

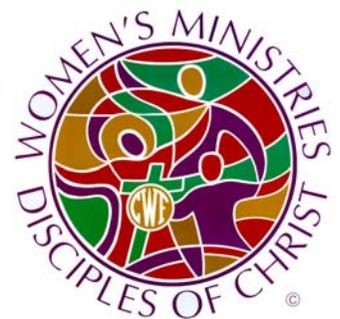
**Disciples Women's
General Programs**

Date: 2010

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No Barriers to God's Table



My Notes

Introduction:

While reading a blog recently, a young woman described a cartoon she had read. In the first frame, there were two men; one in chains with darkened skin the other pulling the man in chains and he was of lighter complexion. In the second frame, the man in the chains was bent over and the lighter man was starting to climb onto the darker man's back. In the third frame the darker man was beginning to straighten his back as he helped the lighter man onto the shelf above them. Finally, in the fourth frame, the darker man was standing straight, he reached his hand up to the lighter man who is seated on the shelf and the caption reads: "What! I got here by myself, why can't you?"

None of us have gotten "here" all by ourselves. We stand, literally and figuratively, on the backs and shoulders of our ancestors who have paved the way that we might all enjoy the privilege of being members of the whole Family of God.

Purpose:

The purpose of the lesson is to begin to understand the nature of wholeness in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Activity:

Give participants a blank piece of puzzle (for example, cut up a sheet of card stock). Each person writes on the piece one skill which they contribute to the group. The puzzle is then assembled to show that everyone contributes to the whole.

Scripture: Luke 15:11 – 32 The Parable of the Prodigal and His Brother

As much as I would have liked to use a biblical parable or story about a woman, this particular parable stands out in accomplishing this lesson's purpose. Reconciliation Ministry is intended to restore that which has been lost and separated from the family. Often we think the message of this parable is about the prodigal son as we have come to know this character. It is only of recent history that we begin to

identify the character simply as “the prodigal.” The etymology of prodigal comes from a word that means to ‘drive away from’ which is interpreted to distance oneself by being inwardly focused and self-seeking. We have learned to focus on the son’s ‘prodigal’ nature. First he goes away to the “far country” – literally distancing himself from his family. Then, it is in the far country where he “squanders” his inheritance presumably on fast living, women and booze continuing the progression of distance from his family.

The notion of distancing or separation from the family continues to plague the Church which is the whole Family of God. The prodigal nature of members of the family, distancing ourselves from those who present as “other” within the Body of Christ breaks the heart of God and diminishes our ability to be the Body of Christ. Being whole does not mean that every member of the family has to be the same shape, size and color. It does not mean that some gifts are more needed than other gifts. In our church, our membership comes from every tribe and every nation, every hue and every ability, every culture and every concern.

What if we were to re-write the cartoon and make it to be about two women on a journey? There are two women, one of them is white and one of them is brown. In the first frame the women are walking parallel paths. They are walking side-by-side in the same direction but they are not together. In the second frame the two women are facing each other and they begin to talk. One says to the other, “Do you mind if I walk with you?” The other woman says, “Sure, I am going to the Big Shelf Christian Church. I would like some company on my journey.” In the third frame, they are chatting back and forth vigorously as noted by the caption reading “lots of chattering and laughter.” In the fourth frame they reach the church where they find a missing stairway to the entrance the church. As well they see a man, a woman and child in the entryway with their arms open wide. The caption reads, “Come in we can’t get started without you!”

Questions to Ponder:

- 1) The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) identity statement says that “we are a movement toward wholeness in a fragmented world. We welcome all to the Lord’s Table as God has welcomed us.” Are there missing pieces to our puzzle in your congregation, women’s group or our broader church?

- 2) Identify modern examples of the “prodigal nature” that you can see in your community, church, broader church, women’s group? How are we separated within the Family/Body of Christ?
- 3) Within our Church and within our congregations, there are many tables that make decisions for the entirety of our context, even though historically and even now those tables are missing the presence and concerns of all those whom will be affected by those decisions. How would your congregation, women’s group or context begin to consider ways to modify the narrative that we have “gotten here all by ourselves?” Did we really become leaders, representatives, and members of our churches “all by ourselves?” Whose shoulders do you stand upon to be in the place you stand currently?
- 4) The prodigal nature indicates that some of us intentionally distance ourselves from the Body of Christ. In other ways, the body of believers can distance itself from those who are different. Can you identify ways in which we can resist the temptation to respond as the older son when those who have intentionally left us return?
- 5) Reflect on and identify some of the gifts needed to become a multicultural, multi-racial and inclusive Church.
- 6) Part of the mission statement of Reconciliation Ministry reads: “It is our shared goal to foster life-giving community within our church and in relationship with the whole family of God.” The key components of this mission are life-giving community and relationship. Reflect as a group on the ways in which your community gives life to those who were once “distanced” from your church/community family. List some of these activities for the group to see your shared journey.
- 7) How did the women in the re-written cartoon enter the Big Shelf Christian Church?

Follow-up Activity:

Learn more about Reconciliation Ministry by visiting their web site <http://www.reconciliationministry.org/>