

*You call us into your Church. Ua outou vala`auina  
matou i la outouekalesia. Wacekia tipi timahe upo.*

*Tu nos llamas a tu Iglesia. 禱召集我們進入禱的教會*

*Maa-xu-*

*guu-hau*

*kami' sa*

*あなたは*

*Egyháza*

*Ua outou*

*tipi tima*

*ih-dia Ne*

*rufst un*

*lyong'*

*禱召集*

*Du rufst*

*주님은*

*baa-ih-d*

*Du rufst*

*lyong' sa*

*hivsz be*

*mee-na-*

*wag Mo*

*hu-nista*

*られます*

*r Church.*

*Wacekia*

*h-xu-baa-*

*us. Du*

*kami' sa*

*hu-nista.*

*Iglesia.*

*aha upo.*

*Maa-xu-*

*uu-haus.*

*kami' sa*

*háza*

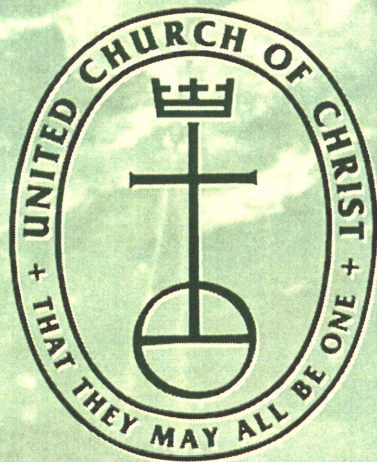
*դեցիիդ:*

# **A Church for All People**

## **Becoming A Multiracial and Multicultural**

### **Church**

# **A BIBLE STUDY**

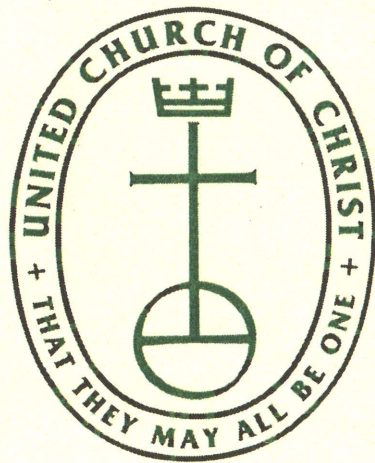


*Introduction & Commentary  
by the Rev. Dr. James L. Forbes*

*Maa-xu-baa-ih-dia Neda Ma-agi-wagec adi-gua mee-na-  
guu-haus. Du rufst uns in Deine Kirche. Tinata'wag Mo  
kami' sa lyong' simba'han You call us into your Church.*

# A Church for All People

## *Becoming A Multiracial and Multicultural Church*



## **A BIBLE STUDY**

Introduction & Commentary  
by the Rev. Dr. James L. Forbes

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## **A CHURCH FOR ALL PEOPLE: BECOMING A MULTIRACIAL AND MULTICULTURAL CHURCH**

### **INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE**

The Nineteenth General Synod Pronouncement and Proposal for Action “Calling the United Church of Christ to be a Multiracial and Multicultural Church” was a venture of faith to be a community of and for all people. A multiracial and multicultural church “confesses and acts out its faith in the one sovereign God who through Jesus Christ binds in covenant faithful people of all races, ethnicities, and cultures... embodying these diversities as gifts to the human family.”

This bible study, “A Church for All People: Becoming a Multiracial and Multicultural Church,” is an invitation for local churches to engage in the journey to embrace in its faith and life, worship and mission, the meaning of being a faith-community of many races and many cultures. It was first presented by the Reverend James L. Forbes at the April, 1994, meeting of the United Church of Christ Implementation Team Pronouncement and Proposal for Action. This booklet is the result of the work of a local church resource committee which designed the questions and edited the study into its format.

Without a clear understanding of the biblical and theological grounding for the vision of diversity and oneness, of a common identity in the context of the whole family of God, the journey toward becoming multiracial and multicultural will never become a living reality. Hence, this bible study is based on the first ten chapters of the “Acts of the Apostles” — upon the birth, call and journey of the early church to live prophetically as a new people united in one common faith and life in Jesus Christ. It highlights the joys and challenges of living together in new ways across racial and cultural boundaries. It invites group participants to probe and understand matters of race and culture as central to the faith and life of the church. It calls for prayerful reflection and honesty in sharing and discussion.

We are grateful for the witness of the Reverend Doctor James L. Forbes, senior pastor at Riverside Church in New York City, who shared the initial study with the church out of the depth of his calling and ministry.

### **FORMAT AND USE**

The five sections of this study are interrelated, with each section having a particular focus and purpose. For example, Section I is on the origins of the VISION of being multiracial and multicultural; in it the pentecost experience serves as the focal point for both the formation of the early church and the historic birth of the United Church of Christ in 1957. It is recommended that each section be covered thoroughly before proceeding on to the next one.

Each section, indicated by a Roman numeral, is made up of an INTRODUCTION, A READING OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT, and a set of QUESTIONS. The introduction sets the context for the reading of the biblical passage upon which the commentary is based. The “engagement” component raises questions for reflection and discussion. In each section, the introduction and commentary are the words of Dr. Forbes.

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This bible study is designed to be used by small groups of youth and young adults and adults of local churches. A total of five one-hour sessions will serve to cover the material. However, leaders should feel free to adapt the sessions to the needs and goals of the group. Retreat settings, over a weekend or a longer period of time, are ideal for this study, providing group members time to reflect and engage the themes, individually and collectively. In all cases, the group member is required to come to each session having read, studied and answered the questions. This will help facilitate more effective use of time.

Each session is to begin with a prayer, followed by the reading of the introduction and the biblical passage, after which the group members are invited to reflect silently on the passage, writing on paper both questions of clarification and those parts which speak to them the most. Each session should allow for a brief moment to address these questions of clarification. If group members wish to cross reference the passages with others familiar to them, they should be encouraged, while maintaining primary focus on the passage in the study. The next step is to have a few of the group members read the commentary with the larger group. Though these statements may be extensive, they are substantive in nature and deserving of critical reflection. They are intended to challenge, remind, inspire, and encourage the class. Finally, adequate time is needed for the questions and discussion. If group members have not had a chance to respond to the questions prior to the session, then the leader is encouraged to allow a period of time for writing down responses to them.

### **BACKGROUND PREPARATION FOR LEADERS**

**THE FIRST STEP** is to study completely and thoroughly the bible study in preparation for classes. In this initial step the leader is attempting to gain clarity about the purpose of the study. After reading the study, the leader is encouraged to write down in her/his words the purpose and themes of the study.

**THE SECOND STEP** is to become familiar with the biblical passages, plus several resource items. These are the text for the Pronouncement and Proposal for Action "Calling the United Church of Christ to be Multiracial and Multicultural," the "Diversity, Pluralism, Multiculturalism" Glossary of the National Council of Churches Unit on Ministries of Christian Education, and the brochure "You Call Us Into Your Church." These resources are included in the United Church of Christ packet of resources on being multiracial and multicultural.

**THE THIRD STEP** is to consider your class. Who is to attend? How much knowledge about the subject matter do they have? What style of education would be most effective? In addition, one needs to include the class in shaping the style and approach to the study. Moreover, a time of community building is encouraged for each session.

**THE FOURTH STEP** is to consider the spiritual dimension to the content. The journey becoming a people of many races and cultures who honor and celebrate the multiplicity of gifts, traditions, and heritages of the human family is a spiritual one requiring an open heart and mind fostered in daily prayer. If each session is begun and ended with prayer, affirmation is made that God's love and power provide the inspiration for our hope and faith in the vision of God's reign for earth.

## A CHURCH FOR ALL PEOPLE: BECOMING A MULTIRACIAL AND MULTICULTURAL CHURCH

You are invited to three acts in this Bible Study:

- A. TO LISTEN to the biblical texts;
- B. TO READ/HEAR the COMMENTARY AND IMPLICATIONS in the context of the Pronouncement on Calling the United Church of Christ to Become a Truly Multiracial and Multicultural Church; and,
- C. TO ENGAGE in the questions and applications based on your own situations: in your own life, in your church, and in the community.

In each case the introduction and commentary have been written by the Reverend Doctor James L. Forbes.

### I. The Origins of the Vision: Acts 2:1-21

#### INTRODUCTION

This begins with Acts 2 which describes, for me, the origin of the United Church of Christ, a description of the founding of what was at work when the United Church of Christ came into being.

Know that there is always tension between the biblical vision and living that vision. Yet, that's where some energy can be found. Here's how the United Church of Christ started!

#### A. LISTEN to the biblical text:

*"When the day of Pentecost had come they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came of sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.*

*"Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of*

*Libya belonging to Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs — in our own language we hear them speaking about God's deed of power.' All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'what does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'they are filled with new wine.'*

*"But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, 'Men (and women) of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:*

*In the last days it will be,*

*God declares,*

*that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.*

*Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.*

*And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and smoking mist.*

*The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,*

*before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.*

*Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

Acts 2:1-21

#### B. The COMMENTARY AND IMPLICATIONS from the text given the context of the Multiracial/Multicultural Pronouncement.

The strangeness of our agenda, as a group of people coming together in 1957, was that you were going to come together pulling people from various heritages and that you were going to be committed to being a church for all people. The major motif in the organization will be "uniting." That was simply smart on your part because you understood that Jesus had made very few requests for Himself. But at the end he did put in one or two requests: "Lord, make them one that the world might believe that you have sent me." So, you very smartly understood that if you were engaged in fulfilling the last will and testament of Jesus, Jesus would find some way to get you funded and sustained into your organizational possibilities.

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The United Church of Christ was as radical in what it was attempting to be and do as were the events in this text. Something moved deeply, like a mighty burning fire, not characterized by open forest fire, but the controlled slow combustion of the determination to just keep on keeping on until the accumulated wisdom of a tradition would cause the church to fulfill the promise that Jesus had made, "that we might be one." As I look at the text, I realize that everybody there was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Now, I understand that anyone who is in the body of Christ is indeed anointed with the Spirit. Therefore, from my Pentecostal background, I affirm that as any one of my Pentecostal brothers or sisters is filled with the Spirit, so are you! That means your heart has been made available to the living Christ. You were willing to accept the invitation into divine human communion. In a way appropriate to who you are, you realize and accept the Spirit. God has honored you with the Spirit by bringing you this far from the very beginning, as a design in the mind of God, "in my mother's womb you were knitting me together."

A little later on, everybody heard people speaking in their own language. Namely, divine presence made communication possible across the various boundaries of our language heritage. That's true. We've been fed by many different kinds of people. What we, in the United Church of Christ, are trying to do is so weird. I like to remind you that this Multiracial/Multicultural Pronouncement is a most aberrant form of social consciousness, if you measure it statistically. Most people don't really try to go across various boundaries. So you must be drunk to be trying to do this. But Peter stands up and says, "Indeed, these are not drunk as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning." It's too early.

But God said, in the last days I'm going to raise up the people and they're going to be together across all sorts of boundaries and barriers. In those days, in community, all God's people will experience the Spirit operating through them in regards to God's larger plan. Demographics notwithstanding, sons and daughters, young men and old men, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit even to those who have been disenfranchised. They will be bearers of the evidence of my Spirit and they will all be able to call upon the name of the Lord and shall be brought into wholeness.

That's what I think the statement is about. The Multiracial/Multicultural Pronouncement is an attempt of the United Church of Christ to live into its origin in the first place, insofar as we are part of the Christian faith. This attempt is thoroughly biblical.

### C. ENGAGEMENT: To engage in the questions and applications for your situations... for your life, your church, and the community.

1. Review the text as a group: describe what happened on the day of Pentecost. Who were gathered in the upper room? What languages were spoken? What stands out for you?
2. What are the origins of your church? Why was the particular church in which you now participate established? Can you connect the identity of your church with the vision of oneness in the Spirit as making us all one?
3. How and when have you been brought to Christian faith yourself? Share your own personal journey to Christian faith. What can you learn from that? Tell some stories of how you have been "filled with the Holy Spirit."
4. Can you acknowledge that your church is **NOT** for all people? Given the vision of the "church for all people," meaning it goes across barriers and beyond boundaries, reflect on these questions:
  - \* How many races and/or cultures are represented in your church?
  - \* Do the worship services and meetings include someone to "sign," meaning providing a way for persons who are hard of hearing?
  - \* Are there hymnals and bulletins in braille for persons who cannot see?
  - \* Are all the meetings, and the worship spaces, physically accessible?
  - \* Is there more than one language used in worship? In meetings?

Naming these are just a few of the more obvious ways that your church may not be for all people. Talk about other barriers or boundaries which subtly or unconsciously make it difficult or even impossible, for other people to be part of your church. Forbes says that "it is so weird" to try to cross barriers and boundaries. Where do you experience that? What makes you resistant to do that? What gives you joy and delight in doing that?

5. "That we might be one." Look around your neighborhood, your social networks, your work, your recreation activities, your leisure time, and ask, "Would persons that I see and/or know in those different contexts be welcome in my church?" (Especially, if they are not now active in any faith community.)

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### ***II. The Call to Live Together: Acts 2:41-47***

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In the midst of my hardest struggle at Riverside Church, I wrote a little song. It goes like this:

*"A strange thing happened on the way to freedom,  
A strange thing happened on the way to equality,  
A strange thing happened on the way to democracy,  
I saw a whole lot of folks in chains,  
Folks who thought they'd been set free."*

It's one thing to be called the Rock and it's another thing to become the Rock. Ask Peter, who was giving the sermon. It's one thing to be called the United Church of Christ and it's another thing to become "united." Inclusiveness is clearly the order of the day. But it brings certain inconveniences along.

#### **A. LISTEN to the biblical text:**

*"So those who welcomed Peter's message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers.*

*"Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time being together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with gladness and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."*

*Acts 2:41-47*

#### **B. The COMMENTARY AND IMPLICATIONS from the text given the context of the Multiracial/Multicultural Pronouncement.**

I'm not quite sure about the class distinction. It is not even clear how long this sharing took place in the New Testament church. They never did really live up to the year of Jubilee nor to the year of release for long. But in an unguarded moment maybe the community did yield to this. They shared all things.

When you have to ask what you have to give up, you don't really have to search long. You've got to give up your resources and you've got to give up your power. The truth is that everybody did some giving up for the sake of the total group. Goods were distributed and day by day they spent much time in the temple.

Spending a lot of time in the church is one of the marks of the Spirit. Where the Spirit is really alive, that is the best show in town. There is no other place that brings as much delight as what happens in the gathered community when it's really alive.

Also they broke bread at home. I don't know whether that meant they spent a lot of time in each other's homes, or when they had dinner at their own homes, they were just family units. The impression you get is that there was a whole lot of house to house fellowship going on.

This raises a question. If there is continuous segregation in housing patterns, we are not going to be able to live up to the implications of our founding. If any group is talking about real integration, real multiracial/multicultural experience, and that group does not have an aggressive program about housing, one that is not characterized by the restrictive covenants of either tradition or law, then that group is not serious!

Maybe the greatest deterrent against the United Church of Christ fulfilling its mission regarding the Multiracial/Multicultural Pronouncement is that a major part of your work would have to be allocating great sums of money to take on a 25 year project to substantially reduce the level of separation of people in terms of housing across the nation. I've not heard of that as a major project for anybody. We've not even seen if it can be possible. However, coming together to worship is not a strange turn around when living together is real. They went from house to house. Perhaps we missed it because it is not clear in the text.

They had generous hearts, generosity, praising God and being happy together so that they could have "the goodwill of all the people." To be prophetic under these circumstances would not be always shouting with shrill notes of bitterness and wrath. It could be prophetic that you got together and enjoyed yourselves so much that it marked a separation from the culture around us. To be happy together could be a prophetic action. That is part of what we say about Riverside. "At least we ought to have a good time in here. Because if people come and see black and white, gay and straight, Hispanics, and people of Japanese and Chinese and Korean backgrounds in here having a good time together, that's prophetic!"



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### C. **ENGAGEMENT:** To engage in the questions and applications for your situations... for your life, your church, and the community.

1. Review the text as a group: describe what you see in the passage. Who is being baptized? What did they devote themselves to? What kind of changes were taking place, in the hearts of the people and in the collective group?
2. Forbes comments about people worshipping in homes. Multiracial and multicultural experiences outside the church are connected with those same experiences inside the church. True for you? Look at the people in the pews of your church. How many persons of different races and/or cultures are present? Write down your responses about the gospel's call for engaging your community. What kind of segregation, by race and/or culture, do you see around you?
3. Do you think of your church as "the best show in town?" Use Forbes' understanding of being "happy together" as a sign of the church's prophetic joy when races and cultures gather to worship. What is Forbes getting at? What illustrations of this can you find in your church life? What do you think it means for the "Lord to add to [your] number those who [are] being saved?"
4. What resources do you have to give up? What power? "The truth is that everybody did some giving up for the sake of the total group." What total group does God call you to share your power with? Name three specific ways in which such "giving up" has occurred for you. In your church. What are three specific ways in which that might yet occur? For yourself, for your church, and for the community?
5. What would it mean for this church to live prophetically in this community and in this time?

### III. *Beyond the Enclaves of Our Native Upbringing:* Acts 8:1B

#### INTRODUCTION

Maybe I ought to stop this study now, because in the eighth chapter there was a severe persecution and all except the apostles were scattered.

#### A. **LISTEN** to the biblical text, Acts 8:1b:

*"That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria."*

*Acts 8:1b*

### B. **The COMMENTARY AND IMPLICATIONS** from the text given the context of the Multiracial/Multicultural Pronouncement.

If it is our destiny to advance the gospel beyond the enclaves of our native upbringing, sometimes trouble can break out. Demographics can be against us. Social pressures can conspire against our well being. And I have to think that it's probably true that when statistics do not bode well for the organization, good Christians might ask how these negative circumstances themselves are capable of advancing God's will for us.

I assume that in some instances if it had not been for hardships, many people would not have become creative about advancing towards what God wanted them to do. This is not a kind of masochistic approach: "I'd like to have trouble." But trouble is at least a very significant resource which we cannot afford to miss. Trouble may be the occasion of our most creative advances in certain areas which we otherwise would have bypassed.

### C. **ENGAGEMENT:** To engage in the questions and applications for your situations... for your life, your church, and the community.

1. Review the text as a group. What kind of persecution broke out? Who was doing the persecuting and who was being victimized by the persecution?
2. The church was persecuted, perhaps due to advancing the gospel beyond the "enclaves of our native upbringing." This means, according to Forbes, there was trouble. What does it mean to advance the gospel beyond our native upbringing? What kind of "trouble" do we get into when we decide to follow the gospel's call to be in relationship with those who are of a different racial and/or cultural background? Are we open, as individuals and as a church, to learning from others who are different from us? What are some of the good, gospel troubles that have happened in your church? What "gospel trouble" have you been involved in as a Christian?
3. "Hardships do make for creativity." Is this true for you? For your church? How have you coped, even thrived, when you have been forced and/or led into creative responses to act on the gospel?
4. "When statistics do not bode well for the organization," Forbes indicates, we need to acknowledge the negative circumstances and see how these can challenge us to become even more creative. What are some of those statistics for you? What are and could be some of the

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implicit creative and even God-inspired responses? Mention two ways you have learned about God's will, God's lessons, through the negative experiences.

### IV. *New Encounters*: Acts 8:26-39

#### INTRODUCTION

After the severe persecution, notice what happens. Here is the Ethiopian Eunuch, one who is from a different ethnic group.

#### A. LISTEN to the biblical text:

*"Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it.' So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:*

*'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,  
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,  
so he does not open his mouth.*

*In his humiliation justice was denied him.*

*Who can describe his generation?*

*For his life is taken away from the earth.'*

*The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?' He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing."*

Acts 8:26-39

#### B. The COMMENTARY AND IMPLICATIONS from the text given the context of the Multiracial/Multicultural Pronouncement.

Will the Holy Spirit lead us down some wilderness roads? And will we be able to justify it amongst our other friends in other denominations? Of course, it is biblical. Every now and then the Holy Spirit's agenda will lead us down some wilderness roads. It will not help our budget that much, not initially, anyway. It may, however, enrich us in other ways.

The Spirit took Philip down. And what a remarkable encounter it was. At the end of it, when it was all over, they came up from the water and the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. People need to know that they don't have to be doomed to the hardship post forever. The Lord knows that we shouldn't have a whole career of hardship all the time. If you go to the wilderness for a while, it is expected that maybe the Spirit will lift you up and give you relief even sometimes when you're kicking and screaming, when you can't stand it anymore.

I think Philip experienced something with that Ethiopian eunuch which was an enrichment for him. He was a eunuch. That introduces the issue of whether or not he was regularly configured according to traditional families. Obviously not, wouldn't that be the case?

Perhaps, one of the ways God helps the church to grow into completeness is through a population which is despised and rejected by the culture. This may come by taking the despised and rejected ones and daring to let the full gospel of Christ be available. God fulfills the agenda of the Spirit by causing us to transcend the negativity in the culture of which we are a part. We are to relate to gay and lesbian communities of faith and to the gay and lesbian communities in our own cities. Part of what the Spirit does is to open us up to constituencies that have not been part of our organized outreach profile before. The Spirit's agenda is being fulfilled.

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### C. **ENGAGEMENT:** To engage in the questions and applications for your situations... for your life, your church, and the community.

1. Look over your church's history. What are a couple wilderness roads on which your church has been "led?" How/when did/was your church "snatched" off that road? In this biblical passage Philip was led to the wilderness and then at the end of the story, the Spirit snatched Philip away. Do you identify with those actions of the Spirit in your church?
2. Forbes raises the question of a population that is rejected and despised by the culture, in particular the gay and lesbian communities. For some, it even seems impossible to talk with persons who are part of a rejected and despised culture. It is sometimes hard just to be able to listen, to hear persons who are "other" than ourselves. In what ways have you reached out in conversation to hear and to listen to others who are different from you? Who are the constituencies to whom you and your church need to be opened up? How could you build bridges with these persons?
3. "The agenda of the Spirit." What does that mean to you? Apply that to your church and to yourself. How is it working out?

## V. *Yes to a Church for All People:*

Acts 10:1-20

### INTRODUCTION

The following text is where the church is today. We know what we're suppose to do, yet there are two elements to be underscored and responded to in this text.

#### A. **LISTEN** to the biblical text:

*"In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius.' He stared at him in terror and said, 'What is it, Lord?' He answered, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial to God. Now*

*send men to Joppa to a certain Simon who was called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.' When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.*

*"About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven open and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, 'Get up, Peter, kill and eat.' But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.' The voice said to him again, a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.*

*"Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. They called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.'"   
Acts 10:1-20*

#### B. **The COMMENTARY AND IMPLICATIONS** from the text given the context of the Multiracial/Multicultural Pronouncement.

I assume that the Spirit that called us into unity at our birthing day is still committed to the broadening of what that unity is. The Spirit is giving Peter the opportunity to be a part of the destiny of the gathering in of all sorts and conditions of men and women. Yet the invitation to Peter finds Peter saying "No."

Have you ever felt deep down inside a "NO" to the demands of serious inclusion of those who have not been regularly a part of the founding element of the church? Have you ever experienced "NO?" I want to say to you that the value of engaging one another in these biblical texts is not

## A CHURCH FOR ALL PEOPLE: BECOMING A MULTIRACIAL AND MULTICULTURAL CHURCH

to get all "YES" people. It is to bring to expression the "NO" with the confidence that if you still work with the Spirit, the quality of your eventual "YES" is likely to be better when you have the candor to understand your "NO." The quality of your subsequent behavior will be better. Because you know that the "NO" was taken and transformed into "YES," there may be remnants of it. You can watch out against yourself and you don't have to have [people of color] always telling you all the time when are you backsliding, because you know there was some "NO" in you.

Let's assume that finally you said "YES," but you know you have to keep a eye on yourself less the "NO" reassert itself. Let's talk about the "NO" part in the call to inclusiveness, whether it has to do with budget, or whether it has to do with leadership quotas, or whether it has to do with liturgical changes, or whether it has to do with the suspension of some of the proprieties that have been so precious and dear. We need to have the nerve to share those times when we have experienced some "NO." It could happen from both the black side, the Hispanic side, the Asian side, [the Pacific Islander side] or the white side [or the Native American side]. What are the "NO" experiences on the way to becoming inclusive? What did you experience "NO" to on the way to becoming exceedingly inclusive?

I hope you've had an occasion to think about the "NO" or the "YES." Value that, treasure it, and recognize that God works with both our "NO's" and "YES's." Peter finally allowed the "YES" to rise above the "NO" and went on down there talking about revitalization. Something slightly happened down there that was akin to what happened at the beginning. So this was a time for renewal for Peter and a broadening for him because he followed that "YES." What he received at Cornelius' house was as significant as anything ever he brought along on the way, because it was, and is, the destiny of the church to keep moving along.

As we struggle with our problems to become the truly inclusive church and nation, may we be mindful of the struggles of others. May we achieve such quality togetherness that we will be able to be helpful to others so they may grow on their way to being one society under God.

### **C. ENGAGEMENT: To engage in the questions and applications for your situations... for your life, your church, and the community.**

1. Forbes says this is where the church is now. Is that true for you? Describe your church in light of this story of Philip at Cornelius' house, in particular in terms of the vision/dream of "the gathering in of all sorts and conditions of men and women."
2. "At what point(s) did you experience "NO" on the way to becoming inclusive?" Invite God's presence to reflect with you on your response to this question.
3. Earlier Forbes said, "inclusiveness is clearly the order of the day, but it brings certain inconveniences along." What might you and your church need to do in order to acknowledge those inconveniences? How can you move toward removing them?
4. This study is intended to move us all along towards transformation and renewal. What are two steps for you to take in making your Christian walk even more inclusive? What are two steps for your church so that it can be more reflective of being a church for all people?
5. Forbes began stating that there is "always tension between the biblical vision and living that vision out. Yet, that is where some energy is found." The biblical vision was given by the Holy Spirit, forming you, personally, as well as us together, as the church. Pray yourself, and in your church with others, about the biblical vision for being a church for all people. Acknowledge the energy which comes or the need for it. Notice the tensions between the vision and the reality. Pray for the Spirit to be present and keep you and us all moving along. Decide when to offer those prayers.

Come, O Holy Spirit, Come.