself, and every decent man has a number of such things stored away in his mind.

—Fyodor Dostoyevsky



Pre-session exercises:

Scripture reading: John 10:14-18, 1 John 3:16-18

Enter imaginatively into the first scripture passage, John 10:14-18. Read the text through slowly, and then read it again, pausing throughout to visualize what is being said.

In your mind, watch Jesus as the good shepherd. Who are the sheep in the pen? Try to visualize the rich diversity of Jesus' flock. How does Jesus care for them? How do they respond?

Now shift your gaze outside the pen. In your context, who are the sheep outside the pen? What do they look like? What are their circumstances? How does Jesus call them—what does he say? How do they respond?

With which sheep do you identify—the sheep inside or outside the pen? If you are inside the pen, visualize new sheep entering the pen with Jesus. What call do you hear from Jesus? How do you respond? If you are outside the pen, visualize yourself entering the pen with Jesus. What is your reception from the other sheep? How does it make you feel? How does the presence of Jesus make a difference? What would it take for all of you to be one flock, with one shepherd?

(Optional) Read John 10:11-13. Imagine yourself as the hired hand. In your context, who are the wolves? How do you respond? Do you run, or do you stand with Jesus to fight, willing to lay down your life for the sheep? Imagine yourself in conversation with Jesus about your response.

Conclude by reading the second passage, 1 John 3:16-18. What call do you hear? How will you respond?

Other readings:

- Reread paragraph 2 of the Belhar Confession.
- Choose one of the Session 4 pre-session readings in Appendix A.

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

Choose one of the options below in preparation for the upcoming session:

1. Find words in the Belhar Confession that address the situations described in the readings—words that, if heeded, could bring healing and unity.
2. Based on your life experiences and the readings so far, create a “top five” list of reasons why people exclude others. Which of these reasons have ever applied to you or your church? Now make a list of five groups of people most commonly excluded or discriminated against in our society. What connections can you make between your two lists? Finally, make a “top five” list of reasons why the excluded groups should be included. Be as specific as possible in your reasons for including these people. What lessons and gifts do they have to offer that we miss out on by excluding them?
3. Depict in some visual way (a drawing, a diagram, a painting, photographs, or modeling clay, for example) one or more of the following concepts: exclusion, disunity, inclusion, unity, the relationship between exclusion and disunity, the relationship between inclusion and unity.



Introduction: In this session we hear the stories of RCA people and look at exclusion close to home.



“Somos Uno en Cristo”/“We Are One in Christ Jesus”
(Music is found in Appendix B.)

Individual Racism vs. Institutional Racism

A distinction between the two forms of racism can be made by thinking about housing. If an African-American or Latino family moved into a predominantly white neighborhood and someone threw rocks at their house and told them to go live somewhere else, that would be an example of individual racism. But when an African-American person who looks at housing is routinely steered into neighborhoods with high proportions of minorities or has trouble getting a mortgage, that is institutional racism.

—“Bringing Racism to Light for a Decade Freed from Racism,” a report prepared by the Reformed Church in America’s Commission on Christian Action. Read the full report at www.rca.org.



In-session exercises

Reflect: Break into groups of two or three and share what you have learned and produced through the pre-session exercises. Limit sharing to two minutes per person.

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

Connect: Read the following paraphrase of paragraph 2 of the Belhar Confession slowly and thoughtfully in unison, or with each member of the group taking a turn. Read as expressively as possible. Then read the selection a second time, substituting the name of your church for “the church.” After the second reading, allow several minutes of silence, in which group members can reflect on the meaning and significance of the words.

We believe in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

- Christ’s work of reconciliation is made visible in the church, the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another.
- Unity is both a gift and an obligation for the church. This means that
 - i. through the working of God’s Spirit, unity in the church is a binding force;
 - ii. at the same time, the church must earnestly pursue and seek unity;
 - iii. the people of God must be continually built up to attain unity.
- The unity of the church must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity, and hatred between people and groups is sin—sin which Christ has already conquered!
- Anything which threatens our unity has no place in the church, and we must resist it.
- We must display our unity as the people of God in a multiplicity of ways.
- The reconciling work of Christ allows the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, languages, and cultures present in the church to be opportunities for mutual service and enrichment.
- True faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership in the church.
- It is wrong to allow natural human diversity or sinful human distinctions to break the unity of the church, all the more so if a separate church is formed.
- It is wrong to say the church has unity when, in fact, it doesn’t, and people have given up hope of reconciliation.
- It is wrong to base membership in the church on birth or any other human or social factor, either explicitly or implicitly.
- It is sin for the church to refuse earnestly to pursue unity.

After several minutes of silent reflection on the paraphrase, reflect together on one of the following questions.

1. What things most threaten the unity and witness of your congregation? (Group members may write down their responses to this question, then post them on a wall or bulletin board in the room for others to view without comment.)
2. Are there conditions for membership or inclusion in your church, written or unwritten, spoken or unspoken, that hinder your unity with other Christians and your witness in your community?
3. Which of the words of the Belhar Confession paraphrase do you feel called to accept as God’s challenge?
4. Which of the words of the Belhar Confession paraphrase do you wish to claim as God’s promise?

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

Respond to what you've learned as you read the following skit aloud:

Clint: Hi, Joe and Barb! Missed you at the Neighborhood Association meeting last night.
Joe: Yeah, I had a church council meeting, and Barb was tutoring at the Literacy Center.
Clint: The Literacy Center, eh? I'm guessing most of your students are green people, right? I've heard so much about green people just not making the grade academically. You know, so many single-parent families, drugs, teen pregnancies, dropping out of school, the whole ball of wax.
Barb: Actually, most of my students are pink people, new immigrants. The only green people at the center are tutors. Oh, and the director.
Joe: Speaking of green people, I hear Roy down the street is selling his property to a green family.
Clint: Well, they put in the highest bid, but...
Joe: I am so ticked off! We all know what happens to property values when green people start moving into a neighborhood. I lost my pension when my company went under, and our house is the only significant investment we've got.
Barb: I'm not prejudiced—I get along great with green people. But we just can't afford to lose our only real asset. I'm mad about this too.
Joe: Yeah, Roy gets out with a tidy sum, and what does he care about the rest of us?
Clint: As I was going to say, a bunch of us in the Neighborhood Association felt the same way. We're not racist, but we feel it's our responsibility to protect the neighborhood. So we offered to pay Clint the difference between the green family's bid and the next highest bid—by a real nice family from my church. Clint accepted.
Barb: Thank goodness! You feel bad for the green family, but there are some real nice green neighborhoods in this city. I really think they'd be happier there. It's just easier to get along with people who are more like you.
Clint: I agree. Well, see you guys around!
Joe: See you, Clint.

- Discuss: What are Clint, Joe, and Barb afraid of? What motivates their discriminatory behavior? How might they have behaved differently (more justly) in this situation? In what ways does the situation in the skit resonate with your personal experience?
- Imagine yourselves as the green people. What were your hopes and dreams for your new neighborhood? What did you feel when you learned of the action taken against you? As Christians, how will you respond?

Further options:

- Create a skit portraying the situation from the point of view of the green people. (If your group is large, you may wish to break into smaller groups for this exercise, allowing time for groups to share their skits afterward.)
- Discuss where you see stereotyping, prejudice, and racism portrayed in the skit. (See definitions at the end of the materials for this session.)
- Take ten or fifteen minutes to complete the “Welcoming Diversity” inventory (Appendix E) to see how your church measures up in the area of multicultural awareness and inclusion. Afterward discuss what you have learned from the inventory. What areas does your church need to work on? (Make a “top five” list of areas for improvement.) How could this inventory be used to help your church become more welcoming of diversity?

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

Prayers:

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord: that, as there is but one Body, and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all; so we may henceforth be all of one heart, and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—from *Book of Common Prayer*, Accession Service, 1715.

Lord Jesus, we pray for the church which is one in the greatness of your love, but divided in the littleness of our own. May we be less occupied with the things that divide us, and more with the things we hold in common. Amen.

—*Celebrating Community* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993).

When someone asks me what it feels like to be discriminated against, I have to pause and think, not just think a little, but a lot. It's a difficult question to answer because each act of discrimination, even perceived discrimination, elicits different thoughts and emotions. Some times it is anger, other times it's confusion, and other times it's an absence of both thinking and feeling—a numbing shock that is to some degree a coping state that my body engages when in utter disbelief. Still other times it's a complex combination of many thoughts and emotions that leaves me feeling awkwardly alone. Though each incident fuels unique initial responses, the resulting and overwhelming feeling I am left with is that I am very tired.

—Steve Long-Nguyen Robbins

To read Steve Robbins's full reflection on the affects of racism, see p. 57.



Digging deeper

1. How do the following equations relate to the problem of discrimination/exclusion?
Same = Safe
Different = Dangerous
What role does fear play in discrimination and exclusion?
2. Go online to the Multicultural Pavilion (<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural>) and take the multicultural awareness quiz. Check out other resources and information on increasing multicultural awareness at <http://www.mhhe.com/multicultural>.
3. Go to www.implicit.harvard.edu and take the Race Implicit Assumption Test (RIAT). The RIAT tests assess your unconscious prejudices in a number of areas by recording the speed with which you are able to make certain associations. What do you learn about yourself?

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

What can we do about personal prejudices?

If you are a white person who would like to treat black people as equals in every way—who would like to have a set of associations with blacks that are as positive as those that you have with whites—it requires more than a simple commitment to equality. It requires that you change your life so that you are exposed to minorities on a regular basis and become comfortable with them and familiar with the best of their culture, so that when you want to meet, hire, date, or talk with a member of a minority, you aren't betrayed by your hesitation and discomfort.

—*Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*, Malcolm Gladwell
(New York: Little Brown and Company, 2005, p. 97)

One solution is to seek experiences that could undo or reverse the patterns of experience that could have created the unwanted preference. But this is not always easy to do. A more practical alternative may be to remain alert to the existence of the undesired preference, recognizing that it may intrude in unwanted fashion into your judgments and actions. Additionally, you may decide to embark on consciously planned actions that can compensate for known unconscious preferences and beliefs.

—Harvard University's Project Implicit implicit association test
(<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/canada/faqs.html>)

Definitions

Stereotype: Generalization about a group of people

Example: "Green people gravitate toward jobs in the service sector."

Implicit stereotype: A stereotype that is powerful enough to operate without conscious control. An implicit stereotype is embedded in this oft-told riddle: A man and his daughter are in a car accident. The father dies, and the daughter is rushed to the hospital. The surgeon is called in. After looking at the patient the doctor exclaims, "I can't operate on this girl—she's my daughter!" If the girl's father died, how could this be?*

Prejudice: Stereotype plus judgment

Example: "Green people have no work ethic!"

Discrimination: Prejudice plus action

Example: "I refuse to hire a green person—I want people who will work!"

Racism: Color prejudice plus institutional power

Example: 32 percent of Acme Extrusion employees are green, but only 2 percent of Acme Extrusion managers are green.

Internalized racist oppression: Internalization of negative stereotypes about one's race.

Example: A black person who believes black people are ugly, stupid, and immoral suffers from internalized racist oppression.

*The surgeon was the girl's mother.

To prepare for the next session, please go through the pre-session exercises for Session 5.

Session 5

The Belhar Speaks of Justice



Focus: The Belhar Confession speaks of the church's responsibility toward those who suffer injustice.

Faithfully following Jesus' way in respect of one ethical issue (e.g. "apartheid") opens our eyes for many other unresolved issues (e.g. violence, power relations in politics, economics, families, poverty, marginalization of the "other").

—Christo Lombard, member-in-residence at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey



Pre-session exercises:

Scripture reading: Luke 4:14-30

Read the scripture through slowly. Then read the passage a second time, using imaginative reading, pausing throughout to picture in your mind the events as they unfold.

- Fix your eyes on Jesus. Listen as he reads from the prophet Isaiah. What impresses you about Jesus? What do you sense is the source of his power? What draws you to him? Does anything about him make you nervous or apprehensive?
- Now read the passage again, this time bringing Jesus into your own context. Who are the people about whom Isaiah speaks—the poor, the prisoners, the blind, the oppressed—in your world? Are any of them in your congregation?
- Picture them in your mind as they enter the place where Jesus is about to speak to you and your congregation. Watch them find seats. How do the people in your congregation respond? Are some offended or made uncomfortable by the presence of these "Isaiah people"?
- How do *you* respond as they enter? Listen again as Jesus reads the Isaiah passage, and observe the various reactions of those gathered. What rebuke do you hear from Jesus? What challenge? What encouragement and hope?
- What happens when Jesus has finished speaking? Imagine how this story would end in your congregation.

Other readings: Reread paragraph 4 of the Belhar Confession, or choose one or more of the pre-session readings for Session 5 in Appendix A.

Choose one of the options below in preparation for the upcoming session:

1. Compare the language of paragraph 4 in the Belhar Confession with the words of Isaiah. Write down phrases that are similar. Read the biblical references listed in paragraph 4. How do the biblical texts support or augment the assertions of the Belhar?
2. Do a print media search. Clip magazine and newspaper articles and photos reporting unjust situations in your community and your world. Try to include as many types of injustice as you can (economic, social, personal, racial, educational, employment,

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gender, political, medical, housing, ecclesiastical, etc.). Note the effects of these injustices in the lives of those directly affected and in the wider community. How do those who are unjustly treated respond? What connection do you see between injustice and disunity?

3. Identify a justice issue in your community that concerns you. Research local groups that are trying to address the issue, talking to people involved in the groups if at all possible. How are the groups addressing the issue? In what ways could you help? If you are already involved in a justice group, how has your involvement changed you? What results have you seen? What have been your joys and frustrations? How could others become involved?
4. If you like statistics, research statistics related to poverty and injustice, locally and globally.
5. Look for a true story—preferably from your community—about a person (or persons) whose life has been impacted by injustice, especially racial or economic injustice. Or look for a story about people whose lives have been changed for the better through the efforts of a justice group. Share the story with your study group. How did the story make you feel? In what way, large or small, has the story changed you?



Introduction

Introduction: Injustice has many faces. In this session we explore God's call to address issues of justice wherever they arise, and how the Belhar Confession helps us to do so.



Song:

“Canto de Esperanze”/“Song of Hope”
(Music is found in Appendix B.)



In-session

In-session exercises

Reflect: Break into groups of two or three and share what you have learned and produced through the pre-session exercises. Limit sharing to two minutes per person.

Connect: The Belhar asserts that that “God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged” (paragraph 4). Discuss one or more of the following:

- As someone from your group slowly reads those words, imagine how a person who is destitute, poor, and wronged might respond to that statement. As the words are read a second time, imagine how the wealthy and privileged might respond.
- From a global perspective, to which group do you belong—the destitute, poor, and wronged, or the wealthy and privileged—or neither? Explain your answer.
- What are your feelings personally about the Belhar's assertion?
- Would taking this statement seriously change the ministry priorities of your congregation? Your denomination? If so, how?

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Respond to what you've learned with one or more of the following exercises:

1. The Jewish prophetic tradition saw God strongly as a God of justice who was particularly concerned with the plight of the lowly. In Luke 4:16-21 we see Jesus embracing that tradition. Compare and contrast your family and culture with the family and culture in which Jesus grew up as a Jew under Roman oppression. (The Song of Mary in Luke 1:46-55 also gives some insight into what Jesus learned at his mother's knee.) How has your upbringing influenced your concern for justice and your involvement in justice work (or your lack thereof)?
2. Break into groups of two or three and reread Luke 4:14-21. Together identify one or more justice issues in your community. Brainstorm specific actions your congregation could take to be agents of Christ in fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy in your community.
3. Using the following scenarios, explore aspects of justice and the relationship between justice and unity. As one member of the group reads the following scenarios aloud, the other group members should indicate whether they think justice and/or unity are present in that situation. (They can do this by holding up cards labeled "justice" and "unity.") After all the scenarios have been read, discuss the issues raised.
 - Mother comes home from the bakery with an apple pie. She gives Ronnie and Bonnie equal-sized pieces.
What is the relationship between fair distribution of goods, justice, and unity?
 - Mother comes home from the bakery with an apple pie. Because Ronnie, who is in the living room, is her favorite, she gives him a large piece, and she gives Bonnie, who is upstairs in her bedroom, a smaller piece.
Can unequal distribution of goods be acceptable if the shorted party is unaware of the inequality? Can there be true unity of two parties when one party is aware of an inequality and the other is unaware?
 - Mother comes home from the bakery with an apple pie. She gives Bonnie, who has finished vacuuming her bedroom, a large piece, and she gives Ronnie, who has not vacuumed his bedroom, none.
Is it just to base distribution of goods on effort, merit, or achievement? Is it always just?
 - Mother comes home from the bakery with apple pie. She gives Bonnie, who has finished vacuuming her bedroom, a large piece, and she gives Ronnie, who has not vacuumed his bedroom, none. Ronnie informs Mother that the vacuum hose is plugged with Bonnie's dirty sock, which Ronnie has been unable to dislodge.
Is it just to base distribution of goods on achievement when there has been unequal opportunity?
 - Mother comes home from the bakery with an apple pie. She gives Bonnie a large piece, and to Ronnie she gives a very small piece. Mother explains to Ronnie that because he is diabetic, he must watch his sugar consumption.
Is it just to base distribution of goods on need? If so, what sorts of criteria could be used to determine need?
 - Bonnie comes home with an apple pie given to her by the baker, who was clearing out an end-of-day surplus. Bonnie thinks about three options: eating the whole pie herself (after all, it is her pie), giving a small piece to Ronnie and eating the rest herself, or dividing the pie in half and sharing with Ronnie.
How do things change for Ronnie and Bonnie when one of them suddenly acquires ownership? What are the obligations of the owner with respect to justice and unity? In

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which of the scenarios could justice be maintained, and with what conditions? In which scenario(s) can unity be maintained?

Further options:

- For each of the scenarios in which you didn't see justice and/or unity, discuss what would be required for their restoration.
- Use the questions raised with each scenario to address the just distribution of wealth, medical care, educational opportunities, etc. in a larger context—for example, your community or the world. Note the connections between justice and unity.

Prayer:

We beg you, Lord, to help and defend us.
Deliver the oppressed,
have compassion on the despised,
raise the fallen,
reveal yourself to the needy,
heal the sick,
bring back those who have strayed from you,
feed the hungry,
lift up the weak,
remove the prisoners' chains.
May every nation come to know that you are God alone,
that Jesus is your Son,
that we are your people, the sheep of your pasture.
—Clement, Third Bishop of Rome



Digging deeper

1. Reflect: What connections do you see between injustice (in housing, education, employment opportunities, health care, etc.), hopelessness, and violence? Can you point to examples from your own community?
2. Explore restorative justice (typing “restorative justice” into your Internet search engine will produce lots of entries). How is it different from retributive justice? Evaluate each approach to justice from the perspective of the Belhar Confession. What are the end results of each approach for the offender, for the victim, and for the wider community? (The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) has produced a study paper on restorative justice. The 2005 report of the CRC’s Committee to Study Restorative Justice is available online at www.crcna.org.)
3. The website of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches contains a wealth of resources and Reformed perspectives on social and economic justice. Explore the material on this website relating to inclusion, justice, and Christian unity by going to www.warc.ch.
4. Reflect more deeply on the points Mitri Raheb raises about “the option for

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the poor” in the excerpt from his address to General Synod 2004 (see Session 5 Readings in the Appendix). The Belhar Confession emerged in a context in which Christians—predominantly Christians of color—were addressing other people who identified themselves as Christians—white supporters of apartheid. The contemporary North American situation is considerably more diverse. Do Christians have an obligation to pursue justice for people who are not Christians? Is the obligation different than the obligation of Christians to fellow Christians? Can Christians work for justice with people who are Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, of some other faith, or of no particular faith? On what basis?

To prepare for the next session, please go through the pre-session exercises for Session 6.

Session 6

The Belhar Speaks of Reconciliation

What does the Belhar Confession say about reconciliation? Why is reconciliation impossible without restoration of justice? What besides restoration of justice must happen to restore unity? What conditions are necessary for reconciliation to occur? What are some of the impediments to racial reconciliation and unity?



Focus: The Belhar Confession calls the church to the ministry of reconciliation in our world.



Pre-session exercises:

Scripture reading: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Engage with this scripture passage using the *lectio divina* pattern described in Session 3. In 2 Corinthians 5:16, the apostle Paul says that, from now on, “we regard no one from a human point of view.” What is a human point of view? Pay close attention this week to occasions when you regard people from a human point of view. How might God’s view differ from yours? What difference does taking God’s view make in your attitudes and behavior?

Other readings: Reread paragraph 3 of the Belhar Confession, or choose one or more readings from the Session 6 selections in Appendix A.

Choose one of the options below in preparation for the upcoming session:

1. The first step in the process of racial reconciliation is recognizing the need for reconciliation. Research one or more of the following:
 - Find out what your denomination is doing to become more aware of racism within it, and to begin to deal with the issue.
 - Find out what your denomination’s ecumenical partners are doing to make themselves more aware of racism in their denominations. Here are web addresses to check:
Christian Reformed Church in North America:
<http://www.crcna.org/justice/issues/antiracism>
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: <http://www.lhra.org/programs.htm>
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): <http://www.pcusa.org/racialjustice/training.htm>
United Church of Christ: <http://www.ucc.org/justice/anti.htm>
 - What groups in your community are working to raise awareness of racism? Which offer anti-racism training or could assist your congregation in exploring racism in your community and in your church? What steps need to be taken to make it happen?

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- Identify congregations in your community with an ethnic-racial composition different from yours. Talk with a member of one of those churches about ways your two churches—and other churches in your community—might begin to work together toward racial reconciliation and unity. If you are unable to talk with someone from another church, brainstorm ways your congregation could meet and get to know a congregation different from yours. Develop a strategy for making it happen.
 - If you are a white person, talk with a person of color: How free does he feel to share his experiences and feelings with respect to racism? Where does she feel safe, and where not? What makes a place safe for honest sharing, and what makes it unsafe? How could the number of safe places be increased? If you are a person of color, reflect on these questions and share your answers with your group.
2. In his book *Reconciliation*, South African John De Gruchy says that one element of the reconciliation process is listening to the “sound of fury,” those actions of vengeance that express legitimate rage rather than pardon. That statement has particular poignancy in a world where the sounds of fury, expressed in acts of violence and terrorism, seem to be everywhere and escalating. Record examples from the media or from your own experience of actions of vengeance that, no matter how unacceptable or even loathsome, nevertheless express legitimate rage at injustice. To what extent do you believe that “justice restored” could reduce destructive acts of vengeance and open the door to reconciliation?
 3. Reflect on a situation where reconciliation is needed in your own life. Do the elements of the reconciliation process suggested by John DeGruchy (see below) point the way to healing in that situation? Pray for the strength and courage to begin the process.

Elements of the Reconciliation Process

- Create space within which the process of reconciliation can take place, a place in which victim and perpetrator can speak face to face.
- Tell the truth about the past.
- Listen to the “sound of fury,” those actions of vengeance that express legitimate rage rather than pardon.
- Recognize that victims have the right to decide about and pronounce forgiveness. This helps to restore the balance of power between perpetrator and victim.

—*Reconciliation*, John W. De Gruchy (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2002)

4. Some have suggested that the media, through the presence of a few prominent people of color (e.g. Bill Cosby, Oprah Winfrey), have contributed to an illusion of integration, a virtual integration that is not carried over into everyday life and that deceives people into believing that racial reconciliation is much farther along than it actually is. What do you think?

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Introduction: In this session we explore the Belhar's call to reconciling ministry, the need for reconciliation—especially racial reconciliation—in the church, some of the steps we might take to begin the process of reconciliation, and some of the obstacles we may encounter.



Song:

"Mayenziwe"/"Your Will Be Done"
(Music is found in Appendix B.)

We, all of creation, in fact, have been reconciled to and made new in Christ, and because of this, we have been entrusted with the gift of reconciliation—to bring and be the message of reconciliation for others. A true mark of the church, using the language of the Belgic Confession, then, is the presence of the ministry of reconciliation for others...Belhar provides an opening for us to turn and walk toward one another based on our shared reconciliation in Christ.

—Gretel Van Wieren, RCA pastor



In-session exercises

Reflect: Break into groups of two or three and share what you have learned and produced through the pre-session exercises. Limit sharing to two minutes per person.

Connect: In *Reconciliation*, John De Gruchy says, "But reconciliation as a final achievement is, in a sense, always beyond our grasp." If reconciliation and freedom from racism will never be fully realized on this earth, what is

the point of the struggle? What does the Belhar Confession have to say in answer to this question (particularly paragraph 3)?

Respond to what you've learned with one or more of the following exercises:

1. Read together one of the selected readings for this session (if not everyone in the group has read it). Then discuss:
 - Montoya letter: What are some of the changes that need to happen in the RCA and/or your congregation if racial reconciliation is to be fully realized?
 - Damascus Road: What does the Mennonite experience with Damascus Road have to teach us about difficulties of racial reconciliation? Does your experience match theirs?
 - Danney letter: Divide into two groups and brainstorm ways you might better use your congregation's resources (human and physical) to foster racial unity, justice, and reconciliation in your community. Don't limit yourselves to facility-sharing.

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Reconvene and share your ideas. Discuss together, based on learnings from the Danney letter, why sharing facilities is a first step but not a last step in achieving reconciliation and unity. How can groups move from being “co-habitors” to “co-partners in Christ”?

2. Discuss: Is your church a safe place for people who feel excluded for any reason to speak up? How could your congregation deal with expressions of pain and anger by persons of color or other excluded groups in a way that healed rather than further alienated? What resources are available in your community to help you?
3. Time of reflection and prayer for reconciliation in your community (each group will need a large wooden or plastic building block):
 - Reflect: What are examples of division and hatred within your church and your community?
 - Share your examples. As each example is shared, write the example in brief form on a sticky note and attach it to your block. Then add the block to a wall you construct together.
 - When everyone has had a chance to share, reflect silently on the situations named, and then have a time of prayer, either silent or spoken.
 - While one person reads the paraphrase of paragraph 3 of the Belhar Confession (on p. 39), the others should retrieve their blocks one by one to dismantle the wall.
 - Pray together to find one small thing you can each do to promote healing in your specific situations during the coming week.
4. Revisit Ronnie, Bonnie, and the apple pie.

Mother comes home from the bakery with apple pie. She gives Bonnie, who has finished vacuuming her bedroom, a large piece, and she gives Ronnie none since he has not vacuumed his bedroom. Ronnie loudly informs Mother that the vacuum hose is plugged with Bonnie’s dirty sock, which Ronnie has been unable to dislodge. Ronnie then grabs Bonnie’s pie and hurls it against a kitchen wall, shouting that Mother always favors Bonnie, which is true, if truth be told. Mother slaps Ronnie and banishes him to his room, where he can be heard sobbing, swearing, and throwing things around.

Using De Gruchy’s elements of the reconciliation process (see p. 36), discuss what would be necessary in this situation to restore not only justice, but also unity. Discuss why restoration of justice alone is insufficient to restore unity. Discuss how the principles illustrated in this scenario relate to situations involving injustice and vengeance locally and globally.

5. On a white board, chart paper, etc., list as many situations as you can think of, both locally and globally, in which the behavior of Christians (whether internal fighting and disunity, or discrimination and injustice against others) has damaged the credibility of the gospel. If you have a world map, place stickers on each of these locations where Christians have brought dishonor to Christ. Next, name Christian people and groups who have, by their actions, borne witness to the light.

If you have time, close this session by reading together the paraphrase of paragraph 3 of the

Belhar Confession (below) and with the following prayer. Add sentence prayers of your own, if you wish.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the way of peace. Come into the brokenness of our lives and our land with your healing love. Help us to be willing to bow before you in true repentance and to bow to one another in real forgiveness. By the fire of your Holy Spirit, melt our hard hearts and consume the pride and prejudice which separate us. Fill us, O Lord, with your perfect love which casts out fear and bind us together in that unity which you share with the Father and Holy Spirit. Amen.

—*Celebrating Community* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993)

Digging deeper



1. In *Reconciliation*, John De Gruchy comments that many Christian churches lack a sacrament of confession or penance (Protestants typically recognize only two sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper). He wonders about the consequences of this in the life of a church. Research the meaning of sacraments in the Reformed tradition and in traditions in which confession and penance are sacraments (for example the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox churches). Do you think De Gruchy's question warrants further consideration? Might confession, if given more emphasis in some formal way, strengthen reconciliation, particularly racial reconciliation, and unity within the church?
2. Develop a reader's theater presentation based on paragraph 3 (or the following paraphrase) of the Belhar Confession for use in your congregation's worship. (One option is to accompany the reading with drama to suggest applications of the Belhar's affirmations to your context.)

Paragraph 3 Paraphrase:

We believe

- That God has entrusted the church with the good news that we have been reconciled in and through Jesus Christ;
- That the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world;
- That the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker;
- That the church witnesses by what it says and by what it does to the new heaven and the new earth, where righteousness dwells;
- That through the life-giving work of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, God has conquered the powers of sin and death, and so also of alienation and hatred, bitterness and enmity;
- That Christ through his Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience, obedience that can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;
- That when those who proclaim the message of reconciliation nevertheless separate people by race, promoting and perpetuating alienation, hatred, and enmity, the credibility of this message of reconciliation is seriously

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affected, and the beneficial work of this message is obstructed.

- That anyone who 1) attempts to justify racial separation by appealing to the gospel, 2) is not prepared to venture on the road to obedience and reconciliation, or 3) denies that the gospel has the power to reconcile because of prejudice, fear, selfishness, and unbelief, that person holds to false doctrine—which doctrine we reject!

To prepare for the next session, please go through the pre-session exercises for Session 7.

Session 7

The Belhar As a Call to Action



Focus

Focus: The Belhar Confession calls us to obedient action.

The challenge of the Belhar Confession is that it is a call to action...It informs all churches that words are not enough to follow Christ. It challenges us to actively and visibly pursue and seek the unity of humanity, reconciliation, and justice.

—Oliver Patterson, RCA member and ecumenical delegate to URCSA, General Synod 1997



Pre-session

Pre-session exercises:

Scripture reading: Acts 4:13-22

Read the scripture passage twice. The second time, stop along the way to visualize the people, the place, and the events of the story. What words especially draw you? Can you think of a stand or an action you might take for the sake of Christ, especially with respect to Christian unity, reconciliation, and justice for the oppressed, that would cause friction with or alienation from your family, friends, community, and/or society? What holds you back? Where could you find the support you need to be obedient? Ask God for wisdom, strength, and courage to hear and obey God's call, whatever it may be.

Other readings: Reread paragraph 5 of the Belhar Confession, or choose one or more of the readings for Session 7 in Appendix A.

Choose one of the options below in preparation for the upcoming session:

1. Do something this week to increase your understanding of and appreciation for a racial group different from your own. Get out of your comfort zone! Here are some suggestions:
 - Worship with a racially different congregation.
 - Visit a soup kitchen, welfare clinic, or some other place where people gather because they have no alternatives.
 - Visit the cultural center of an ethnic group different from yours.
 - Plan a group ethnic meal. Ask people from an ethnic minority to bring food from their own ethnic traditions, and ask everyone else to bring an ethnic dish they've never cooked before.
 - Go to an ethnic restaurant and eat food you've never tried before. (Eating pizza at Pizza Hut doesn't qualify as Italian!) Use your fingers or chopsticks if the tradition typically requires it.
 - View a foreign film that's not European.
 - Read a book written by someone from a racial minority.
2. Pope John XXIII said words to the effect of, "See it all, let most of it go by, and do what you can to make a difference." Someone else has said that to be an agent of change you must "start where you are, use what you know, and do what you can to

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make a difference.” If you are not at present actively involved in justice work, here are some possible arenas for action in response to the issues raised by the Belhar Confession:

- Work for racial reconciliation and unity among Christians.
 - Work for reconciliation and unity among Christians from different denominations.
 - Work with other Christians on a justice issue (e.g. housing, literacy, tax reform, education reform, prison reform, abortion, environmental protection, animal welfare, employment equity, health care access, etc.).
 - Work with people of various faiths (or no particular faith) on a justice issue.
 - Work for greater respect and understanding among faith groups (Christian and non-Christian).
 - Volunteer your gifts and experience to serve in God’s world (e.g. food or clothing bank, literacy center, prison ministry, foster parenting, tutoring, income tax preparation, sharing music or art with seniors—the possibilities are endless).
3. If you are already involved in community service or justice work, think and pray about what you are doing. Do you feel excited and passionate about your work? Do you sense God’s call? God’s blessing? Does the work you are doing make good use of your gifts and experience? Where do you need to stretch and grow to become a more effective servant of Christ?
4. Go online and research what resources, information, and service opportunities are available through your denomination.



Introduction: Why must we act for justice, reconciliation, and unity? What is the cost of inaction? What can God accomplish through our obedience? These are some of the questions we explore in this session.



Song:

“Sikhulule”/“Liberate Us, Lord”
(Music is found in Appendix B.)

Jesus' Third Way

Seize the moral initiative
Find a creative alternative to violence
Assert your own humanity and dignity as a person
Meet force with ridicule or humor
Break the cycle of humiliation
Refuse to submit or to accept the inferior position
Expose the injustice of the system
Take control of the power dynamic
Shame the oppressor into repentance
Stand your ground
Make the Powers make decisions for which they are not prepared
Recognize your own power
Be willing to suffer rather than retaliate
Force the oppressor to see you in a new light
Deprive the oppressor of a situation where a show of force is effective
Be willing to undergo the penalty of breaking unjust laws
Die to fear of the old order and its rules
Seek the oppressor's transformation

—*Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*, Walter Wink
(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003)



In-session exercises

Reflect: Break into groups of two or three and share what you have learned and produced through the pre-session exercises. Limit sharing to two minutes per person.

Connect: Read the excerpt from Ronald J. Sider in Appendix A (p. 64). Reflect on this reading in light of the Belhar Confession. Do you know anyone for whom, as the Belhar puts it, the credibility of the gospel was seriously affected, and in whose life the beneficial work of the gospel was obstructed because of the failure of Christians to behave as Christians, particularly in response to injustice and suffering? On the flip side, do you know of anyone who was brought to Christ through the love and faithfulness of Christ-followers?

Respond to what you've learned with one or more of the following exercises:

1. Discuss: Some Christians believe that Christians should indeed be involved in politics, social justice, etc., but as part of separate, non-church organizations (whether secular or Christian) and not under the umbrella of the institutional church.
 - What arguments can be made for and against such an approach?
 - How specific should the institutional church become in addressing racism and other justice issues? Should it restrict itself to broad proclamations of biblical principles, or can it legitimately endorse specific policies, parties, and leaders? What is the line between

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- political meddling and prophetic witness? Does the Belhar Confession successfully tread this line?
- What are the pros and cons for Christians of working with interfaith or secular organizations versus strictly Christian organizations? How much must people have in common to work together? Common purpose? Common motivation?
2. Read together and discuss the Barker selection in Appendix A (p. 64). Why is it often easier to respond to needs and injustices far away than in our own communities? Reflect on the ministries and missions of your church. On chart paper, a white board, etc., list what you see as your congregation's goals and priorities. What changes might your church make to be more faithful to Christ's call?
 3. Read together Liala Beukema's reflections at the end of the Church of the Good News story (p. 67). What is meant by "doing with" rather than "doing for"? Is there a justice situation in your church's neighborhood in which your church could get involved? How could you get involved in a way that respected, engaged, and empowered your neighbors? With whom could you work? Where would you get the strength to stay the course?
 4. Read together the first four paragraphs of the Orange City–Bronx churches story (p. 67). How does the relationship of these two churches go beyond the common "one-time" mission trip? List benefits that might be received by congregations in mutual ministry. What "mutual mission" possibilities do you see for your congregation? Designate someone in your group to explore the possibilities further and report back.
 5. In the Isaiah 61 Project story (p. 69), two inner-city RCA churches are offering their facilities, along with their time and money, to meet the very real needs of children and young people in their neighborhoods. What very real needs in your neighborhood would be helped by offering the use of your church's facilities? What steps would you need to take to make dreams reality?

If there is time, read once again paragraph 5 of the Belhar Confession. Close with a time of prayer, using the prayer below and/or prayers of your own.

Prayer: A Tourist's Prayer

O Lord, I don't want to be a spectator
A tour passenger looking out upon
the real world,
An audience to poverty
and want and homelessness.

Lord, involve me—call me—
implicate me—commit me—
And Lord—help me to step off the bus.

—Freda Rajotle ©World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland. Used with permission.

Two years ago my wife, Nancy Heisey, and I were in the Argentine Chaco sitting under a tree and talking with Salustiano Lopez, a Toba Indian church leader. Our interest was to seek his counsel on how North American mission and service organizations should work in the years ahead. We asked how, in Argentina or neighboring countries, he would begin to share the gospel with other indigenous people who do not have churches among them. He paused for a moment, and then responded, “I would go and eat their food.” He began to weep, and the missionary couple who were our translators wept with him. Nancy and I were also overcome with his simple but powerful response. We knew that these forty-year missionaries and their colleagues had acknowledged the dignity of the indigenous people of the Chaco by eating their food, sleeping in their houses, and learning and recording their languages.

—*Extending the Table: A World Community Cookbook*, Joetta Handrich Schlabach and Kristina Mast Burnett (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991)



Digging deeper

1. There are many possible responses to evil and injustice, including anger, violence, defiance, apathy, despair, helplessness, passivity, creative action, and militant nonviolence (Walter Wink). Read and reflect on paragraph 5 of the Belhar Confession, then respond with art (painting, drawing, sculpture, collage, poetry, music, etc.) to one or more of the following:
 - How do you see those around you responding to injustice and evil?
 - How do you respond, or wish to respond, to injustice and evil?
 - What call do you hear from the Belhar Confession in this regard?
2. In a speech to graduates of Berea College in May 2005, Desmond Tutu suggested that in situations where God seems to be failing to act against suffering and injustice, it is because God is waiting for humans who are willing to act with God to bring change. Think of a situation of injustice or disunity that you have prayed God would change. How could you work with God? Spend time in prayer seeking God's leading.
3. Anthropologist Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

To prepare for the next session, please go through the pre-session exercises for Session 8.

Session 8

The Belhar As an Affirmation of Hope



Focus: The Belhar Confession is an expression of hope.



Pre-session exercises:

Scripture reading: Isaiah 66:5-13, 22-23

Read this session's scripture passage several times, soaking in the rich imagery of hope. What is the basis for hope? To whom is the message of hope given? This passage tells us that God will finish in a spectacular way what God has started. Claim this promise for yourself and for your world. Talk with God about your hopes and fears, then entrust them to the one who is completely worthy of trust.

Other readings: Read paragraph 1 of the Belhar Confession, or choose one or more of the Session 8 readings in Appendix A.

Choose one of the options below in preparation for the upcoming session:

1. What is the basis of your hope for our world? Write a personal statement of faith, or find or create a poem, a song, a dance, or a piece of art that expresses where your hope lies.
2. What things in your world (organizations, movements, people, trends, etc.) give you the most hope?
3. Robina Winbush's story in Appendix A raises important questions about how we can address the fundamental faith needs of children, especially children of color, in a world that is hostile not only to their faith, but to their very existence. Find out about your church's programs for children and youth. What is your church doing to instill hope and vision in a new generation? How are you equipping your children and youth to be agents of reconciliation and hope in a "lost and broken world so loved by God"? What changes might you need to make to better equip and enable your young people to follow Christ in mission?
4. Imagine a letter that might be written by the grandparent of a child of color being raised amid violence and poverty. What might that letter say? Where might that grandparent find hope?

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

5. Write a letter to a child you care about, expressing your hopes for her or his future, or write a prayer or poem in which you express to God your hopes and fears for the child and for the world in which he or she lives.



Introduction

Introduction: The Belhar Confession testifies that God calls the church to work for unity, reconciliation, and justice. As we seek to obey God's call, what is the source of our hope? How can we be bearers of hope in a world grown weary and cynical?



Song:

“Cantai ao Senhor”/“Rejoice in the Lord”
(Music is found in Appendix B.)



In-session

In-session exercises

Reflect: Break into groups of two or three, and share what you have learned and produced through the pre-session exercises. Limit sharing to two minutes per person.

Connect: Read aloud the first paragraph of the Belhar Confession. Why do you think the framers of the Belhar—Christians suffering the oppression of apartheid at the hands of other Christians—affirmed this belief before all others? Read the paragraph aloud again. Share your reflections.

Respond to what you've learned with one or more of the following exercises:

1. Discuss the Winbush story in Appendix A (p. 70). If not everyone has read it, take a few minutes to read it now, silently or aloud. How can civil disobedience be an expression of hope? How can civil disobedience bring hope to the oppressed and credibility to the gospel? What was at stake for the children in Rev. Winbush's confirmation class? What sorts of things could tip the balance of their lives toward actions born of hope rather than of despair? What does Paragraph 5 of the Belhar Confession have to say about civil disobedience?
2. Discuss Session 8 pre-session exercise 3 concerning your church's programs for children and youth.
3. Read and discuss the Huber piece in Appendix A (p. 70). What connection do you see between opportunity and hope in the situation described? How do you respond to the assertion that “injustice cannot and will not stand in a world ordered by a God who demands justice”? Has it been true historically? Have you experienced it as true in your own life? What does it mean to live “as people who know that redemption draweth nigh”?

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

4. Read the Mulder and Smith letters in Appendix A (p. 71). Discuss one or more of the following questions. (You may wish to divide the questions among group members, then come together to share your answers.)
- Where in the Mulder letter do you see privilege of birth?
 - What hopes are expressed? How do those hopes compare with your hopes for the children in your life?
 - What are some of the disadvantages or dangers of privilege?
 - How can we help privileged children become aware of their privileges, develop sensitivity and compassion toward those with fewer privileges, and develop hearts for service?
 - Contrast the Mulder letter with the Smith letter. What “different place” does the Smith letter come from than the Mulder letter?
 - What might be the blessings of being raised in a family that has struggled for generations against racism, exclusion, and injustice?
 - What might be the personal challenges of being raised in such a family (emotionally, spiritually, etc.)?

If there is time, read together the following words from the Belhar Confession. Close the session with prayer. If you have access to hymnals containing the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi (“Make Me a Channel of Your Peace”), you may want to sing the prayer together.

We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

Prayer:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury, pardon,
Where there is doubt, faith,
Where there is despair, hope,
Where there is darkness, light,
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console,
Not so much to be understood as to understand,
Not so much to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

—attributed to St. Francis of Assisi



Digging deeper

1. In *Theology of Hope*, Jurgen Moltmann asserts that those who live in hope, who trust in God's covenant promises, "can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it." The result is that the church becomes "a constant disturbance in human society" because of its unwillingness to accept the status quo. The second result of hope is creative action, because new thinking and planning spring from hope. Evaluate your life and your church in light of Moltmann's statement. Is there an aspect of human society that disturbs you enough to contradict it? Is the church you know a "constant disturbance" in human society? If not, why not?
2. Reflect on the following quote by Walter Brueggeman. Can you think of examples of the various distortions of prophetic hope he mentions?

Of course prophetic hope easily lends itself to distortion. It can be made so grandiose that it does not touch reality; it can be trivialized so that it does not impact reality; it can be "bread and circuses" so that it only supports and abets the general despair. But a prophet has another purpose in bringing hope to public expression, and that is to return the community to its single referent, the sovereign faithfulness of God.

—*The Prophetic Imagination*, Walter Brueggeman
(Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001)

To prepare for the next session, please go through the pre-session exercises for Session 9.

Session 9

What Shall We Do with This Gift?



Focus: In the Belhar Confession, we have received a wonderful gift. How best can we make use of that gift?

By the Holy Spirit all who believe and are baptized receive a ministry
to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and
to love and serve those with whom they live and work.
We are ambassadors for Christ,
who reconciles and makes whole.
We are the salt of the earth;
we are the light of the world.

—Order for Commissioning Christians to the Ministry of the Church,
Reformed Church in America



Pre-session exercises:

Scripture reading: Isaiah 6:6-13

The angel of God purified Isaiah by touching a hot coal to his lips before calling him to service. Why? As you have progressed through this study, what parts of the Belhar Confession have been hot coals in your life?

God sent Isaiah to call the people to repentance and healing. The result? Dulled hearing, closed eyes, and calloused hearts. What must we do to avoid a similar fate when we hear God's call in our lives? To what is God calling you? To what do you think God is calling your denomination?

Other readings: Since there are fewer pre-session exercises this session, please read all of the Session 9 readings in Appendix A.

Choose one of the reflection questions below:

1. How could the Belhar Confession be used to help your denomination better practice justice and racial reconciliation?
2. What would be required for the Belhar Confession to function in your denomination as it does in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, as an “instrument for profound self-examination, to help determine whether the church really lives by the faith it proclaims” (Dr. Molefi Seth Pitikoe)?
3. What are the pros and cons of each of the ways the Belhar Confession could be used?

...one church's very specific, contextual confession can also be a genuine *universal* message to the world church, with many applicabilities, exactly because it is grounded truthfully in a serious engagement with the truth of God's word in real circumstances.

—Christo Lombard, member-in-residence at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey, in an address to the 2004 RCA General Synod



Introduction

Introduction: There are various ways our denominations could choose to make use of the gift we have received from the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. We could use it as a guide to study and action. We could adopt it as a contemporary confession on par with “Our Song of Hope.” Or we could elevate it to the status of a standard of unity, standing alongside the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort as a document that defines who we are at the core of our theological being. What will we choose?



Song:

“Thuma Mina”/“Send Me Lord”
(Music is found in Appendix B.)



In-session

In-session exercises

Reflect: Break into groups of two or three and share what you have learned and produced through the pre-session exercises. Limit sharing to two minutes per person.

Respond to what you've learned using one or more of the following exercises:

1. On one side of an index card, write one thing you've learned from your study of the Belhar Confession that gave you joy. On the other side, write one thing you learned that caused you anger or sorrow. As a group, share what you've written.
2. Together, create a list of ways you could make use of the Belhar Confession in your own congregation. For each item, identify a person or persons in your congregation who could make it happen. What steps need to be taken next? Share your group list with the pastor of your church.
3. Create a list of ways your denomination could make use of the Belhar Confession. Send the list to a denominational leader.
4. Take a vote in your group on what status the Belhar Confession should have within your denomination:
 - Study document
 - Contemporary confession (e.g. “Our Song of Hope”)
 - Standard of unity (e.g. Heidelberg Catechism)
 - Other (specify)Share the results with your pastor.

5. Make a list of things you want the rest of your congregation to know about the Belhar Confession and about your experience with the Belhar study. Assign someone from your group to communicate these things to your congregation, perhaps through your church's newsletter.

Close this final session of the Belhar Confession study by reading together these words from the Belhar Confession and praying the following prayer and your own prayers.

We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

Prayer:

Let not they Word, O Lord, become a judgment upon us, that we hear it and do it not, that we know it and love it not, that we believe it and obey it not; O thou, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit livest and reignest, world without end. Amen.

—attributed to Thomas à Kempis



Digging deeper

1. Research the role of confessions in the life of the church. Under what sorts of circumstances do they arise? What functions do they serve? What is a “confessional church”? What are the confessions of our ecumenical partners?
2. Learn more about your denomination's standards of unity. Do you agree that the Belhar Confession fills a gap left by the current confessions? Why or why not?
3. Read the contemporary confession “Our Song of Hope.” (It is posted on the RCA website: www.rca.org.) What difference does it make if a confession is not elevated to the status of a standard of unity?
4. Reflect on opportunities the Belhar Confession presents for church educators:
 - To learn about confessions.
 - To understand the theological basis for Christian social action and justice initiatives.
 - To explore the shift in the center of Christendom to the southern hemisphere.
 - To learn about our ecumenical partners.

Unwrapping the Gift

5. Reflect on the possibilities the Belhar Confession presents with respect to ecumenical relationships (especially with the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa). Find out about the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s work with the Belhar Confession by visiting their website.

Appendix A: Readings

SESSION 2 READINGS

**Reflections by Ruan Shyh-zhen, translated by David Alexander
Kaohsiung Christian Family Counseling Center, May 2004**

I'm a Taiwanese daughter-in-law from Vietnam. According to Taiwan's mainstream media I belong to the "overseas brides" classification. This title carries several connotations: that we love money, have no knowledge, have deviant ideas, and so on. The children whom we bear and raise are regarded as being "slow." When I first heard this I was distressed and dispirited. I learned that stories confirming these ideas are frequently run in the mass media, inducing many people to look at my friends and me with a particular set of prejudices. I admit that there are some overseas sisters who do not make the best show of themselves, yet those with whom I am acquainted do not lack in domesticity, academic ability, effort or willingness to become a part of their husbands' extended families. Their children are intelligent and adorable, the same as the children of most Taiwanese families. Having heard so many negative opinions, I am both heartsick and driven to speak out my feelings.

Refugees International (RI) concerns regarding Darfur, Sudan

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RI has conducted six missions to Sudan and Chad since 2004 in order to monitor the increased displacement and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Darfur, western Sudan. Militia supported by the government of Sudan have conducted a genocidal campaign that in the name of defending the government of Sudan from rebel forces has targeted villages of African farmers, chased two million people from their homes, killed an estimated 300,000 and resulted in thousands of rapes. Despite wide international recognition of the situation in Darfur, no effective response to the atrocities has been mounted and the violence continues.

Amnesty International Press Release, 02/01/2005, on the discrimination against Roma in Europe

There are an estimated seven to nine million Roma living in Europe today with 80 percent of them living in new European Union member states and candidate countries. The level of income and unemployment is considerably lower for the Roma minorities across the region. According to the World Bank, in Hungary the poverty rate is about five times greater among Roma than among non-Roma.

Reflections on white privilege, by David Baak, director of the Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism and interim minister for mission at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan

One summer evening, a friend's car broke down, so he had it towed to a shop for repair. The following day I gave him a ride to the shop so he could get an estimate and make arrangements to have the car fixed. James, an African American, and I, a white person, walked into the shop together through the open overhead door.

We approached the desk of the shop manager. Looking past James and directly at me, the shop manager asked "May I help you?" James said, "I came to see about getting my car fixed—they towed it in last night."

"What kind of car is it?" the manager asked, still looking directly at me. "It's James's car," I said, but the manager continued to ignore James. By the time we finished, I had been asked to

verify that the car belonged to James and to guarantee his check. The manager never even asked me who I was.

That is white privilege. I did nothing to earn the manager's respect or trust; James did nothing to warrant disrespect and suspicion. For everyone involved, the social and emotional consequences of such interactions are incalculable, especially when multiplied over a lifetime.

I learned that day to pay attention. I am very aware of who is talking to whom—and how they talk, and what words they use. I regularly see other examples of exclusion, and I try to intervene where possible. Most importantly, I have learned to watch how I behave when I sit at the manager's desk.

Letter about racial exclusion in the Reformed Church in America, by Ina Montoya, youth pastor at Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church in Dulce, New Mexico, and member of the RCA's Commission on Race and Ethnicity

This is a letter describing a situation pertaining to racism or prejudice in the church as told to me by a Native American member of the Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church.

It happened at Triennial 2004 in California. Six of our women attended the conference, with five traveling together by plane and one driving with her family. At the conference the sixth woman often was separated from our group and was doing things with her family between Triennial activities. So naturally she didn't keep her nametag on at all times.

She noticed how other women would treat her differently because she didn't have the "identification" of the church. Some ignored her "hello's" but were nice to those wearing nametags; others automatically thought she was an employee of the DoubleTree Hotel where many Triennial women stayed, or employed as a janitor at the Crystal Cathedral, almost looking down on her (as if a janitorial job is something to look down upon).

Disappointed, we apologized for any negative actions against her, and were thankful she felt secure enough to share this with the consistory of Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church, the women who attended, and the RCA Commission on Race and Ethnicity.

SESSION 4 READINGS

Reflections by Pedro Windsor, pastor of La Capilla del Barrio, an RCA congregation in Chicago, Illinois

Having just received a call from an RCA classis to begin a new Hispanic church start, the first thing on my agenda was to secure housing for my family. I was referred by the classis missions committee folks to a local real estate agent. At the real estate office I was greeted warmly by the agent: "Hello, Reverend, it is so good to meet you." At my request, the agent drove me around a Hispanic area of the city, showing me a couple of possibilities.

Once back in the real estate office, the agent told me, "Reverend, quite frankly, the neighborhood that you have chosen is not really a good one. Mind you, Reverend, I grew up in that area, but things were different back then. Those people," he said, referring to Hispanics, "are a bunch of drunks who are dirty and always in trouble with the law..." He continued on in that vein, while I sat in my seat, stunned!

The agent concluded with, "Reverend, frankly speaking, I don't know why you would want to live in that area with those people." Gazing directly into his eyes, I responded calmly, "Because I am one of those people!"

The expressions on the face of the real estate agent that followed were a sight to behold. Seeking to regain his composure, the agent said to me, "Reverend, please excuse me for a moment," and left his office.

This experience left me angry and in pain, not just for me, but also for this man. I was referred to him by Christians, who had identified him as a member of one of our churches. If any good was served by this encounter, it was possibly the realization that racism isn't as simple as black and white.

Reflections by Anna Jackson, pastor of Queens Reformed Church in Queens Village, New York

Several years ago, in recognition of Black History Month, I led a six-week discussion group on the presence of black people in the Bible using a video series by the Rev. Dr. Cain Hope Felder. To my amazement, the class had about twenty-five people, of whom 75 percent were white. Many of the people in this class were folks that I considered to be enlightened, liberal, open-minded, deeply spiritual, and eager to learn. I had great respect for them and considered them not only my brothers and sisters in Christ but also my friends. This was going to be a great class and I was very excited about it.

By the third week another thought came to me. On this evening, somehow our discussion steered toward prejudice and one's response to it. As I shared some of my feelings of outrage that I have experienced when confronted with the prejudice of another, someone said to me, "Anna, that's the problem. When will you get over it? You need to get over it and move on."

I was stunned and wounded. Not because I had not heard people say that before. But I had never heard someone that I respected so highly say such a thing. That was something that I expected from "those" people, not from her—a white woman committed to the celebration of human diversity in the family of God. I wanted to scream.

Instead I took a deep breath and said quite passionately, "How does a wound get to heal if it is constantly poked, prodded, and stabbed? If I left here tonight and went down the street to hail a cab, most would not stop to pick me up. Why? Because I am black.

If I go to one of the boutiques uptown I will be followed around the store by salespeople, not because they are interested in my purchases, but to make sure I don't steal anything. Why? Because I am black.

If I go to answer the ad for an apartment for rent in certain neighborhoods, all of a sudden the apartment is no longer available, or the person showing it becomes rude and uncooperative, or they will have me jumping through so many hoops to get it that it would not be worth my time. Why? Because I am black. Even in the church today, there are congregations that would not want me to serve among them for no other reason than the fact that I am black.

So how does a person get over something that is a daily reality? This is not the past or a memory from yesteryear that we are having difficulty letting go of and moving beyond. This is stuff that happens every single day."

I fumed and cried all the way home that night wondering to myself how come people just don't get this. At that moment, I realized just how difficult multicultural ministry really is in our context, and the great commitment needed to live it out.

Reflections by Steve Long-Nguyen Robbins, Ph.D., president of S.L. Robbins & Associates, a diversity, inclusion, and cultural competency consulting firm, and a visiting professor at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan

When someone asks me what it feels like to be discriminated against, I have to pause and think, not just think a little, but a lot. It's a difficult question to answer because each act of discrimination, even perceived discrimination, elicits different thoughts and emotions. Some times it is anger, other times it's confusion, and other times it's an absence of both thinking and feeling—a numbing shock that is to some degree a coping state that my body engages when in utter disbelief. Still other times it's a complex combination of many thoughts and

emotions that leaves me feeling awkwardly alone. Though each incident fuels unique initial responses, the resulting and overwhelming feeling I am left with is that I am very tired.

I am tired when store clerks fail to see an upstanding citizen when I use my credit card, asking to see my driver's license when others in line before (or after) me are not asked. I can understand asking everyone, a policy uniformly carried out, but to be singled out with a negative label is tiring.

I am tired of other kids on the playground asking my kids where they are from, but not asking other kids on the same playground where they are from. I understand the curiosity that kids have, but such questions directed at my kids and not others tell me that other kids see my kids as outsiders, not really part of the "family." The "family" of which these other kids have a mental model does not seem to include kids that look like mine. All my kids were born in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

I am tired when I think about how my life would be happily different if my mother was still alive to play with her four grandchildren. My children do not have a Vietnamese grandmother. She took her own life after facing a lifetime of poor treatment and discrimination. I suspect it was very tiring for my 4' 11" mother, who spoke with a distinct accent, to find out that equality, inalienable rights, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were words that apparently applied to some, not all. I am tired, and angry that these country-founding concepts were not operationalized for all.

I do not necessarily view each negative incident as racial discrimination, but am always left with questioning whether it was, and that is very tiring. As an example, when I am treated poorly in a restaurant I do not jump to the conclusion that the wait person was being racist, but I tend to ask two questions in those types of situations. The first is, "Does that wait person treat everyone poorly?" And the second is, "Is that wait person treating me poorly because of my race?" I suspect that those who are part of the white majority rarely find themselves asking the latter question here in the United States. Imagine having to ask (and answer) those two questions on a relatively regular basis. It is tiring.

Alone, each incident does not deplete me of too much energy. But the accumulation over the course of a lifetime of all these incidents (and others)—of what is or what might be racially based prejudice and discrimination—zaps a lot of energy that could be used elsewhere. It leaves me with less physical and emotional energy. I have less energy to use creatively at work.

Comments from the author: It was difficult for me to write the article (not necessarily on an emotional level) because I think what plagues many in the RCA and elsewhere is a misunderstanding of what racism is. Racism itself is much more of an institutional concept that involves privilege and power at institutional levels. Racial prejudice on the other hand is more of the individual level—things that occur in interpersonal interactions. It's when you combine racial prejudice and power/privilege that you get big "R" racism. And herein lies the perceptual problem. Nice, well-meaning individuals understand racism as individual acts of prejudice, and that's how they assess the degree of racism in our world. Well, racism today is much more subtle and less noticeable unless you know what to look for. Consequently, many people don't see racism as a big issue, and they do not see themselves in a bad light because they are "nice people." They believe that if they just treat everyone with love and respect, then everything will be okay. This approach does not account for all the institutional factors that produce racial disparities. Because of our past history, we do not even need "mean" people anymore to produce unequal outcomes—outcomes that have very little to do with "hard work" and "good personal choices." Until people can understand and make this vital distinction, we will have lots of folks who feel sorry for other people, but will also blame those very same people.

—Steve Robbins

I have less energy to spend with my wife and kids. But ultimately I have less energy to further God's kingdom. That is the tragedy of racism, that there are countless people in our communities that are seen negatively, are treated as outsiders, that have lost loved ones, and who are left with less energy than they should have to serve God, to make heaven on earth. We should all be tired of that.

The Poison of Prejudice

In the 1960s Iowa teacher Jane Elliott led her all-white, all-Christian, third-grade class in a simulation in which the children were separated into superior and inferior groups based on their eye color. Children with brown eyes were praised and given special privileges, while children with blue eyes were denied basic classroom rights.

With disturbing speed the children fell into their roles. The children designated as inferior performed worse on classwork, began calling themselves stupid, acted aggressively and even, in some cases, began banging their heads on their desks in anguish. In contrast, dyslexic brown-eyed boys suddenly could read. This simulation demonstrated the poisonous effects of prejudice and discrimination on self-esteem and performance.

Read more about this project by typing "Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes" or "Jane Elliott" into your Internet search engine.

SESSION 5 READINGS

Injustice Against Innocents in an Age of Terror, by Habeeb G. Awad, Palestinian-American and international student advisor at Hope College in Holland, Michigan

Below, you will find some of my personal insights and experiences that I felt directly and indirectly as a Middle Easterner after 9/11.

On 9/11, my parents, who live in the occupied West Bank of Bethlehem, were very worried about me. They insisted that I should stay home for some time and not venture outside the house unless it was necessary. My parents learned from the news that some Arab and Muslim citizens in the United States were arrested without charge and held in jail despite their rights. This worried my parents a lot. I assured my family that I felt safe in the community in which I live.

Once in a while, my wife and I go to eat at a Middle Eastern restaurant. I noticed, shortly after 9/11, the Middle Eastern restaurant's owner decorated his establishment with American flags. Looking at how we, the Arab-Americans, use flags after 9/11 reminds me of the biblical story when God instructed the Hebrews to mark their doors with blood so that God's wrath bypasses their homes.

Shortly after 9/11, a friend told me, "They [the U.S. government] are focusing their attention on your people." My people! I felt the burden on my shoulders simply because I am a Palestinian-American, that somehow I am guilty by association.

As a Palestinian-American, I have a deep concern with the alarming hostility expressed by U.S. media commentators towards the Palestinian people in the wake of the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. While I was watching the funeral proceedings on MSNBC on November 13th, the show host, Don Imus, described Arafat as "stinky," a "rat" with "beady eyes." He also added statements claiming "all Palestinians look like him." Then, one guest at Imus's show described the crowds of Palestinians attending the funeral as "animals" and joked about their hygiene. "They're dropping soap from the helicopters," the guest laughed. I felt that I was dehumanized by Imus's racist remarks and that the general public will take it for granted that all Palestinians are "animals."

The Belhar Confession Speaks to Injustice in Palestine

Excerpts from an address by the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb

In 2004 the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem and general director of the International Center of Bethlehem, addressed the RCA's General Synod. Among many other things, he said...

What we are facing in Palestine today is what can best be called a land grab. The state of Israel is confiscating nearly every plot of land in the West Bank upon which there is not Palestinian habitation, which will leave no room for any future growth. My two daughters, who are now fourteen and ten, will not in twenty years be able to find in Bethlehem or anywhere else in the West Bank a free plot of land, even one acre of land, upon which to build a home, because all the empty land, which is our treasure for future expansion, will have already been confiscated. In 1948 the state of Israel was carved out of around 78 percent of historic Palestine. When we were still calling for a two-state solution, we were saying, "Okay, Israel, take your 78 percent and leave to us the other 22 percent." What's happening today is that Israel has already taken 60 percent of the 22 percent, which leaves us with only 10 percent of historic Palestine. In this 10 percent we have 6 million Palestinians. Israelis, who are also 6 million, have the other 90 percent.

...Israel is currently constructing [a wall] around almost every town on the West Bank. If you come to visit us in the little town of Bethlehem, you will see that Israel is already building this wall...When it is completed, a twenty-six-foot-high wall stretching for fifty miles will completely surround Bethlehem, leaving just one big gate by which we can come and go. And the Israelis will control that gate, leaving us completely at their mercy. While you are singing "O Little Town of Bethlehem" on Christmas Eve, the actual town of Bethlehem will be imprisoned behind these high walls, forever confined to an area as small as two square miles.

Even more difficult is that Israel's decision to build these walls comes with an American blessing. The Belhar Confession speaks to this in what it says about any forced unilateral separation. This is what we have in Palestine today—a forced unilateral separation...And what this will inevitably lead to, unfortunately, is a system of injustice—which is irrevocable. Once these walls are in place, there will be no one to tear them down. What this will lead to in increasingly overcrowded Palestinian towns is high levels of unemployment, dangerously low water supplies, a lack of local control over resources, with no proper access to the outside world...

The Belhar Confession of our brothers and sisters in South Africa is encouraging us not to remain silent as a church regarding any ideology or policy which results in the exclusion of the Palestinian people. I would call upon you, as our partners, to help us initiate together a process of confessing.

**Excerpts from an address to RCA General Synod 2004, by Christo Lombard,
Namibia/South Africa, member-in-residence at the Center of Theological Inquiry at
Princeton Theological Seminary**

During the first ten years of its existence [the Belhar Confession] triggered and hastened the collapse of apartheid in South Africa, and now in the last decade or so, it has been an inspiration and theological backup for diverse initiatives in church and society: e.g. the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, the quest for the continuing unifying movement within the Reformed family and the wider ecumenical world, and various involvements with justice issues in society, not only in Southern Africa, but in the "global village"...

When I accepted the position of head of the biblical studies department at the University of Namibia, in 1984, and my family joined the congregation of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in Windhoek, soon to be followed by a few other white "Protestants," Belhar immedi-

ately became the tower of strength that carried forward the difficult work of bringing down the walls of separation, prejudice, and fear in this “mixed” Christian community. Through shared meals in the white, black, and so-called colored townships of Windhoek, of the initiative “Koinonia Windhoek,” we brought Christians together in the spirit of Belhar; the Confession was studied, preached, and lived, until in 1995 we published a book, “Kom ons word EEN” (“Let us become ONE”), through which the Uniting Reformed Church (the old DR Mission Church in Namibia) invited the white DRC and the black Evangelical Reformed Church of Africa (ERCA) to indeed become one...

Another personal example of the effect of the Belhar is the inspiration it provided for me and a few other white Namibians to help break the deadlock in the Namibian peace process... Through carefully planned peaceful marches and demonstrations and information campaigns, the newly formed Namibia Peace Plan 435 group managed to overcome the severe ideological and smear campaigns of the South African “dirty tricks department” and to help mobilize the majority of the Namibian people, so that within three years the South Africans were probably even relieved to withdraw from Namibia “with honor,” to be able to deal with their own volatile situation. We still believe that it was the Belhar-like spirit of reconciliation and the sense of justice that helped Namibia to make its enormous transition in such a peaceful and orderly way...

I can mention a last Namibian-based instance of an “implication” of Belhar: the paradigm that was developed in public schools regarding the teaching of religion in Namibian schools. As chairperson of the new curriculum committee for religious and moral education, established by the minister of education, soon after independence, I was faced with the task to chart a new course in this crucial area. The committee had the new Namibian Constitution as a guideline, together with the resolve never again to privilege one religion above others. However, we did not want to throw the child away with the bathwater, and thus decided to develop a curriculum in which all major religious traditions would be taught, with an emphasis on their ethical teachings, so as to foster real understanding and respect (not only “tolerance”!), and so to prepare our learners to make informed ethical choices in life ahead. Thus, when September 11 came in 2001, we were sitting in a multi-faith meeting with the Muslim imams of the local mosques, together with Jews, Christians of evangelical and ecumenical persuasion, Baha’is and representatives of other religions—already busy with the agendas of working together towards better understanding and a “common ethos.” Belhar’s emphasis on God’s justice in all spheres of our worldly existence provides a very powerful theological back-up for such uncharted terrain—terrain which, worldwide, we cannot avoid any longer, not even under the First Amendment...

It seems to me that the inclusiveness of the Confession, not only dwelling inside the safe walls of the church, but “stepping off the plank” (Leonard Sweet), as it were, into the world, especially the world of the “other” (so easily seen as the stranger or the enemy), and the deep concern for all forms of marginalization and exclusion, are aspects of Belhar that present a powerful hermeneutic of “justice for all.” These principles, working positively for reconciliation wherever there is estrangement or exclusion (“women,” “children,” “gays and lesbians,” “foreigners,” Muslims,” “white middle-aged males”!) and “looking for other bikers to wave to on the roads of life,” and sensing God’s way of justice and peace in the world—are they not treasures exactly because they are part of what we believe, of what we confess, and thus live?

Excerpts from an address to RCA General Synod 2004 by the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb

There is another very important aspect of the Belhar Confession which we can apply to our context, which is the option for the poor and the concern for justice. Doug [Fromm] just quoted Martin Luther King Jr.: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Because

justice cannot be divided, justice cannot be partial. In the last part of the Belhar Confession it is clear that the approach is more general in this way. It doesn't speak specifically about the revelation of God through Christ but about revelation in broader terms. "We believe," the confession says, "that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among men." Clearly the confession draws our attention to the fact that God's option for the poor is universal. God is interested in bringing justice to all peoples in every nation, irrespective of their social, economic, or cultural background. This approach of Belhar is certainly a platform that can apply to Jews and Muslims. In this moment of truth I hope that holding up the Belhar Confession as a model for our own context can help us facilitate an interfaith confession which would restate some of what we are confessing here as Christians.

This principle, God's and the church's justice and care for the poor and suffering, is one of the most spiritually significant and theologically compelling contributions of Belhar for our Reformed faith.
—Gretel Van Wieren, in her address to the RCA General Synod, June 2003

SESSION 6 READINGS

Mennonite Church USA experience with Damascus Road and racial reconciliation

Since 1995, the Mennonite Church USA has been engaged in Damascus Road, an initiative designed to address racism in the church. In an editorial in the February 15, 2005, issue of The Mennonite, Everett J. Thomas writes the following:

Until an institution or group identifies its beginning place with honesty and humility, not much progress can be made. This also means that those in our denomination charged with dismantling racism cannot simply create one analysis that fits all groups and then write a curriculum.

Rather, each group interested in creating a truly multicultural, antiracist church must do the hard work of locating themselves on the road and committing to taking the next step along the way.

Damascus Road maintains at least two important principles associated with this journey. First, no group or institution can skip a stage in the transformation process. Second, moving from any one stage to the next is difficult and can be painful—no matter how advanced the stage.

The discouraging part of this work is that the more we work at dismantling racism, the more problems we uncover. Mennonite Church USA peace advocate Susan Mark Landis, a member of the Executive Board's antiracism team, recently explained why.

"The more we get into it," she said at last month's Executive Board meeting, "the harder it gets because [racial-ethnic] people finally have the courage to speak up. It is very hard."

The more we work at dismantling racism, the more those victimized by it begin to trust us—and then reveal more of how they experience our racism. They also ask for action.

To learn more about Damascus Road, go to www.mcc.org/damascusroad.

January 16, 2006, letter from Ina Montoya, youth pastor at Jicarilla Apache Reformed Church in Dulce, New Mexico, and member of the RCA's Commission on Race and Ethnicity

Dear Friends,

This is a letter describing racial prejudice or insensitivity that I have experienced in the church as a Native American. Most situations seem to happen out of ignorance, and I cannot say that in my lifetime I have been completely innocent of my own prejudices due to ignorance.

My first examples happened in churches where I've spoken. At one church, an elder Anglo woman commented to me on my oily skin: "Back in my day, we never allowed our forehead to become shiny; it was unheard of!" Some people, when I came to speak, expected me to have a broken English accent, and as they shook my hand on exiting the church they told me: "I was so relieved when I heard you speak good English with no foreign accent!" Actually, I myself prefer the voices of my grandmothers and other Native elders over my "midwestern" accent.

Then there is the frequent claim of white people to Indian heritage, particularly royal Indian heritage: "My great-great grandmother was a Cherokee Indian princess, though I cannot prove it." In reciprocation to this, Native Americans sometimes wear a T-shirt that reads, "I have a little bit of White in me, but I can't prove it."

My final example comes from worship at General Synod 2003. In response to my request that Native music be included, I was given a hymnbook to look for appropriate songs, but found nothing except songs that were very stereotypical. To my surprise, one of the songs chosen for worship was one of those songs, and it was accompanied by a monologue that took me back to a cowboy and Indian movie from the 1960s. Our Native drum beat was played on African drums for the sake of convenience and because "they both sound the same." The beat used for another Native song was more like one the cavalry would have used during a march of attack than like the steady American Indian rhythm we refer to as a heart beat.

Though these incidents happened years ago, the painful feelings they stirred in me are still present. The comments about my different skin and my non-accent rekindled the feelings of self-consciousness and self-contempt I experienced growing up as a Native American child.

Perhaps I should have been more insistent and assertive in the General Synod worship situation. I practiced notes to the stereotypical tune on my wooden flute without knowing or inquiring about the words that were to be used with it. And I should have walked across the stage of the Hope College chapel to correct the drum beat, but I did not feel it was my place to do so. Not enough self-esteem, I guess.

Nevertheless, my experiences at my speaking engagements and General Synod worship were mostly positive. I was able to tell about God's work being done on the Jicarilla Apache Reservation and to educate others about Native American culture.

—Ina Montoya

Letter from Tom Danney, pastor of First Reformed Church in Nyack, New York

We weren't looking to become a shared facility. We had heard the stories of scheduling and maintenance problems. We liked having the place to ourselves. One tenant five days a week was enough. But one problem was obvious: the church facilities (sanctuary, fellowship hall) sat idle for most of the week.

In the space of three years, we were approached by two individuals: the first wanted to begin a ministry to recent Spanish-speaking immigrants in the area, and the second wanted to begin a ministry to French-speaking Haitian Seventh-day Adventists. Permission was easily

given for both to begin. One ministry has been here for just over three years and has grown remarkably. The other has been with us only one year and has only a small worshipping congregation to date.

While financial contributions have been a welcome benefit to our budget, there are other ways both new congregations have given back to the “host” church. Their spiritual fervor, for starters. Their care of the building and care for the building is another. Out of immense gratitude, both congregations have been understanding and cooperative around scheduling matters, and they have been strong prayer partners with respect to the current ministry of this 166-year-old congregation.

Yet, different styles and languages have prevented unified worship times. In addition, both new congregations hold their services at unfamiliar worship hours for the “host” congregation. While unity is annually prayed for in our traditional congregation, unifying experiences—if only to simply know each other—have not found legs to move on. The newer congregations, while welcoming the idea of fellowshiping or eating together, have been slow to follow up when suggestions are made. And the “host” congregation struggles with its memories: other tenants in the past impacted the free use of “our” church space when we wanted to use it. Fear that this will happen again is very real.

If Christian unity is to be realized at all in this exciting mix of culturally and racially different congregations, the “host” congregation will have to move beyond permission-giving to real and desired participation. It will help if our congregation can lose the “host” mentality and risk new initiatives to connect with and know those who live with us in our home.

—Rev. Thomas C. Danney, February 2005

SESSION 7 READINGS

Excerpt from *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, by Ronald J. Sider (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004)

Graham Cyster, a Christian whom I know from South Africa, recently told me a painful story about a personal experience two decades ago when he was struggling against apartheid as a young South African evangelical. One night, he was smuggled into an underground Communist cell of young people fighting apartheid. “Tell us about the gospel of Jesus Christ,” they asked, half hoping for an alternative to the violent communist strategy they were embracing.

Graham gave a clear, powerful presentation of the gospel, showing how personal faith in Christ wonderfully transforms persons and creates one new body of believers where there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, rich nor poor, black nor white. The youth were fascinated. One seventeen-year-old exclaimed, “That is wonderful! Show me where I can see that happening.” Graham’s face fell as he sadly responded that he could not think of anywhere South African Christians were truly living out the message of the gospel. “Then the whole thing is a piece of sh—,” the youth angrily retorted. Within a month he left the country to join the armed struggle against apartheid—and eventually giving his life for his beliefs.

In Our Own Backyards, by Karen Barker, professor at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa

At Northwestern College we are working diligently to be more ethnically aware and diverse. We enter into relationship with an organization from Chicago. We do all kinds of mission trips during school breaks and during the summer. It looks good. It makes us feel good.

But all of these populations are away from us, mostly urban or in a different country. And all the while we are stumbling on what is right outside our doors. The Spanish-speaking population here has exploded in numbers. The American Indians have reservations less than an hour away from us. There is one of the largest Sudanese populations in this country an hour and a half from us in Sioux Falls. There is a large Asian population living in the Sioux City area. Where is the denomination's money so that individuals from these groups can attend one of its colleges? Of the four houses across the street from me, two of them are Spanish-speaking households. They are the best kind of neighbors. If they see me raking my leaves, they come over with their leaf blowers and their pick-up trucks to help. These households are Roman Catholic, so the chances are slim that they will come to church with me. So, the question becomes: What is the need that my church and my college can meet? We can hold free ESL classes for the parents of the children my children play with. We can hold free Spanish classes for people like me. Mission trips and long-distance relationships just aren't enough, when the nuances of racism and prejudice are all around us. Even in Iowa.

Making a Difference in Chicago

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The Church of the Good News (RCA) has a long history of involvement with its integrated Lathrop Homes neighborhood in north-side Chicago. This was once a thriving industrial area, but during the 1980s and '90s, manufacturers began fleeing the cities for the suburbs or rural areas (where land was cheaper) or for the South or other countries (where labor was cheaper).

The loss of jobs was devastating to Lathrop residents, many of whom had lived and worked in the area for many years. Liala Beukema, at that time the pastor of Church of the Good News, cites the case of her neighbor. "He has been employed at four different neighborhood plants. He has never been fired from any of those jobs. Each job loss was the result of a layoff due to a plant closing." By the late '90s the unemployment rate in the area had risen to around 90 percent

Even as jobs were moving out of the neighborhood, often beyond the reach of residents unable to afford transportation to more distant locations, welfare reforms made finding stable employment all the more critical. Adding to the neighborhood's woes was gentrification, a process in which older, low-income and blue-collar neighborhoods are redeveloped into updated, upscale new communities. Already, one former manufacturing site in the area had been converted into an expensive, gated community. Long-time residents feared that the result would be rising housing costs that would drive them from their homes.

When community leaders learned that yet another manufacturer (Cotter & Co.) was leaving the area, and that a gated community was being proposed for this site too (by the developer of the first gated community), they decided that enough was enough.

The Church of the Good News had hooked up with the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) in connection with an earlier issue, and the LSNA now became the main vehicle for neighborhood action.

One of the toughest challenges leaders faced was mobilizing neighborhood residents, many of whom, after prior defeats and years of being neglected and ignored, felt they had no hope, that "you can't fight city hall." But persistence paid off. People began meeting weekly at the church to research the issues and decide what they could do to stop the gated community. Talking to the owner of the manufacturing plant, the neighborhood group learned that building the gated community would require a zoning change. Investigating further, they learned that in Chicago, aldermen had a key role in zoning changes in their wards, and that the developer of the proposed gated community was currently building their alderman a very large

home in the first gated community at a very good price. A meeting was called, and over three hundred neighborhood people packed the church. At the meeting, another area manufacturer told the residents that if the gated community were built, he would be forced to relocate, taking with him another five hundred jobs. When this story hit the news, the mayor stepped in and declared that there would be no housing at the Cotter location.

This was a victory, but the residents felt they needed to decide what they did want to see on the property. They produced a document setting forth their requirements: five hundred living-wage jobs (jobs that paid well enough to support a family) with benefits and job training. Every time a developer made a proposal that did not meet LSNA's requirements, they fought it. They relentlessly pressured city officials. Says Beukema, "Every time we'd hear that there was going to be a meeting with a developer, we'd try to meet with the [planning] commissioner, try to meet with the developer. If we couldn't get any satisfaction there, we'd end up on the fifth floor to meet with the mayor. We became very close friends with the fifth-floor security guards. They'd see the elevator doors open, they'd see our faces, and they'd pull out the ropes to block off the door to the mayor's office."

Their unrelenting presence made a difference. Planning department officials, perhaps embarrassed by the group's frequent visits to the fifth floor, began to be more proactive. But, says Beukema, it also made a difference in the attitude of the neighborhood. "Partly because of the early decision of the mayor not to put housing there. But also because a kind of community camaraderie developed over the course of time, as people went to actions together and heard reports about actions. People began to feel like something was really possible."

Eventually a proposed use was put forward that the LSNA felt would be beneficial to the neighborhood. Costco Companies Inc. wanted to open its first Chicago store on the site. Costco offered living-wage jobs with benefits for all employees, both full- and part-time. They planned to hire over two hundred people, and other development at the site was expected to bring in the rest of the jobs the group hoped for.

The new alderman called a meeting to discuss Costco's proposal, but held the meeting in a location that was not convenient for the Lathrop residents. Beukema and other community leaders felt this was a deliberate strategy to limit the neighborhood's participation. In an interview, Beukema and Nancy Aardema, executive director of LSNA, described how the community responded:

Beukema: We organized a march from the Church of the Good News, which is right by Lathrop, over to St. Bonaventure [the meeting location]. We wanted to all enter in a group and show our unity. We also wanted to make it fun. We had over 70 people. We handed out sack lunches. We had drums. We had signs. It was a parade.

Aardema: By this time, we had had many, many actions. We had flied all the traffic in the neighborhood. We'd had candlelight vigils. We'd had prayer vigils. This march was a celebration of all of our work, with songs and a festive atmosphere.

Beukema: We sat very respectfully in the back of the room. We far outnumbered the people from the gentrified area. Costco did their presentation, then we began to ask questions. Really we just wanted a public agreement to two things: that they would do the job training with us, and that they would utilize us as a resource for hiring people in the neighborhood. And the alderman stood up and totally lost it. Just absolutely got furious. He said we didn't have a right to ask that, and who did we think we were. What happened next was great. A number of people in the gentrified section of the audience stood up and said, "We don't get it. Why can't you agree to that?" So most of the anger got

directed toward the alderman, and we were sitting in the back of the room eating our sack lunches.

Aardema: As we were leaving the meeting, the police [who had been called by the alderman] were standing there. And they said, “You guys look pretty peaceful.”

Beukema: We offered them sandwiches, apples, juice boxes. It was fun. So that was a victory, at least a partial agreement on the hiring. But the bigger victory was that here are all of these people who at one time were our enemies, or seeming enemies, who are supporting us now, who are starting to understand our concerns. That was very encouraging.

Further reflections from Liala Beukema

The lesson of changing the leadership paradigm from top down to bottom up is one the most valuable gifts I have been given from the Church of the Good News community. Early on in our tenure at Good News, the good people of Good News and the public housing community gently but firmly challenged us to move from the process of “doing for” to “doing with” and to experience the power of this change. That story is documented in my husband George Beukema’s book, *Stories from Below the Poverty Line: Urban Lessons for Today’s Mission* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001).

In the mid ’90s, as conditions in our community began to change and gentrification was steadily eating away at valuable resources for economic development and stability, our church engaged the neighborhood in an intentional process of organizing. Weeks and months of one-on-one interviews, community gatherings, brainstorming, prioritizing, and relationship-building created a strong, dedicated, and unified body of folks who were able to withstand seven long years of combating market forces, political resistance, and human discouragement while we worked to prevent the eighteen-acre [Cotter] site from being converted from manufacturing to upscale housing. Because of our unified voice, at the end of the struggle our community was able to negotiate with the city of Chicago and the commercial developer for resources for job training for community residents, first opportunity for job interviews, and a year-long mentoring and support program for training graduates who were hired. As a result, fifty people from our community garnered living-wage jobs with full medical and dental benefits. Three years later 65 percent of those hired from our program are still employed.

We would not have had this success without creating a strong bond. It was this bond, rooted in the wisdom, the voice, the dreams, the commitment of the people of the community that shaped and sustained the movement through the ups and downs, the victories and defeats of a seven-year struggle. It was the people’s collective history of being too long forgotten and neglected that fueled stamina and perseverance when other folks might have been inclined to give up the fight.

To have been invited into this process has been one of the most amazing and humbling experiences of my life, one for which I am truly grateful.

Orange City and Bronx Churches Partner in Mutual Mission, by RCA editorial staff

As president and vice president of General Synod, respectively, Steve Vander Molen and Irving Rivera are spending a lot of time together this week. But this is hardly their first meeting, though Vander Molen pastors a church in Orange City, Iowa, and Rivera in the Bronx, New York. For the past nine years, their congregations have kept up a relationship of friendship, mutual support, and joint mission in a bond Rivera says was “birthed by the Holy Spirit.”

In early 1996, First Reformed Church in Orange City was looking for a spring mission trip destination. They decided on Fordham Manor Reformed Church in the Bronx, where good

things were happening in the ministry of the congregation, but the building was damaged beyond the congregation's ability to patch it up.

The RCA calls the kind of relationship between First Reformed Church and Fordham Manor Reformed Church "mutual mission." RCA Global Mission encourages RCA members, congregations, and classes to form partnerships with people and churches in other parts of their country and abroad, for the enrichment and support of both partners.

These partnerships also include classis companionships, experiential journeys, and pastoral and seminary student exchanges, but many mutual mission relationships begin with a volunteer service trip. Steve Vander Molen says about his church's work group experiences in New York City, "We have as much to gain from the partnership as to give. The kind of ministries they're involved in have enlivened and empowered people from our congregation."

On March 3—"a day that will live with me forever," Rivera says—three vans with thirty-some members of First Reformed Church, including Pastor Vander Molen, pulled up at Fordham Manor. To the surprise of Pastor Rivera (not to mention the Iowa work group), thirty people from the Fordham Manor congregation ran up and hugged the work group members.

"I couldn't believe what I was seeing," Rivera recalls. "It was beautiful; I had to pull aside to a corner, and I wept. I thought, 'This is truly Pentecost.'"

The Iowa team, joined by members of the New York congregation, painted, replaced windows and doors, and replaced worn-out flooring. But the most significant transformation wasn't in the facilities. As members of the two congregations shared meals and worked side by side, a deep relationship developed. There were tears in the eyes of both church groups when they said goodbye at the end of that week.

Both Rivera and Vander Molen describe those five days together as a turning in their congregation's outlook. Rivera felt encouraged in his own ministry and was amazed at the change he saw in the congregation. "We were experiencing slow growth, but since '96 it took off and hasn't stopped," he says. "Now we're talking about expanding the building eight hundred to a thousand feet!"

Since then, the relationship has deepened. When First Reformed has sent work groups to other New York City churches, members of Fordham Manor have often offered them hospitality and sent members to work alongside them. Members of Fordham Manor have visited First Reformed, and First Reformed now funds a scholarship for minority students at Northwestern College in Orange City, which has enabled at least one student from Fordham Manor to attend. Fordham Manor has started relationships with other churches in their area, collaborating in evangelism ministries and spending time enjoying each other's company.

Officiating at this General Synod is another step in the partnership between the two churches, as Vander Molen sees it: "So here we are, two pastors who'd rolled up their sleeves together in '96, president and vice president nine years later."

"We're from very different cultures and contexts, but our two congregations have really bonded in unique ways," Vander Molen says. Rivera comments, "Whenever the two groups meet, it's amazing. There's a real bond there that speaks of what God is trying to do in our denomination."

"I pray that this would happen with more churches," he adds. "Whenever I go to First Reformed in Orange City, I feel like I'm going to my home church."

Isaiah 61 Project Brings Hope to Urban Youth, by RCA editorial staff

“The Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed...They shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations” (Isaiah 61:1, 4).

Dr. Oliver Patterson is a professor of language and literacy at New York University and a member of First Reformed Church in Jamaica, Queens, New York. After September 11, 2001, Patterson and Reformed Church World Service coordinator Betty Voskuil discussed how to help urban youth deal with the violence of the terrorist attacks, as well as the stresses of their daily lives.

The Isaiah 61 project arose out of those discussions. With help from funds from Reformed Church World Service, two Reformed congregations in inner New York City now welcome dozens of children and young people who come two days a week to play basketball, spend time with friends, and learn more about themselves and the world around them.

Why did project leaders choose the name “Isaiah 61” for the project?

Isaiah 61 is the clearest statement of the social justice mission of Jesus Christ: to free the imprisoned, the brokenhearted, and the poor. We take imprisonment to mean more than physical incarceration but also mental imprisonment caused by the brokenness of society.

Our project attempts to heal that brokenness by having children and youth critically understand the social forces that work to maintain such evils as racism, sexism, and social classism. We attempt to teach them that all things are possible through Jesus the Christ. Our hope is that the children who attend the project will become the leaders of the cities and bring healing to all who hurt.

How does the project go about doing that?

We focus on four themes: peace and violence, identity, health, and leadership.

The program opens with worship, prayer, and contemporary gospel music, songs the kids like—it opens their spirits after a day of school. We have a social drama that vivifies the real-world issues of the children. Then we talk about it, interpret it. We do a lot of talking, a lot of writing, a lot of reading.

People in the community—teachers, nurses, construction workers, plumbers—have come and talked to the kids about their lives and work. A local shop owner who sells very expensive jackets gave the kids insight into the costs of the clothing and how much profit is made; they engaged in critical reflection about marketing and costs. The shop owner told the children that the jackets were overpriced and that they should not buy them.

The images presented by the pop media, especially for black kids, are not very wholesome. When we introduce them to people in the community who are positive, they get to see true role models.

We also integrate field trips into the curriculum.

“One of the real goals of the project was to learn from the things we did and share them with other churches,” says Oliver Patterson. “We’re currently sharing what we’ve done with other churches; Elmendorf Reformed in Harlem is adapting the curriculum to their after-school program.” For more information about the Isaiah 61 project or suggestions on applying the project’s curriculum at your church, email Michelle Patterson at Michelle1367@netzero.net.

SESSION 8 READINGS

Reflections on Civil Disobedience, by Robina Winbush, ecumenical officer for the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

“Pastor, Pastor...did you go to jail?” The children of my church and community greeted me with this question one afternoon in the spring of 1999. I looked at their questioning faces and knew that it was important that I find the correct way to explain my actions to them. These children were used to adults going to jail, but usually it was for something that the adult had done wrong. How did I explain going to jail for something that was right? I smiled and told them to make sure they were in church the next Sunday and they would get an answer to their question.

Needless to say, they were all at the Hollis Presbyterian Church the next Sunday and they had also brought their friends. As they rushed down for the children’s message, I looked at their expectant and waiting eyes. “I hear there’s a rumor going around that the pastor went to jail. Yes, I did.” Somewhere between the gasp and the dead silence, I knew I had their attention. I asked them how many had heard about a man named Amadou Diallo, who had been shot forty-one times by police officers in the Bronx and he hadn’t done anything wrong. Their faces dropped and their heads nodded. I explained that I had joined with other ministers, people of faith and just plain citizens in going to One Police Plaza to let the police, the mayor, the city and the world know that we thought this was very wrong and we wanted the police officers brought to trial. They began to understand. We talked about Martin Luther King, Jr. and how he led people to jail to protest when African Americans weren’t being treated fairly or justly. I watched them begin to connect history with their lives. I explained that I went to jail for a very little while, to make sure that they lived in a city where they would be treated fairly and justly.

A year later, on the Friday when the four police officers were acquitted of the charges related to shooting an innocent Black man forty-one times and killing him, I had a confirmation class to teach. I wasn’t sure how I was going to teach class that evening. As the class gathered, there was an uneasy and unusual quietness about the students. It was a class made up of 60 percent African American males between the ages of ten and thirteen. They were never quiet. But this day was different. I asked them what was up. They asked me if I had heard about the verdict in the Amadou Diallo case. I said yes. I knew that before we could talk about the catechism questions, we needed to talk about the verdict and where was Jesus in all of this. I let them talk and listened to their stories of seeing their fathers’ and brothers’ and uncles’ and grandfathers’ encounters with the police. I saw the fear in their eyes and the vulnerability of their spirits. Their anger was minor in comparison with the deep sense of betrayal they felt. As I listened, I prayed for a way to pull them out of the traps of helplessness and defeat that were holding their spirits. I knew that confirmation for these children would have to be more than learning the catechism questions, reciting the Apostle’s Creed and professing the faith of their parents and the church. Confirmation would have to answer the fundamental question, “Who is Jesus to an African American male child in world that is hostile to his very life?”

A Ministry of Hope in the Holy Land, by John Hubers, supervisor of RCA mission in the Middle East

January 6, 2005

The Belhar Confession was formulated as a response to an oppressive political situation based at least partly on what some South African Christians considered good biblical teaching (much as those who held slaves did so based on their reading of scripture). Those who wrote this confession challenged these beliefs, noting that they flew in the face of one of the most

important themes of the Bible, which is reconciling justice.

Palestinians face a similar situation to that faced by black South Africans under apartheid. Here, too, they find themselves living under the heel of a government which has put in place an oppressive system which robs them of their dignity and humanity. With the construction of what has been called by some an “apartheid wall,” their lives are even more circumscribed and delimited. They “live and move and have their being” in the suffocating grip of a humiliating military occupation.

Some Palestinians have responded with retributive violence, which has only served to make the situation more desperate. Others approach it with resignation. Palestinian Christians have for the most part chosen to take a more constructive path, one which echoes Belhar’s prophetic witness to the biblical voice of reconciling justice.

One such person is Palestinian Lutheran pastor the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, whose moving presentations at last year’s General Synod helped those who attended gain a better understanding of the true nature of the issues involved. Dr. Raheb does not mince words when it comes to identifying the evils of the Israeli occupation: “The Israeli government is unilaterally deciding where the boundaries for the Palestinian homelands should go,” he says with a justifiable sense of outrage. “We can compare the resulting situation to a piece of Swiss cheese. Israel controls the cheese, and the Palestinians live in the holes. And what this will inevitably lead to, unfortunately, is a system of injustice—which is irrevocable.”

This, however, does not lead him to despair or to justify a nihilistic violent response. On the contrary he continues to hold out hope that justice will prevail. This is what has led him to establish what may be the most hope-filled ministry taking place in the West Bank today with his International Center of Bethlehem (www.annadwa.org). Inaugurated in 1995 with a staff of four, the ICB has now become “one of the largest private employers in the Bethlehem region.” Its stated aim is “to equip the local community to assume a proactive role in shaping their future” through quality educational programs for all ages (“womb to tomb”). In a conversation I had with Mitri this past summer he said that what he is attempting to do with this ministry is to create a sense of normalcy in a situation which is anything but, preparing Palestinian young people in particular for a future which will allow them to live as responsible and productive citizens in a free society which he believes they will one day have.

The biblical foundation for this ministry is clear. It’s found in the way God’s people have always lived as though God’s promised “shalom” is a given. The framers of the Belhar Confession had a similar vision—believing that injustice cannot and will not stand in a world ordered by a God who demands justice. Here, too, the call is to live as people who know that “redemption draweth nigh.”

The Reformed Church through its volunteer office is encouraging young people to get involved with this ministry of hope by volunteering their time and gifts to a summer program the center runs for Palestinian children. Northwestern College is considering it as part of their Summer of Service program. The hope is that there will be a good response to this so we, too, can have a role to play, however small, in Christ’s ministry of hope in the Holy Land.

Letter to My Grandson, by Dr. Edwin Mulder (who is white)

Dear Tom,

Your grandmother and I want you to know how very proud we are of you. Congratulations on making the golf team of your high school as a freshman. And what is this that we hear about your having a lead in the spring musical at your school? All those piano and voice lessons are paying off. We think it is great that in addition to your studies you are taking advantage of all these opportunities.

Life is like that Tom, full of opportunities. In your short life you have had so many wonder-

ful experiences of traveling, living in an affluent neighborhood, and having parents who make possible lots of neat things. Along with all of these privileges comes responsibility. We know that you are grateful for all this, and, that there are tons of kids in the world who do not have the opportunities that are yours. The world can be a cruel place, and it is for many people. What the world needs are people who care and strive to make a difference. I believe that you are one of those persons whose life is going to make a difference.

One of the most formative experiences of your grandfather's life was a visit to South Africa. There I saw how white people exploited people of color in the name of God. At the same time it made me look into my own life, and I realized that while there had not been many people of color in my world, I had prejudices that I needed to acknowledge. I realized that I had much to learn from people of other races and cultures. I was fifty years old at the time. Since then I have come a long way in valuing all God's people. You are living in a multicultural world. Affirm that world, Tom. Learn from people whose traditions and cultures are different from yours. Be an advocate for people who have no voice.

I remember the day you were born. What a great day that was! I can hardly believe that you are 15 and beginning to notice girls. I know that you are starting to think about where you want to go to college, and what you want to do with your life. Whatever you do, I pray that you will think about how you can make the world a better place in which to live. Never discount the difference you can make. The Jesus in whom you have put your faith calls you to be a light in a world where there is a lot of darkness. Tom, let Jesus live in and through your life.

Remember your grandmother and I will be in the bleachers cheering you on as you run the race of your life.

With all the love in the world,
Your grandfather (Ed Mulder)

Letter to a Grandson, by Sara Smith (who is African American)

Dear Justin,

Today, while cleaning and sorting out books in an overloaded bookcase, I found an old journal of mine that was written many years ago. When I opened the journal and started reading, time stood still!

Landing at Jan Smuts Airport—I shall never forget. The narrow entrance to the custom hall was flanked by two policemen in olive garb fatigues with sub-machine guns casually swinging over their shoulders.

A cold streak went up and down my spine as I observed young white armed soldiers and policemen strolling arrogantly throughout the big custom hall displaying their badge and dress of authority. This eerie scene introduced this black American to the police state of South Africa.

As I waited in the big custom hall many thoughts and expectations about the journey to South Africa drifted to and fro through my mind.

Justin, that was many, many years ago. But as I kept on reading the “happenings” I experienced in that time and place, I reflected on our family life's journey and our involvement in the civil rights movement. I can truly say God has blessed us with some progress and some victories. But, the struggle for justice and human rights for all of God's children is still ever present all around us and world wide.

I was truly grateful for the genuine honesty of the people I met on that South African journey. I will always treasure the memory of sharing everyday experiences under apartheid, worshiping and praying together. These unforgettable opportunities reinforced for me the determination and steadfastness in “keeping the faith” in the midst of despair and overwhelm-

ing pain. It was a privilege to have lived with my sisters and brothers in the segregated townships and witnessed the experiences of their daily lives.

Many incidents during that South African journey often forced me to revisit painful racist memories in my life. Even today when I recall some of these experiences the pain is still there.

Florence Seese was one of my favorite grammar school teachers. On the first day of school in fifth grade, Ms. Seese seated all of the black children in the last seat in each row in the back of the room. Ms. Seese was the organist for the “uptown” United Methodist Church.

As a college student in Kansas, I was refused service in the main room of a local diner. My fellow students organized a protest demonstration led by the president of the college in front of the diner.

During the early years of our marriage Grand-dad (a war veteran) and I had to write a scathing letter to the Mayor of New York City to secure decent housing for our growing family.

Justin, these experiences and many, many more have impacted our lives and demanded that we be “doers of the word.” And, today more than ever Christians are demanded to actively witness against and strive to eliminate any form of injustice. Sadly to say, the tentacles of racism are still found in our society and even within our Christian community of faith.

My hope and constant prayer is that Christians everywhere will truly become the “light of the world” to ensure “there is a better day a coming” for you and future generations.

Love and prayers,
Grandma Sara

As long as we have stories to tell to each other there is hope. As long as we can remind each other of the lives of men and women in whom the love of God becomes manifest, there is reason to move forward to a new land in which new stories are hidden.

—*The Living Reminder*, Henri J. M. Nouwen
(New York: The Seabury Press, 1977)

SESSION 9 READINGS

Report on speech given on October 3, 2000, at Western Theological Seminary (Holland, Michigan) by Dr. Sam Pick, director of Diaconal Services in Cape, South Africa

“I open my eyes and feel like I’m in another country,” says Dr. Sam Pick, referring to the last decade of conciliatory changes in South Africa.

One component of the positive changes has been the Belhar Confession, adopted as a creed by the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa and integrated into music, worship, and personal confessions of guilt...

Although Pick does not foresee immediate reconciliation between whites and blacks in South Africa, he remains optimistic about the future. He believes that policy will bring South Africans together, despite the many dialects and cultures prevalent there. For example, schools are now open to all students, and children of all races learn together.

**Excerpts from an address to RCA General Synod 2002 by Dr. Molefi Seth Petikoe,
Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa**

Mr. President, moderators of committees, honorable members and guests of this great gathering, ladies and gentlemen, it is both an honor and a privilege for me to represent the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa...

We were...delighted to learn that General Synod 2001 approved the [Belhar] Confession [for] church-wide study...

The Confession of Belhar is indeed a valued possession of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. It functions in the Uniting Church as an instrument for profound self-examination, to help determine whether the church really lives by the faith it proclaims...

The traditional Reformed confessions that date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, despite their value and significance for the faith of the church, are inadequate to express the fullness of the Reformed faith. The main themes of the Belhar—the unity of the church and the reconciliation between peoples and God's justice for the poor and the destitute—are not addressed in these confessions. Very little is said about the unity of the church. Reconciliation and justice for the poor are completely absent...

The Reformed churches, not only of South Africa, but of the world, would be significantly poorer without Belhar and what Belhar professes. The implications of Belhar are far wider than its original context. Our wish is that the Reformed family would recognize this and not see it as only South African.

**Excerpt from an address to RCA General Synod 2003 by the Rev. Gretel Van Wieren,
pastor of Lawyersville Reformed Church in Cobleskill, New York**

Belhar follows in the Reformed tradition of expressing core beliefs through confession. The theological contributions of Belhar—unity, reconciliation and justice—are solidly biblical and affirm fundamental aspects of Reformed faith. Belhar is special in that it has been issued as a cry of faith from brothers and sisters in Christ—who have suffered immeasurable oppression and pain—on the other side of the world. Because of its solid theological content and special geographical and social context, Belhar represents a profound and unprecedented gift to the broader church.

Excerpts from an address to RCA General Synod 2004 by the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, general director of the International Center of Bethlehem and senior pastor of Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem

The fact that this confession deals with a very specific context at a very specific time in history, with reference to a very specific land, ironically gives it greater significance for the worldwide church. This because it is not theory, but a statement of truth arising out of a very real life situation...At the same time, we must say that its contextual nature means we cannot just take the Belhar Confession as it is to use for our (the Palestinian) situation, which reflects yet another context. This is the work of the Holy Spirit—to help us to take the Word of God spoken in the Belhar Confession and help us articulate it in a new way for our context.

RCA General Synod resolutions relevant to the Belhar Confession

R-1 (MGS 1995, p. 405) – RCA to pursue relationship with Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa:

To request the Commission on Christian Unity to consult with the appropriate offices of the URCSA with the input of the African-American Council, to develop a plan for correspon-

dence and continuing relationships between the respective assemblies and congregations of the RCA and URCSA.

R-14 (*MGS 1999*, p. 115) – RCA to address racial prejudice and intolerance:

To encourage all members of the RCA to speak boldly, in the spirit of Christian love, against acts of intolerance, racism, and police violence; and further, to encourage commissions, synods, and classes to work with all deliberate speed in the implementation of past and present recommendations in addressing issues of prejudice and racial intolerance.

R-13 (*MGS 2000*, p. 100) – Belhar Confession as a means of responding to R-1 and R-14 (above)

To instruct the Commission on Christian Unity to commend the Belhar Confession to the church over the next decade for reflection, study, and response, as a means of deepening the RCA's commitment to dealing with racism and strengthening its ecumenical commitment to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and other Reformed bodies.

Reasons:

1. This recommendation is one of CCU's responses to R-14 (*MGS 1999*, p. 115).
2. Racism is a sin that the Belhar Confession confronts.
3. The RCA needs to take a look at racism within the RCA.
4. This recommendation honors the RCA's relationship with the URCSA and previous agreements.

Overview of Current Reformed Confessions and Comparison with Belhar Confession

Belgic Confession:

Date: 1561

Author: Primarily Guido de Bres, a preacher in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands

Birthplace: The Netherlands

Context: Severe persecution of Reformed churches in the Netherlands (including Belgium) by its then Roman Catholic government

Purpose: Sent to King Philip II to protest the cruel oppression and to prove to the persecutors that Reformed Christians were not rebels, but law-abiding citizens who professed true Christian doctrine according to the Holy Scriptures

Heidelberg Catechism:

Date: circa 1563

Authors: Credited to Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus

Birthplace: Heidelberg, Germany

Context: Requested by Elector Frederick III, ruler of the German province of Palatinate, to provide a basis for Reformed theological instruction in the church.

Purpose: To teach

Canons of Dort:

Date: 1618-1619

Birthplace: Dordrecht, The Netherlands

Context: Severe disagreement in the church over key issues of theology

Purpose: To affirm principle beliefs of Calvinism—total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints (TULIP).

Belhar Confession

Date: 1982

Birthplace: Belhar, South Africa

Context: Unjust, racist system of government in South Africa called apartheid.

Purpose: In opposition to apartheid, to affirm the unity of the church, reconciliation between peoples, and God's justice for the poor and destitute.

Why the Belhar Confession is valuable—a summary

- It fills a significant gap: there is little mention in classical confessions of the central biblical principle of God's justice and special care for the poor and suffering. The Belhar fills this gap in the standard confessions.
- Its content is fundamental to our faith: the unity of the church, reconciliation of peoples in Christ, and God's justice and care for the suffering and poor are fundamental biblical principles that lie at the core of the Reformed faith.
- It's the only confession the global church has from Africa and the Southern hemisphere.

How could the church make use of the Belhar Confession?

- As a study/reflection resource document
- As a confession on par with Our Song of Hope
- As a new standard of unity on par with the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dort
- A new category could be created, such as confessional documents. Confessional documents would function more like the Presbyterian confessions. They would not have the same weight as the Standards (they wouldn't, for example, be part of the Declaration for Ministers).

Appendix B: Songs

SESSION 2

“Perdon, Senor”/“Forgive Us, Lord”

Todos/All B \flat C Dm *Fine* *Soloista/Solo or choir* Fmaj7/C *Todos/All* B \flat C

Spanish 1 Per-dón, Se - ñor. Por tan - tas in - jus - ti - cias, Per - dón, Se -
 2 Per-dón, Se - ñor. Es - ta - mos en pri - sio - nes, Per - dón, Se -
 English 1 For - give us, Lord. For all the world's in - jus - tice, For - give us,
 2 For - give us, Lord. We're shack - led by our ha - bits, For - give us,

Soloista/Solo or choir Dm Gm/B \flat Dm/A *Todos/All* B \flat C Dm D.C.

ñor. Por tan - ta in - di - fe - ren - cia, Per - dón, Se - ñor.
 ñor. Es - cla - vos del pe - ca - do, Per - dón, Se - ñor.
 Lord. For all of our in - dif - ference, For - give us, Lord.
 Lord. We're chained to dis - o - be - dience, For - give us, Lord.

Spanish soloista

English solo or choir

3 Al perdonar a otros, . . .
 De acuerdo a tu promesa, . . .

3 As we forgive each other, . . .
 According to your promise, . . .

4 Libera hoy tu pueblo, . . .
 Que pueda hoy servirte, . . .

4 Deliver us from evil, . . .
 For joyful service free us, . . .

Text and music: Jorge Lockward

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A native of the Dominican Republic, Jorge Lockward is Global Praise program coordinator for the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. He served on the editorial board of *Mil Voces Para Celebrar*, a Methodist hymnal (Abingdon Press, 1996). Lockward is also the conductor-in-residence of *Cantico Nuevo* (New Son), a music, arts, and liturgy ecumenical project in New York City, and he leads numerous worship and music workshops throughout the U.S.

“Nkosi! Nkosi!”/“Lord, Have Mercy”

(8)

Nko - si! Nko - si, yi - ba ne - nce - ba ku - thi. (x 2)
 Kre - stu! Kre - stu, yi - ba ne - nce - ba ku - thi. (x 2)
 Nko - si! Nko - si, yi - ba ne - nce - ba ku - thi. (x 2)
 Lord, have mer - cy, oh Lord, have mer - cy on us. (x 2)
 Christ, have mer - cy, oh Christ, have mer - cy on us. (x 2)
 Lord, have mer - cy, oh Lord, have mer - cy on us. (x 2)

Words: Traditional prayer of petition in Xhosa language (South Africa)

Music: Mziwamadoda Joseph Singiswa, South Africa (Xhosa), 1979; trans. David Dargie

“Nkosi! Nkosi!” (“Lord, Have Mercy”) from *Halle, Halle* compiled by Dr. C. Michael Hawn

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This song is from the Xhosa (South Africa) tradition. It was created in one of the many group composition workshops facilitated by David Dargie throughout South Africa. Singiswa composed the Kyrie as part of a complete musical setting of the mass in 1979 while he was still a school boy. His mass has proven to be very popular in Xhosa churches. Singiswa is now a choirmaster at Zwelitsha. The mass is often accompanied on the maribas developed by David Dargie from Shona instruments for use in the Xhosa context.

“Nkosi” is obviously a traditional prayer of petition derived from the Greek text “Kyrie Eleison.” It can prepare the congregation for offering spoken prayers. The choir could continue to hum “Nkosi” as petitions are spoken over it. It is an excellent selection to establish a sense of unity between praying and singing.

“Psalm 51”

Refrain 1

Greek Ky - ri-e e - le - i - son. Ky - ri-e e - le - i - son.
 English Lord, have mer - cy. Lord, have mer - cy.

Note: Lower voices may hum.

Ky - ri-e e - le - i - son. Ky - ri-e e - le - i - son.
 Lord, have mer - cy. Lord, have mer - cy.

This refrain was composed in 1987 by Dinah Reindorf of Ghana, who formerly conducted the Nigerian National Orchestra.

Text: Early Greek liturgy


Music: Dina Reindorf (20th cent.), Ghana; arr. *Sing! A New Creation*

©1987, Dina Reindorf; arr. ©2001 CRC Publications. Used with permission.

SESSION 3

“¡Miren que Bueno!”/“Behold, How Pleasant”


Estribillo/Refrain




to verses last time

¡Mi - ren qué bue - no, qué bue - no es!
Be - hold, how pleas - ant, how good it is!

Estrofas/Verses



Mi - ren qué bue - no es cuan - do los her - ma - nos es - tán jun - tos:
How pleas - ant and har - mon - ious when God's peo - ple are to - geth - er:



D.C.

1. es co - mo a - cei - te bue - no de - rra - ma - do so - bre Aa - rón.
2. se pa - re - ce al ro - cí - o so - bre los mon - tes de Sión.
3. por - que el Se - ñor nos man - da vi - da e - ter - na y ben - di - ción.
1. fra - grant as pre - cious oil when run - ning fresh on Aa - ron's beard.
2. fresh like the morn - ing dew that falls on Si - on's ho - ly hill.
3. there is where God be - stows the bless - ing, life for ev - er - more.

Words: Pablo Sosa (Argentina) 1972, tr. Pablo Sosa (based on Psalm 133)

Music: Pablo Sosa, 1972.

Words and music ©1974 Pablo Sosa. Used with permission.

Pablo Sosa is one of the foremost authorities on Latin American sacred music. He has degrees from an ecumenical seminary in Buenos Aires now called Instituto Superior Evangelico de Estudios Teologicos (ISEDET) and Westminster Choir College, as well as further study at Union Seminary (New York) and in Germany. A Methodist minister, professor, composer, and conductor, Sosa has a varied career both at home and abroad. His works appear in several hymnals in North America and are sung widely at ecumenical gatherings around the world. Sosa has a passion to bring congregational song to his people in their own musical idiom.

Sosa was asked by the pastor of the Flores Methodist Church to write a song for a fellowship occasion following a worship service in 1970. The pastor wanted to encourage a sense of communion among the members of the congregation and a celebration of the joy of being together. After choosing Psalm 133 as the text, Sosa inquired among his biblical colleagues at ISEDET, the seminary where he taught, about the meaning of oil running down Aaron's beard. He was told that it was an image of extravagance and joy. At the church social, Sosa invited the people to think of other delightful images of extravagance. These were inserted into the song along with the text written by Sosa. Among those ideas offered was one by a child who said that the joy of being together was like tasting the first ice cream of the hot summer, especially in January, the middle of the summer in the southern hemisphere.

SESSION 4

“Somos Uno en Cristo”

Spanish So - mos u - no en Cris-to, so-mos u - no, so - mos u - no,
English We are one in Christ Je - sus, all one bod-y, all one spir-it,

u - no só - lo. só - lo. Un so - lo Dios,
 geth - er. geth - er. We share one God,

un so - lo Se - ñor, u - na so - la fe,
 one might - y Lord, one a - bid - ing faith,

un so - lo a - mor, un so - lo bau - tis - mo, un so - lo Es -
 one bind - ing love, one sin - gle bap - tism, one Ho - ly

p' - ri - tu y e - se es el Con - so - la - dor.
 Com-fort-er, the Ho - ly Spir - it, u - nit-ing all.

Chords: Em, B7, Em 1, Em 2, Am

Text and music: Anonymous; tr. Alice Parker, arr. Philip W. Blycker, all arr. Jorge Lockward
 Tr. ©1996, Abingdon Press, admin. The Copyright Company; arr. ©1992, Celebremos/Libros
 Alianze. Used with permission.

“Somos Uno en Cristo” is a *corito*—a short, lively folk song, with its text based in Scripture or a scriptural story. In this case, the text is from Ephesians, a reminder to the body of Christ of who we are and what truly unites us: one Lord, one faith, one love, one baptism, one Spirit. This song could be used on Worldwide Communion Sunday (the first Sunday in October) or during the passing of peace. Sing twice, then improvise softly while the congregation greets each other. When they return to their places, sing again.

Philip Blyker, who arranged the music for this anonymous piece, is a Texan who served as a missionary in Venezuela. He was a major force behind the recent outpouring of traditional hymn texts written to Latin American music. He has also composed or arranged more than a dozen songs in the Spanish-language Methodist hymnal *Mil Voces*.

“Be Thou My Vision”

Be thou my wis - dom, and thou my true word;

I ev - er with thee and thou with me, Lord;

thou my great Fa - ther, thy child let me be;

thou in me dwell - ing, and I one with thee.

Irish folk melody; tr. by Mary Byrne, 1905; versified by Eleanor Hull, 1912.

SESSION 5

“Canto de Esperanze”/“Song of Hope”

Descant

(jah) Hal - le - lu -

G G6 Am/G

Spanish 1 ¡Dios de la es - pe - ran - za, da - nos go - zo y paz!
Dios de la jus - ti - cia, mán - da - nos tu luz.

English 1 May the God of hope go with us ev - ery day,
May the God of jus - tice speed us on our way,

jah, hal - le - lu -

D7 G

Al mun - do en cri - sis, ha - bla tu ver - dad.
Luz y es - pe - ran - za en la os -
fill - ing all our lives with love and joy and peace.
bring - ing light and hope to ev - ery

Estribillo/Refrain

2 hal - le - lu - jah. Pray - ing, let us work for peace.

G G Am Am7

cu - ri - dad. O - re - mos por la paz,
land and race. Pray - ing, let us work for peace,

Argentinian folk song, anonymous; tr. Alvin Schutmaat
“Canto de esperanze”/“Song of Hope” arranged by Tom Mitchell ©1993 Choristers Guild,
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“Canto de Esperanze,” an anonymous Argentinian folk song, reminds us that although Christ has come already and God’s full reign is imminent, we are still waiting, struggling, praying, and celebrating as we work faithfully together—in hope—for the world God loves.

SESSION 6

“Mayenziwe”/“Your Will Be Done”

Xhosa Ma - ye - (Ma - ye) nzi - we 'nta - ndo ya - kho. Ma -
English Your will (Your will) be done on earth, O Lord. Your

ye - (Ma - ye) nzi - we 'nta - ndo ya - kho. Ma - ye - nzi -
 will (Your will) be done on earth, O Lord. Your will be

we 'nta - ndo ya - kho. Ma - ye - nzi - we 'nta -
 done on earth, O Lord. Your will be done on

ndo ya - kho. Ma - ye - nzi - we 'nta - ndo ya - kho.
 earth, O Lord. Your will be done on earth, O Lord.

Originally published in the World Church song book *Many and Great* (GIA Publications 1992). © Mayenziwe (Your Will Be Done). Text from the Lord’s Prayer; Music: South African traditional, as taught by George Mxadana, transcribed by John L. Bell. Used with permission.

SESSION 7

“Sikhulule”/“Liberate Us, Lord”

Leader

Si - khu - lu - le si - khu - lu - le nge - nce - ba
 Lib - er - ate us. Lord, set us free. Lord, lib - er -

Group

Si - khu - lu - le, si - khu - lu - le,
 Lib - er - ate us, Lord. Lib - er - ate us, Lord.

ya - kho nko - si, si - khu - lul' si - khu - lu - le
 ate us. Lord, set us free. Lib - er - ate us.

nge - nce - ba ya - kho si - khu - lu - le.
 In your love and mer - cy set us free.

Words and music by Thozama Dyani, South Africa (Xhosa); tr. David Dargie
 “Sikhulule”/“Liberate Us, Lord” from *Halle, Halle* compiled by Dr. C. Michael Hawn ©1999
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During the nearly fifty years of apartheid in South Africa, beginning in 1948, black South Africans suffered increasing violence and restrictions on their freedom to assemble, to receive adequate education, and to choose where they could live. In 1960 and 1986, the white apartheid government called two “Emergencies” during which the movements of black South Africans were even more severely restricted than usual. It was especially during these times that innocent people were shot and killed on sight by police without any recourse for the victim’s family.

This song grows out of a personal experience by the composer in 1984 not long before conditions led to the second Emergency of 1986. Dyani’s brother was jailed after an incident with police. He was walking home from a choir rehearsal when he was shot by police. In apartheid South Africa, if the police shot you, you were automatically guilty. Detainees in jail had no rights and no due process. They often died due to the violent conditions of incarceration. Dyani composed a complete Liberation Mass that grew out of this experience and in memory of the events of Soweto Day (June 16, 1984). “Sikhulule” is a part of this mass. Its simple text is undergirded by the unwarranted violence against her brother and friends who suffered and died on this day.

Singing is a natural response to oppression throughout Africa. Congregational song serves to unify the prayer of the suffering community, offers a sense of healing through the solidarity of singing together, and helps maintain hope in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. Without song, there would be little hope.

SESSION 8

“Cantai ao Senhor”/“Rejoice in the Lord”

Introduction

Can -
1. Re -

tai ao Sen - hor um cân - ti - co no - vo, can -
joi - ce in the Lord and sing God a new song; re -
God's ho - ly arm has gained us the vic - t'ry; for

tai ao Sen - hor um cân - ti - co no - vo, can -
joi - ce in the Lord and sing God a new song. Re -
God's ho - ly arm has gained us the vic - t'ry; for

tai ao Sen - hor um cân - ti - co no - vo, can - tai ao Sen -
joi - ce in the Lord and sing God a new song. Re - joi - ce, let us
God's ho - ly arm has gained us the vic - t'ry. Re - joi - ce, let us

hor, can - tai ao Sen - hor.
sing. Re - joi - ce, let us sing.
sing. Re - joi - ce, let us sing.

D.S. al Fine Fine

2. For

3. The ends of the earth have seen God's salvation; (x3)
Rejoice, let us sing. (x2)
4. Break forth into song with trumpet and lyre; (x3)
Rejoice, let us sing. (x2)
5. The rivers and mountains join in the singing; (x3)
Rejoice, let us sing. (x2)
6. For God will return and judge all the nations; (x3)
Rejoice, let us sing. (x2)

“Cantai ao Senhor”/“Rejoice in the Lord” from *Halle, Halle* compiled by Dr. C. Michael Hawn
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The tune for this song comes from Brazil, and the words are a paraphrase of Psalm 98. Brazil is one of the most diverse countries in South America and one of the world's largest economies. It is a complex collection of indigenous peoples and immigrants whose varied musics and cultures constantly influence one another.

SESSION 9

“Thuma Mina”/“Send Me Lord”

The musical score is written for a four-part choir in 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first system contains two staves. The upper staff has lyrics: "Thu - ma mi - na, thu - ma mi - na," with the words "Send me, Lord," written below. The lower staff has lyrics: "thu - ma mi - na, thu - ma mi - na," with the words "send me, Lord," written below. The second system also contains two staves. The upper staff has lyrics: "Leader: Thu - ma mi - na . . ." followed by "thu - ma mi - na Nko - si yam." with "send me, Lord, in - to the world." written below. The lower staff has lyrics: "thu - ma mi - na Nko - si yam." with "send me, Lord, in - to the world." written below. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

Words: Traditional, South Africa/Zulu

Music: Traditional, South Africa; tr. David Dargie

“Thuma Mina”/“Send me, Lord” from *Halle, Halle* compiled by Dr. C. Michael Hawn ©1999

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“Thuma mina” (“send me Lord into the world”) is a text that appears in different versions throughout South Africa because it is essential to the worship of many denominations. The musical style is derived from a mixture of traditional Western hymns and the popular township sounds of the South African urban areas.

Appendix C: Worship Materials Based on the Belhar

Belhar Hymn, composed by David Alexander

Tune: O Waly Waly (folk tune, The Water Is Wide)

Meter LM (8-8-8-8)

Verses based on numbered divisions in the confession itself: 1) Trinity; 2) Unity; 3) Reconciliation; 4) Justice; 5) Obedience.

1. Since the beginning of the world
one triune God protects the church.
By Word and Spirit this is done,
and will be so until the end.

2. The gift of unity is shown
as witness to the world abroad,
by means of willing, joyful faith
and service to the least of all.

3. The pow'rs of sin and enmity
in Christ are conquered totally.
To reconcile us each to all,
this mission is the church's call.

4. For justice God has been revealed,
the church for justice God has sealed,
to stand with those who have been wronged,
to join the voiceless in their song.

5. We must obey the Church's head,
Jesus, the Christ whom we confess.
Though human pow'rs and laws forbid,
still we must walk the way he led.

Belhar Litany I, composed by David Alexander

We believe in the triune God who gathers, protects, and cares for the church by Word and Spirit.

We believe in one holy, universal Christian church, called from the entire human family.

We believe that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church.

Unity is both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ.

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

We share one faith, have one calling;

have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism,

eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope.

We reject doctrines which absolutize natural diversity or sinful separation of people in ways that break the visible and active unity of the church;

We reject doctrines which profess that spiritual unity is maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation.

We reject doctrines which maintain that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining church membership.

We believe that God has entrusted the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ to the church;

We reject doctrines which sanction the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color.

We believe that God is self-revealed as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace in a world full of injustice and enmity. God is the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged. God's church is called to follow our Lord in this.

God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; frees prisoners and restores sight to the blind.

God wishes to teach all people to do what is good and to seek the right;

God's church must stand by people in any form of suffering and need,

the church must witness and strive against any form of injustice,

so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

The church must stand where God stands, follow Christ against the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests.

We reject the ideologies which legitimate injustice and all doctrines which use the name of the gospel to support those ideologies.

We believe that the church is called to confess and do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

Belhar Litany II, composed by David Alexander

We believe in the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit.

This God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

We believe in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

We believe that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another.

We believe that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ.

We believe that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought.

We believe that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity, and hatred between people and groups is sin.

We believe that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted.

We believe that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.

Therefore we reject any doctrine that absolutizes natural diversity in such a way that this hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church.

We reject any doctrine that professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers are alienated from one another and in despair of reconciliation.

We reject any doctrine that denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin.

We reject any doctrine that maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

We believe that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things,

even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence.

We believe that Jesus is Lord. To the one and only God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

Appendix D: Dictionary of Terms Relevant to the Belhar Confession

Apartheid – Afrikaans for “apartness,” apartheid was a social and political policy of racial segregation and discrimination enforced by white minority governments in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. The term includes an assumption that racial groups are segregated because of the superiority of one group over the others.

“Benign” neglect – A policy or attitude of ignoring a situation instead of assuming responsibility for managing or improving it.

Civil disobedience – The active refusal to obey certain laws, demands, and commands of a government or of an occupying power without resorting to physical violence.

Confession – A formal statement of religious beliefs; creed.

Discrimination – Selective or preferential treatment of an individual or group of people based on race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, etc.; prejudice plus action.

Ethnic group – A group of people who have certain background characteristics in common (e.g., language, culture, religion, traditions, tribal or national origin), which provides the group with a distinct identity as seen by themselves and others.

Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) – A denomination established in 1951 made up mostly of black members of the DRC.

Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC) – A denomination established in 1652 that embraces three standards of unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of the Synod of Dort), yet is more widely known as a “white” denomination associated with the politics of the Afrikaner community and the system of apartheid.

Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) – A denomination established in 1881 by congregations that departed the (white) Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa in order to become a racially mixed (colored) church. The denomination embraces the same standards of unity as its parent denomination.

Implicit stereotype – A stereotype that is powerful enough to operate without conscious control.

Internalized racist oppression – Internalization of negative stereotypes about one’s race.

Justice – The fair, moral, and impartial treatment of all persons, especially in law. Includes concepts of right relationships and equitable distribution of resources.

Prejudice – An irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics; stereotype plus hostility.

Race – A distinct population of humans commonly distinguished on the basis of skin color, facial features, and ancestry.

Racism – Subordination of a person or group based on their color. Racism involves having the power to carry out systematic discriminatory practices; color prejudice plus power.

Reconciliation – Bringing together again in love or friendship.

Segregation – The separation of people based on a characteristic such as race or ethnicity.

Standards or Forms of Unity – Three creeds—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—commonly held by Reformed churches with origins in the European continent, especially the Netherlands.

Status confessionis – a Latin term meaning that which is foundational for belief and behavior, and must be affirmed by professing members of the church body.

Stereotype – A standardized mental picture held in common by members of a group and representing an over-simplified opinion, affective attitude, or uncritical judgment.

Systemic (institutional) racism – Structural racial discrimination. Racial discrimination by governments, corporations, or other large organizations. Common results are illiteracy, unemployment or underemployment, and high rates of incarceration.

Unity – Biblically, the oneness of believers with God and one another in Jesus Christ through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) – A denomination established in 1994 by the union of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA).

Appendix E: Welcoming Diversity: An Inventory for Congregations

GRACE/Racial Justice Institute Summit on Racism – Religion Sector

As our communities become more diverse, every congregation is faced with the challenge of how to reach out to people of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. We believe an important step in meeting that challenge is to ask whether our congregation is truly welcoming to all people. While our initial answer may be “Yes, of course,” focused introspection might reveal hidden barriers that may hinder people from other racial/ethnic backgrounds from feeling at home in our congregation.

A subcommittee of the Religion Sector of the Summit on Racism has created this inventory to aid congregations seeking to embrace and welcome the diversity of their communities. The inventory focuses on six areas: perceptions, leadership, worship, visual, educational, and events. The subcommittee recommends that this inventory be used by a committee or a team of interested persons.

Read each statement and, using the scale below, place your most appropriate response to the statement in the space provided.

NA = not applicable

DK= don't know

1 = not at all true

2 = sometimes true

3 = true, most of the time

PERCEPTIONS, ATTITUDES, VALUES: What we hold in our minds and hearts affects our actions.

1. ____ The healing of racism and an appreciation for racial/ethnic diversity are values of the leadership of our congregation.
2. ____ Opportunities for dialogue are provided about these values between our congregation and our leadership.
3. ____ Our leaders comprehend and communicate the way in which ethnic, economic, social, and political justice makes visible the reign of God.
4. ____ Our congregation is receptive to preaching, teaching, and dialogue about the harm of racism and the value of diversity.
5. ____ Our congregation is open to the ideas that people from other racial/ethnic traditions bring about worship, education, community, and outreach.
6. ____ Our congregation is aware of our denomination's position on issues of racism, poverty, and violence because the positions are consistently held before the people.

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

- 7. ____ Members who reflect our congregations' racial/ethnic diversity are being recruited and equipped for leadership.
 - 8. ____ Our congregation addresses root causes of poverty, racism, and other forms of discrimination, while also relieving immediate needs through ministries of charity, compassion, and mercy.
 - 9.
 - a. ____ Past attitudes or actions of prejudice and discrimination have been addressed in our congregation forthrightly, and healing is taking place around these issues.
 - b. ____ We have a process of reconciliation in place when needed.
-

LEADERSHIP/ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: Leaders and structure set a congregation's course.

- 10. ____ Our congregation's leadership promotes anti-racism and diversity.
 - 11. ____ The leadership is conscious of diversity when selecting vendors for supplies and services.
 - 12.
 - a. ____ Our congregation has a team that works with the leadership to address issues of racism in our congregation and society.
 - b. ____ The team has developed a strategy for addressing racism within the congregation and community.
 - c. ____ The resources of our congregation support this team.
 - 13. ____ People outside our congregation's primary racial group are consulted about how we might address unintentional racism and become more inclusive.
 - 14.
 - a. ____ We have a system of greeting in place so that all those who attend receive a warm welcome.
 - b. ____ Members of the "greeting team" are educated to be welcoming to a wide variety of people.
 - c. ____ The members of the "greeting team" are representative of the racial/ethnic make-up of our congregation.
-

WORSHIP: Does our worship inspire us to greater understanding and appreciation for the diversity of God's people?

- 15. ____ Our liturgies and music incorporate a variety of racial/ethnic traditions.

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

- 16. ____ We invite speakers, dramatists, musicians, etc. who represent a variety of racial/ethnic traditions.
 - 17. ____ Our preaching addresses the sin of racism and challenges the congregation to examine themselves in light of Scripture and religious vows.
 - 18. ____ The gospel message is expressed in ways relevant to diverse people.
 - 19. ____ We give voice in worship to issues important to diverse people.
 - 20. ____ As a congregation we welcome and befriend all visitors before, during and after worship.
-

VISUAL: Visuals are strong messages. What do we see around us?

- 21. ____ A wide variety of racial/ethnic people are represented in our windows, pictures, wall hangings, etc.
 - 22. ____ The classrooms for young children are supplied with dolls, books, games, and other toys that represent a wide variety of racial/ethnic people.
 - 23. ____ All classrooms and libraries have books, videos, etc. that represent a wide variety of racial/ethnic people.
 - 24. ____ Our displays, brochures, and publicity pieces reflect diversity.
 - 25. ____ The staff and leadership visually reflect a commitment to multicultural ministry.
-

EDUCATIONAL: What are we reading, studying, and promoting?

- 26. ____ We strive to teach a respect for diversity.
- 27.
 - a. ____ Our educational materials reflect a variety of racial/ethnic people (and language groups if appropriate to our congregation).
 - b. ____ Racial/ethnic people are consulted when new curriculum or educational materials are developed.
- 28.
 - a. ____ We regularly offer classes that give insight into different racial/ethnic groups.
 - b. ____ We are sensitive to the differences in teaching and learning styles among people from a variety of cultures and traditions.
 - c. ____ Our faith is presented in terms of the history, tradition, and contribution of minority cultures as well as the dominant culture.

Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice

- 29.
- a. ____ We offer on-site racism- and diversity-sensitivity training.
 - b. ____ We promote off-site racism- and diversity-sensitivity training for members of our congregation.
 - c. ____ We offer our site for racism- and diversity-sensitivity training.
-

EVENTS: Do we schedule events to broaden our experiences and perspectives?

30. ____ Our congregation invites other congregations representing different racial/ethnic groups to share in opportunities for outreach, recreation, and worship.
31. ____ Our congregation promotes times for members to visit or to participate in other racial/ethnic groups' work, play, or worship experiences.
32. ____ We hold activities to celebrate the diversity already among us and to become familiar with a variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural traditions.
-

Thank you for your efforts with this inventory. Racism is a serious and often subtle problem in our country and in our congregations and must be addressed. This inventory is intended to help a congregation engage in conversation about its own reality of racism. Then, from that discussion, the congregation can enter into designing ongoing healing actions that will serve as a guide for planning and annual evaluation.

If you would like more information, we invite you share your experience with others and us. Please contact the GRACE/Racial Justice Institute office listed below. We are interested in your feedback and progress.

RESOURCES

GRACE (Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism)/Racial Justice Institute
207 E. Fulton, 4th Floor
Grand Rapids, MI 49503-3210
Phone: (616) 774-2321 Web: www.graceoffice.org

Woodrick Institute for the Study of Racism and Diversity at Aquinas College
1607 Robinson Rd. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49506
Phone: (616) 632-2177 Web: woodrick.aquinas.edu

Institute for Healing Racism
Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce
111 Pearl St. NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
Phone: (616) 771-0330 Web: www.diversitygrandrapids.org/institute.asp

GRACE/Racial Justice Institute
207 E. Fulton • Grand Rapids • Michigan • 49503 • (616) 774-2321 • www.graceoffice.org

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Appendix F: World Recipes from *Extending the Table*

Banana Oatmeal Cookies (Jamaica)

Makes 4 dozen

375°F/190°C

12-15 min.

Cream together until light and fluffy:

3/4 c. margarine (175 ml)

1 c. sugar (250 ml)

Beat in:

1 egg, beaten

Add:

2-3 bananas, peeled and mashed (about 1 c./250 ml)

3 1/2 c. rolled oats (875 ml)

1/2 c. peanuts or almonds, chopped (125 ml)

Mix thoroughly.

Combine in separate bowl:

1 1/4 c. flour (300 ml)

1/2 t. baking soda (2 ml)

1/2 t. salt (2 ml)

1/4 t. ground nutmeg (1 ml)

3/4 t. ground cinnamon (3 ml)

Add to banana mixture and mix well. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Drop dough by teaspoonfuls on ungreased baking sheets, about 1 1/2 inches apart (3.5 cm). Bake 12-15 minutes or until golden brown. Cool on rack.

—Pauline Cousins, St. Mary, Jamaica

Sesame Seed Cookies (Nigeria)

Zakin Ridi (ZAH-kin ree-dee)

Makes 4-5 dozen

400°F/200°C

8-10 min.

Cream together:

3/4 c. shortening or margarine (175 ml)

1 c. sugar (250 ml)

2 eggs

1 t. vanilla (5 ml) or 1/2 t. lemon extract (2 ml)

Add:

2 1/2 c. flour (625 ml)

1 t. baking powder (5 ml)

1 t. salt (5 ml)

1 c. sesame seeds (250 ml)

Stir until well blended. Cover and chill at least 1 hour. Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C). Roll dough 1/8 inch thick (1/3 cm) on lightly floured, cloth-covered board. Cut into desired shapes. Place on ungreased baking sheets. Bake 8-10 minutes or until very light brown.

—Martha Adiva and Suzanne Ford, Jos, Nigeria

Coconut Crunchies (India)

Bolinha (bohl-EEN-yah)

Makes 4-5 dozen

375°F/190°C

8-10 min.

These unique cookies made with cream of wheat instead of flour are popular in the Indian state of Goa. The original recipe uses yolks of six eggs; we substitute three whole eggs.

Combine in saucepan:

1 c. sugar (250 ml)

1/2 c. water (125 ml)

Boil to make thin syrup, about 5 minutes.

Add:

3 c. fresh or packaged coconut, grated (750 ml)

1/4 t. ground cardamom (1 ml)

Cook over low heat 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and cool.

Add alternately to cooled coconut mixture:

3 eggs

2-2 1/2 c. uncooked cream of wheat (500-625 ml)

Mix well. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C). Drop batter by spoonfuls on greased cookie sheets and bake 8-10 minutes until golden brown.

—Rose Chater, Barde, Goa, India, and Cynthia Peacock, Calcutta, India

Chick-Pea Dip (Turkey)

Hummus (HOO-moose)

Serves 4-6

Drain, reserving liquid, and place in blender or food processor:

6 c. canned or cooked chick-peas (1.5 ml)

Puree.

Add alternately and continue pureeing:

1/2 c. sesame butter (125 ml)

1/2-1 c. lemon juice (125-250 ml)

Add and blend until smooth:

4-5 cloves garlic

1 1/2 t. salt (7 ml)

Sauce should be thick and smooth. If too thick, thin with some of the chick-pea liquid. Place on small serving platter and garnish with parsley; black olives; drizzle of olive oil; dried, crushed mint; or red pepper to taste.

—Jewel Wenger Showalter, Irwin, Ohio

Dutch Spice Cookies (Netherlands)

Speculaasjes (spay-kou-LAHSS-yuhss)

Makes 3 dozen

325°F/160°C

10-12 min.

Speculaasjes, known many places as windmill cookies, take their name from a spice mixture of ground cinnamon, ginger, cloves, and allspice marketed in the Netherlands. Traditionally associated with St. Nicholas Day, December 6, Speculaasjes are now a year-round favorite.

Cream:

2/3 c. margarine (150 ml)

3/4 c. brown sugar, packed (175 ml)

1 egg

Add dry ingredients, alternating with milk:

2 3/4 c. flour (675 ml)

1/2 t. baking powder (2 ml)

1/2 t. salt (2 ml)

1 t. ground cinnamon (5 ml)

1/2 t. ground ginger (2 ml)

1/4 t. ground cloves (1 ml)

1/2 t. ground allspice (2 ml)

1/3 c. milk (75 ml)

Knead dough with floured hands until smooth. Chill at least 4 hours. Roll out to thin dough on floured surface and cut into shapes or use cookie press. Bake on greased cookie sheets 10-12 minutes in preheated 325°F (160°C) oven.

—Juliette Kuitse, Elkhart, Indiana

Almond Cookies (China)

Xingren Dangang (shing-RUN DAHN-gahng)

Makes 7-8 dozen

375°F/190°C

10 min.

Cream:

1 c. shortening or margarine (250 ml)

3/4 c. sugar (175 ml)

Add:

2 eggs, one at a time

1 T. almond extract (15 ml)

2-4 drops yellow food coloring (optional)

Combine:

2 1/2-3 c. flour (625-750 ml)

1/2 t. baking soda (2 ml)

1/4 t. salt (1 ml)

Using fingers, mix dry ingredients with wet mixture into fairly stiff dough. Divide in half. On floured surface, roll each half with palms into 1 foot long, 1 1/2 inch diameter roll (30 cm, 3.5 cm). Wrap in waxed paper and refrigerate 3 hours. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C).

Beat lightly:

1 egg white

Cut cookies in 1/4-inch slices (3/4 cm) and place on ungreased cookie sheet. Press almond half in center of each cookie. Brush with egg white and bake 10 minutes.

—Nav Jiwan International Tea Room, Ephrata, Pennsylvania

Anthill Cake (Brazil)

Bolo Formigero (BOH-loh for-mee-GAY-ee-roh)

Serves 20-30

350°F/180°C

45-60 min.

Mix together:

2 c. sugar (500 ml)

2 c. flour (500 ml)

1 c. cornstarch (250 ml)

1/2 c. unsweetened grated coconut (125 ml)

1 T. baking powder (15 ml)

Combine:

4 egg yolks

1 c. coconut milk (250 ml) (see below)

1 c. margarine, melted (250 ml)

Mix dry and liquid ingredients.

Beat to stiff peaks:

4 egg whites

Fold into mixture.

Add:

1/4–1/3 c. semi-sweet chocolate, grated (50-75 ml)

Pinch of salt

Mix gently. Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Pour batter in greased and floured bundt, angel food or 9x13-inch pan (3.5-L). Bake 45-60 minutes (depending on size of pan) or until golden brown on top and toothpick comes out clean. When cool, sprinkle with powdered sugar.

—Dona Lourdes, Jardim Primavera, Recife, Brazil, and Mert Brubaker, Lancaster, Pennsylvania

(To make coconut milk from packaged coconut, heat, but do not boil, 1 1/2 c. milk (375 ml) and 1 1/2 c. water (375 ml). Pour over 1 1/2 c. grated coconut (375 ml). Let stand in cool place 2 hours. Strain and use. *Extending the Table*, p. 280)

Lemon Loaf (Norway)

Citron Kake (sih-TROHN KAH-kah)

Makes 2 loaves

350°F/180°C

50-60 min.

Option: If potato flour is not available, substitute cornstarch or rice flour, or increase white flour to 3 c. (750 ml).

Beat until thick:

2 c. sugar (500 ml)

3 eggs

Add and mix until blended:

1 c. margarine, melted (250 ml)

1/2 c. potato flour (125 ml)

2 1/2 c. white flour (625 ml)

2 t. baking powder (10 ml)

1 c. milk (250 ml)

rind of 1 lemon, grated

Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Pour batter into 2 loaf pans, greased and floured on bottoms only. Bake 50-60 minutes. Remove from pans. While still warm, glaze with thick paste of juice from 1 lemon and confectioner's sugar. Serve in slices with fresh fruit or sherbet

—Gerd Doroshuk, Dauphin, Manitoba

Cheese Pastry (Bolivia)

Rollos (ROH-yohs)

Makes 24 pieces

350°F/180°C

30 min.

This is a delicious and simple adaptation of Bolivian cheese rolls, a snack food often sold at bus stops to people who are traveling.

Sift:

4 c. flour (1 L)

4 t. baking powder (20 ml)

1 t. salt (5 ml)

2 T. sugar (30 ml)

Add:

1/2 c. margarine (125 ml)

1 c. warm milk (250 ml)

4 egg yolks (reserve whites)

Mix well. Divide dough in half. Pat out half in greased 13x9-inch pan (3.5 L).

In separate bowl, beat until foamy:

4 egg whites

Add:

1/2–1 lb. Monterey Jack or similar cheese, grated (250-500 g)

Mix. Spread half of cheese mixture on dough in pan. Pat out rest of dough on cheese layer and spread remaining cheese mixture on top. Bake at 350°F (180°C) about 30 minutes until golden brown. Cut in squares to serve.

—Sherry Holland, Caracas, Venezuela

Guacamole (Mexico)

(gwah-kah-MOH-lay)

Serves 4-5

In bowl, chop or mash:

1 avocado, peeled

Stir in:

1 small tomato, finely chopped

1-2 T. onion, minced (15-30 ml)

1 T. lemon juice (15 ml)

1 clove garlic, minced or crushed

salt to taste

cilantro, chopped (optional)

1/2 fresh green chili pepper, minced, or substitute a dash of Tabasco pepper sauce or a bit of coarsely ground black pepper (optional)

Add 2 T. sour cream (30 ml).

Serve as a dip for tortilla chips or raw vegetables.

—Marie Palafox, Guadalajara, Mexico, and Emily Will, Ciudad Guzman, Jalisco, Mexico

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