Intercultural Ministries in The United Church of Canada: Faithfully Challenging White Privilege

Abstract
The United Church of Canada has embraced a commitment to intercultural ministries to combat racial injustice and to challenge White privilege and Eurocentric culture. There is a clear theological and pedagogical basis for the work, as well as practical methods for implementation. In this workshop, three leaders from that denomination will reflect on how the focus on intercultural ministries is changing their congregations, theological schools, denominational decision-making, and understandings of mission and ministry, and will describe what they each do to educate and nurture this development.

Indigenous peoples, and people of diverse racial backgrounds, and have been active participants in The United Church of Canada since the church’s formation in 1925. Over the past few decades, however, Canadian churches—including the United Church—have observed that its racial diversity has continually increased, and many newcomers to Canada are calling the United Church home. Also more recently, in response to the ongoing legacy of residential schools, and in living into the calls to action from Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Indigenous church leaders are teaching the whole church to be humble about its cultural and colonial history. The church’s intercultural commitment seeks to respond to these realities, and to faithfully address White privilege. There is also a very clear theological basis for the work, which goes beyond responding to contemporary realities and reminds the church of its call to co-create brave spaces of belonging for all of God’s peoples.

With this in mind, Adele Halliday will describe the history and development of The United Church of Canada’s vision for intercultural ministries, with particular focus on: (1) why this vision has become a denominational priority, (2) the practices, processes, and programs she and her team use to nurture this vision within the denomination, and (3) some evaluation of the impact this work is having. She will also explore some of the foundational work that led the denomination to declare intercultural ministries as a priority, some of the practical programs that have been put into place, and the various ways the church has been trying to challenge White privilege in various aspects of its work.

Stephen Fetter will describe the 15-year journey his congregation has been on to move from being “accidentally multi-cultural” to “intentionally intercultural.” The congregation is in downtown Toronto, Ontario, Canada is a fascinating mix of people with Caribbean, East Asian, Eastern European, and White backgrounds, with a handful of folks from different countries in Africa and elsewhere as well. He’ll focus on three specific strategies that he and his Board members have used to enhance intercultural ministry in this context, and provide examples of activities designed to enhance each strategy. (1) Intentional focus on hospitality and belonging, including ways to celebrate each person’s place within the community, an emphasis on curiosity rather than judgement, and a wide variety of activities designed to enhance and
strenthen relationships that cross cultural boundaries. (2) Intentional and on-going conversations about cross-cultural relationships and respect, including ways to enhance Worship, committee make-up, decision-making, and celebrations. (3) Development of ministries that emerge from the gifts and backgrounds of the people actually sitting in the pews, including ministries to strengthen internal relationships and a refugee sponsorship program.

HyeRan Kim-Cragg will offer reflection on intercultural ministries that is happening at congregational levels in a Western Canadian province. She will also share reflections about her work as a professor of theology at a United Church theological school: This is an inclusive and justice-seeking educational institution; at this school, this presenter offers continuing education work to lay and ordered on the issue of race and colonialism, which is connected to intercultural ministry.

Session Participants

Adele Halliday is currently Team Leader for Discipleship and Witness in the Church in Mission Unit of The United Church of Canada, and is lead staff for work related to intercultural ministries (including work on racial justice and disabilities), and she collaborates with colleagues on many other areas of work. In her staff capacity, she develops educational programming, regularly leads workshops on racial justice and intercultural engagement, writes policy, oversees the mandatory Racial Justice Training for all ministry personnel in the denomination; she also works with congregational and judicatory leaders to strengthen the intercultural focus of ministry. Adele is a Black Canadian who has written several resources and study guides, including the lectionary-based curriculum *Seasons of the Spirit*; she has also written extensive resources on race, ethnicity, and culture. The most recent was a feature article in the United Church’s *Mandate* magazine, focusing on how The United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ are working together to tackle anti-Black racism.

Adele has been working on various aspects of the denomination’s racial justice work since 2004. Previously, Adele worked with KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives and was a member of the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Commission of the World Council of Churches. Adele holds a Masters of Education and a Masters of Theological Studies. Adele is also involved in local ministries and ecumenical work, including the Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network and the Forum for Intercultural Leaders and Learning of the Canadian Council of Churches; she is also a member of the World Council of Churches’ Reference Group on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

Stephen Fetter is the Minister of Forest Hill United Church in Toronto ON Canada, ([http://www.foresthilluc.org)](http://www.foresthilluc.org) where he and his congregation members have been working to enhance the intercultural aspects of their ministry for the past 15 years. As a student he served an overseas internship in the Philippines, which left him with a life-long interest in cross-
cultural conversation. He has subsequently served churches in three Canadian provinces. Steve is also Program Coordinator for Webinars and Electronic Meetings at the General Council Office of The United Church of Canada, and is responsible for the development and oversight of the denomination’s online continuing education program for church leaders. His program can be seen at http://www.united-in-learning.com, which offers about 40 stand-alone webinars each year, and training series for Licensed Lay Worship Leaders and for Youth Ministers. Steve is a member of the Leadership Team for ALLLM.

**HyeRan Kim-Cragg** is Lydia Gruchy Professor of Pastoral Studies in St. Andrew’s College, Saskatoon. As a postomial feminist scholar, she has been teaching colonialism which is inseparable to racism and sexism. As a racialized migrant to Canada, she has been also engaging research on race, migration, and intercultural ministry. She regularly teaches anti-racism education and has led racial justice workshop in her denomination for many years. She is the author of Interdependence: A Postcolonial Feminist Practical Theology (PickWick), and Story and Song: A Postcolonial Interplay between Christian Education and Worship (Peter Lang). Her academic writings appear in Postcolonial Practice of Ministry (Lexington), Church in an Age of Global Migration(Palgrave) and journals Practical Matters and Religious Education.

This program is being presented by members of The Association of Leaders in Lifelong Learning for Ministry (ALLLM), and will be of particular interest to practitioners engaged in providing non-degree, post-graduate continuing education for clergy and other church leaders. It will be more of a workshop than an academic presentation.

Works that have informed us along the way:

**Adele Halliday**
- Engaging an anti-racist educational framework for the work, including naming what is the work for racialized people, and what is the work for White people
- Challenges of naming White privilege: cultures of Whiteness; understanding White privilege, White normativity, and White supremacy
- Understanding and exploring histories, both oral and written
- Many authors and scholars on intercultural ministries and racial justice
- Intercultural theologies, particularly theologies of people who have been traditionally marginalized, and how these inform and challenge the church
- Storytelling and particular incidents of racial injustice that illustrate the ways in which Whiteness can work within denominational spaces
Stephen Fetter

- The work of Diana Butler Bass on the importance and priority of belonging, particularly as found in *Christianity After Religion* (2012)
- The work of John Dominic Crossan on the nature and demographics of Paul’s communities in first century Christianity
- A wide variety of writers in the area of hospitality and church growth

HyeRan Kim-Cragg

- A thick description of the critical incident around White English Tutor and non-White international students’ learning experience in a theological school
- A critical reflection on this critical incident: the challenge of White English Normativity at work
- Naming the problem of “patronizing kindness” of tutoring and the school’s institutional complicity in it
- Creating brave spaces of addressing the implicit racism in our curriculum and student support, critical to theological education
- Congregational engagement on intercultural ministries.