

Addressing Diversity and Promoting Reconciliation by Learning

By: Tracey Yancey

This is our Lord's solution to the puzzle of resolving conflict and misunderstanding. Suppose a person is crossways over a situation and there is a need for resolution. Sometimes we aren't even sure what the misunderstanding or conflict is but we know in our heart we need to be in a more reconciled place with someone.

An example of this occurred in our group the Kingdom Seekers. We came to Leadership UMC in search of a new experience, an opportunity to learn about leadership in our church and to find other ways to serve our Lord. I met a strong, capable woman who like me has a good sense of who she is and how she sees the world. While we share these traits we come from different parts of the world, different kinds of churches worshiping in different types of communities and we have a different sense about "how to get it done."

As group facilitator I found myself questioning my communication skills. This question led to my feeling conflict within our group and I feel this is the perfect example for our topic of diversity and reconciliation and more specifically my chosen "word" learn. Rather than seek different ways to communicate I have realized I must take a step back and learn from this person. Seek ways to grow from the experience by learning. Let the wise listen and add to their learning and let the discerning get guidance. Proverbs 1:5 NIV

I must reconcile that I come from a different place and I have different ideas but if I open my heart, my ears and my eyes and my mind and find ways to learn from another in ways I haven't before, I will have found reconciliation. "He who has ears let him hear." Matthew 11:15 NIV

This same scenario often happens in our churches where someone becomes crossways over an issue and walks away. What can we do to remind people that – just because we don't have things in common we are still all brothers and sisters in Christ, and we must learn from each other and work together to help make more disciples for Christ. Isn't that what we are all about?

Jesus said “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest in your souls.” Matthew 11:29 NIV

Learning in itself isn't something that requires resolution. However if we aren't willing to meet another person where they are and truly hear what they are saying and open ourselves to learn from them then we need to resolve the conflict we find ourselves with. It is also an important aspect of spiritual growth. Learning comes in many forms. Traditionally we think of being in school or a class with a teacher. However, there are many other ways to learn as well. We teach our children as we rear them and we learn from others in our everyday walk through life. But are we willing to learn from another person so as to understand their position or the place where they are – not where we are. This should be our goal. “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it.” 2 Timothy 3:14 NIV

Learning also means listening. We must be fully present in the moment without thinking what we are going to say but instead truly opening our ears and focus our mind on what is being said. And to learn you must be willing to be taught. We should also engage with questions. Ask so you can learn. This might mean stepping out of your comfort zone and that is not always easy. “Trust the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and He will make your paths smooth. Proverbs 3:5 – 6 NIV

Another important key to learning is accepting what others have to say. Sometimes we may not want to hear what is said but if we open our hearts and accept what is being shared we will find ourselves in a better place. Wise learners quietly accept instruction and criticism, love discipline and listen to advice. Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge. Proverbs 23:12 NIV

If we truly want to embrace diversity and find reconciliation we must be willing to learn from one another regardless of how hard that may be. We must continue to find ways to teach others the importance of this lesson so that we may all work to build God's kingdom and make disciples for Jesus Christ – whoever and wherever we are. And remember as Paul wrote to the

Philippians “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put into practice, and the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:9 NIV