



# Exploring Christianity:

## A Church That Values People

**iFOLLOW**

Meeting with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series

## About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

### Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

### Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

### Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

### Credits

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# A Church that Values People

*This presentation is designed for people who have not yet come to a point in their spiritual journey where they have decided to become a follower of Jesus.*

## Learning Objectives

1. Understand the reality of diversity in the world
2. See that diversity is something God created
3. Accept that God values diversity in human personalities, ethnicity, gender
4. Accept inclusiveness as one of the Divine principles of life

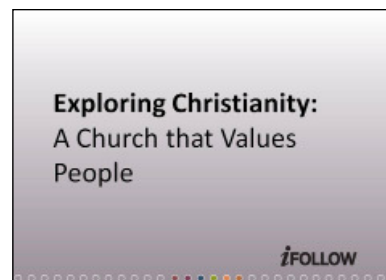
## Content Outline

1. The Reality of Diversity
2. Diversity is God's Design
3. God's Life is Diverse—Spirituality is Diverse
4. God Values Humanity
5. God Values Inclusiveness

## Background Materials for the Instructor

A mother once described how her three children responded to a big spider's web in the garden: The first child examined the web and expressed wonder at how the spider wove it. The second child worried about where the spider was hiding. The third child exclaimed, "Oh, look! A trampoline!"

The way we see and respond to life is so different. It's almost as though diversity is hard-wired into human beings (though we have a big tendency to obscure and forget this reality).



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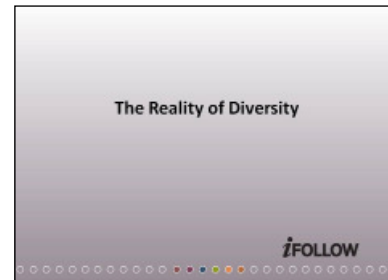
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## The Reality of Diversity

Sony came out with a creative advertisement in 2005 for their new LCD television, the Bravia. They wanted to emphasize a very simple message: the color you see on these screens will be “like no other.” So the Danish director Nicolas Fuglsig, along with the creative team from Sony, shot a movie of 250,000 balls of every color bouncing down a steep street in San Francisco. The visual result was brilliant, stunning and dazzling!



The degree of dazzling brilliance is directly in proportion to the availability and maximization of the entire range of colors. So Sony wants the public to know that their advanced technology capitalizes on this reality and makes the viewing experience unprecedentedly appealing. “Color like no other.”

And they chose to shoot the ad in San Francisco, a city known for its rich diversity in numerous levels: from the unique blend of old world and contemporary architecture to the cultural melding and morphing pot of ethnicities and lifestyles. For example, typical of this reality is when Temple United Methodist Church befriended a Ukrainian refugee woman who works in San Francisco’s most traditional German restaurant, which is owned by an Arab who is married to a Chinese woman who runs a pizza restaurant managed by a Russian. All of these differences and more make San Francisco one of the top five most visited cities in the world. And it certainly reflects our global economy.

In a Big Mac hamburger sold overseas in one of the 100-plus countries where McDonald’s has a restaurant, the onions are from the U.S., the beef patties from Hungary, the lettuce from Ukraine, the bun from Russia, the pickles and special sauce from Germany, the sesame seeds from Mexico, and the cheese from Portugal. This is what one author describes as a “polyglobal world,” (Sweet, p. 369) the globalization of economic and cultural life, which means the subsequent loss of Western hegemony and a lessening of the leverage of the Western authority over the rest of the planet. We are fast recognizing the need to embrace our planetary diversity.

Sony’s marketing mantra for the Bravia TV—“color like no other”—is becoming the description of American culture where some 10 percent of the population (28.4 million people as of the 2000 census) was born in another country, the highest share since 1940, and some 13 percent speak another language at home besides English. The population of more than 50 of the 100 largest U.S. cities is made up predominantly of immigrants and ethnic minorities.

And old ethnic categories no longer work. Tiger Woods, the most famous golfer in the world, calls himself, not African-American, but “Cablinasian” (a combination of Caucasian, black, American Indian, and Asian). For the first time, the United States has a president of

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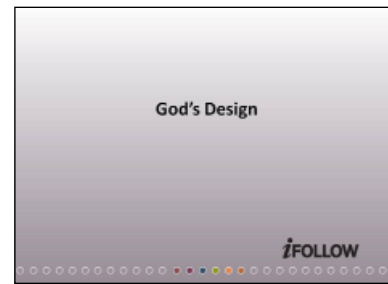
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color: Barak Obama, whose father is Kenyan and whose mother is Kansan and who grew up in Indonesia (attending a Muslim school) and Hawaii. America is a truly colorful place and simply reflective of life on the entire planet.

## God's Design

But this reality shouldn't surprise us too much. It's not anything too radically new. After all, global life and even cosmic life from their very beginning were infused with rich diversity and variety. Whether you believe in the Big Bang Theory for the evolution of the universe or the Creation model, diversity and variety are inherent within the picture of origins.



In the Big Bang Cosmological Model, the massive explosion that begins the expansion of the universe is filled with interactions between high energy density, huge temperatures and pressures, and rapid expanding and cooling. All of this produces a diverse and unique array of elemental particles that continue to interact in violent collisions, ultimately creating a predominance of matter over antimatter. Those elemental particles, clear back at the presumable beginning of the universe, are stunningly diverse and yet mysteriously similar. There's a curious homogeneity to the cosmos in the midst of opposite forces and reactions and vast diversity.

Among the most elemental particles (that were the very beginnings of life immediately following the Big Bang) are the "fermions" (comprised of 12 flavors of quarks, leptons, and neutrinos as well as 12 corresponding antiparticles) and the "bosons" (comprising gluons, photons, W and Z bosons, and mesons of which there are 146 types). This just scratches the surface of the amazing combinations of particles and forces that interact together in stunning combinations to ultimately produce matter and the later evidences of life.

The Creation Model suggests a stunning array of diversity and variety. The biblical account in Genesis 1 and elsewhere describes God bringing cosmic life into existence using a rich combination of elements. The earth is formless, empty, and dark. The Spirit of God is hovering over the surface. And God begins to create. First, light and darkness. Then, water on earth and in the heavens: The firmament and atmosphere that wraps the globe in a blanket of life-giving moisture. Then, dry ground that begins to sprout vegetation of every kind, seed-bearing, fruit-giving plants that continue recreating more of the same kind. Then, the sun, the moon, the stars. Then, water creatures of every kind, birds of every kind – both that produce more of themselves. Then, offspring-producing animals; "all sorts of livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and wild animals." And finally, human beings—male and female—with the capability of reproducing generations to come with their infinite varieties of temperament combinations, personalities, skin

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color, intelligence, emotions, desires, fears, creativity, motion and commotion, and staggering capabilities.

According to experts, there are about 400,000 plant species and somewhere from five to 50 million animal species. So however you view the origin of life, the conclusion is inescapable that diversity and variety are intrinsic to the very fabric and existence of the universe. So what are some of the implications of this reality, especially for those who call themselves religious and spiritual, who embrace a God who is either the Source of life or the divine Energy in all life? What does this reality of life mean?

## God's Life

Beatrice Bruteau of Fordham University asks the postmodern question, "How big is your we?" In other words, in today's culture and world, the basic paradigm is plural rather than singular. We are a global village first and foremost, made up of multitudes of individual tribes and nations. Imagine the rich diversity!

Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners, an evangelical Christian organization dedicated to the eradication of global poverty, hunger and other pressing human needs, puts it this way: "Can we expand our vision of community beyond our own skin, family, race, tribe, culture, country and species? Spiritual life is more than what we believe, it also includes how we relate." (Wallis, p. 86) That's a very profound paradigm. Spirituality cannot be separated from our world view and our human relations experience. There must be a corresponding valuing of diversity in how we think, talk and behave toward others. That is, in fact, true spirituality.

One of the prolific authors in the Christian New Testament, Paul, expressed this continuity by using a fascinating metaphor to describe this value in religious community. Here's the way he articulated it:

"The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ ... Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, 'I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,' that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, 'I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,' would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

"But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, 'I don't need you.' The head can't say to the feet, 'I don't need you.'

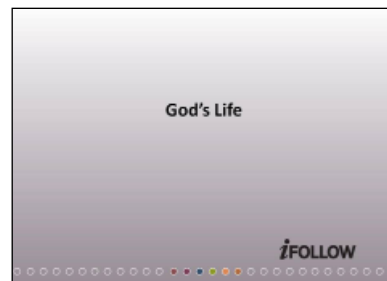
"In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the

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most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.” (1 Corinthians 12:12-22, New Living Translation)

So what is the author suggesting by using the metaphor of the human body to describe community? Several paradigms can be noted. First, diversity is a God-given reality. God placed the parts of the body where each one finds itself. Our individual value is a statement of being, not doing.

Second, every part has an important place. There is significance to each person. We all have a special role in life. And that role’s function is to contribute to the whole.

Third, we must honor each role as significant and valuable. Function doesn’t determine value; but it does contribute value to the whole.

Fourth, there must be intentionality to honoring others. To those body parts that are sometimes seen as less dignified (therefore they’re covered up and not publicly exposed or shamed) we give honor. What would that look like in community with people? It means that we seek out those who might be typically considered as the “unseen” or the “undeserving” and give them dignity – honor them, acknowledge their importance and value.

Fifth, our interdependence with others encourages us to live in solidarity with each other – when one suffers, we all suffer; when one is honored, we all are honored and celebrate that honor. We acknowledge that we are an inter-connected whole. As theoretical physics states, one action always produces a reaction. Our universe is intertwined and inter-related. So we need to live in harmony with that reality. What affects one affects all. And when we refuse to embrace that, the whole world suffers.

And finally, life the way God designed it works best when there’s harmony and unity in the midst of diversity. Our differences don’t negate wholeness, they enhance it. It’s not either/or but both/and. When we see ourselves as parts of the same human body, we can value our individual uniqueness as well as our similarities. We bring everything to the same table of life to enhance all of life. We become advocates for each other no matter who we are or where we live – different parts of the same “body.”

Native Americans of the Southwest don’t talk about “tolerating” one another. Toleration is not the issue. They talk about “honoring” each other. Here’s how they do it. They gather in talking circles, in which everyone contributes his or her perspective about situations and events. When they “honor someone,” they first hear them, affirm them, and understand them. Only then do they themselves expect to be heard, affirmed and understood. (Sweet, p. 383)



Imagine how that one simple community discipline would transform our inter-relationships – person to person, group to group, nation to nation. Imagine intentionally creating “talking circles” where people were actually listened to and affirmed for their values and views before being lectured to. Imagine conducting foreign policy this way. Imagine living in community where all people were not just tolerated but honored equally.

## God Values Humility

For that to actually happen, two other values must be encouraged: humility and inclusivity. One of the attitudes that creates a distaste for religion and religious organizations like churches is the sense of arrogance that pervades them. The attitude that, “We are right and everyone else is wrong.” Or that, “We have the Truth and everyone else needs to embrace our Truth to be accepted in the end.”

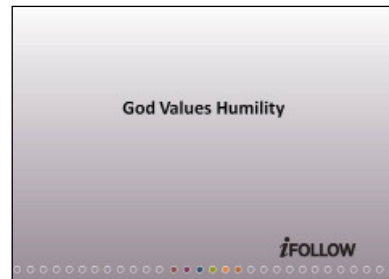
These attitudes are counterproductive to genuine community. The arrogance implicit in such an attitude puts being right ahead of being in relationship. It makes dogmatic knowledge the highest value; Truth as principle or proposition as opposed to a Person. So what I know becomes more important than who I know.

Imagine how different the religious and spiritual experience would be to embrace life with humility. To acknowledge that I don’t have all the answers, that I don’t have a corner on Truth, that I am incomplete without others, that my view of life and God will be more balanced and reflective of Totality when I expose myself to other people’s views and beliefs, that I am “here” not to simply get people to believe what I believe but also to learn from them, to allow their beliefs to help shape my own. Imagine living in a community where this value of humility was a cornerstone.

There’s a profound hymn that the early Christians sang regularly as one of their theme songs. Archeologists have uncovered copies of it in various places like homes and ancient gathering spots for worship spread throughout the ancient Middle East and Roman empire. It’s recorded in the New Testament:

“Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the [heavenly location] of deity and showed the nature of deity – he [humbly] took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.” (Philippians 2:5-8, The Message, adapted)

The cornerstone of deity is humility – the willingness to give of one’s self for the sake



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of the other – the choice to recognize the supreme value of the other to the extent of becoming one with the other, of acknowledging the significance of what the other has to bring to the Table. The heart of Christianity’s view of God and Christ centers on this experience of profound humility, what’s called the Incarnation, Christ’s intentional choice to become one with humanity in order to not only give but also receive, to not only teach but also to learn what it was like to be fully human, to live in complete solidarity with people.

The early Christians sang this hymn regularly. No wonder congregations developed the reputation in their communities of being places of acceptance and great diversity – places where, unlike the culture of their time, Jews and Gentiles, free and slave, men and women, rich and poor gathered together and shared common meals, material possessions, and spiritual activities.

Arrogance is antithetical to God and therefore to the building and establishing of genuine community. God designed life to work best with an attitude of humility.

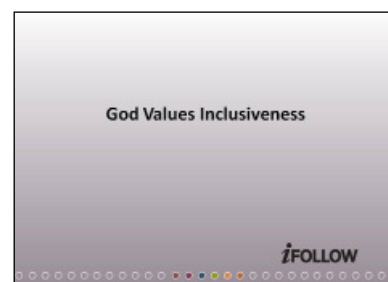
The great jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis said, “If you can’t have humility to be in balance with others, you won’t be as good a jazz musician as you might be.” (Sweet, p 384) That’s a great way to put it. Jazz as a musical structure and style is built upon the value of humility – the intentional allowing of others to contribute their expertise in an organic and dynamic blending of the whole. It involves a deep respect for each musician’s contribution to the piece by structuring into the delivery creative opportunities. The end result is high impact and deep pleasure.

## God Values Inclusiveness

It’s been suggested by some that we got our word “news-paper” because at the head of certain periodicals the following symbol was placed: N-E-W-S with the N above the E-W and the S below the E-W – indicating the four points of the compass, the four corners of the earth, north – south – east – west; news from around the world.

What a great symbol for churches to use to indicate the godly value of inclusiveness. In fact, that has always been a high value for God. For example, contrary to some opinions, the Old Testament God was regularly calling for radical inclusion among the people of God. Here’s one of those passages.

“This is what the Lord says: ‘Be just and fair to all. Do what is right and good, for I am coming soon to rescue you and to display my righteousness among you. Blessed are all those who are careful to do this. Blessed are those who honor my Sabbath days of rest and keep themselves from doing wrong.



‘Don’t let foreigners who commit themselves to the Lord say, “The Lord will never let me be part of his people.” And don’t let the eunuchs say, “I’m a dried-up tree with no children and no future.” For this is what the Lord says: ‘I will bless those eunuchs who keep my Sabbath days holy and who choose to do what pleases me and commit their lives to me. I will give them—within the walls of my house—a memorial and a name far greater than sons and daughters could give. For the name I give them is an everlasting one. It will never disappear!

‘I will also bless the foreigners who commit themselves to the Lord, who serve him and love his name, who worship him and do not desecrate the Sabbath day of rest, and who hold fast to my covenant. I will bring them to my holy mountain of Jerusalem and will fill them with joy in my house of prayer. I will accept their burnt offerings and sacrifices, because my Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

‘For the Sovereign Lord, who brings back the outcasts of Israel, says: I will bring others, too, besides my people Israel.’” (Isaiah 56:1-9, New Living Translation)

God sends a very pointed message to the Hebrew people of that day, people who considered themselves the “chosen” of God, a nation called by God to be a “light” to the world. They had become extremely exclusive and selfish, arrogant in their claims to be special to God. Rather than being a light for revealing the character of God, a channel of the divine way, they had turned inward, afraid of contamination from “outsiders” and proud of their understanding of truth. “We are the only Way,” they boasted.

As a result, they had set up a culture of “insiders” and “outsiders.” A purity religion based upon what you believed and how perfectly you lived in harmony with God’s commands. They stratified their religious community – a sacred hierarchy – with the spiritual professionals at the top and the “sinners” and “unclean” at the bottom. You were either welcome and included or not, based upon where you fit on the ladder.

Notice the two groups of people God singles out in this passage for radical inclusion: foreigners and eunuchs. Foreigners were considered “out” by virtue of birth. If you weren’t born a Jew, you couldn’t be included. And eunuchs were considered “out” by virtue of physical handicap (castration), either by their own choice or the choice of another. As a result, they were both impotent and unable to have offspring, both conditions considered by the Jews to be wrong and therefore worthy of judgment. Both groups were not accepted into the religious life of the community and looked upon as “outcasts.”

Notice what God says to both groups. In essence: “You belong! You’re In! I embrace you!” And what’s more, God promises each group special privileges that will enhance their sense of belonging: to the foreigners – “You have full and complete access to all the rights and responsibilities of my people – you can come straight into the Temple of God and worship like everyone else.” To the eunuchs – “Though you may be missing the ‘equipment’ to produce offspring and descendants to carry on your name, I will give you a legacy and a name that will live on for ever.”

Imagine what this radical inclusion does to the sense of community? God takes those considered by the “church” as unworthy and undeserving and “grafts” them into the community. God gives them full status and dignity and honor regardless of genetics or geography or physiology. To God, everyone is welcome! “My House will be called a House of Prayer for all people.”

In fact, Jesus quoted that verse when he went to the Temple and chased out the money changers and religious leaders. He cleansed the Church because ordinary people were being excluded by the religious establishment. People were being marginalized and kept out because they didn’t measure up to the external standards of the established purity religion. And so Jesus, knowing the radically inclusive nature of his God, refused to let that continue. God’s House was a House of Prayer for all people.

So why is it that so often the one place on earth that should be inclusive is exclusive? Why is it that those who claim to follow God so often act contrary to God? Imagine what it could be like if people would actually emulate the real God – a God who values diversity, humility and inclusivity. Imagine if spiritual and religious communities established themselves around these godly values in how they think and how they behave; if they really believed that difference is not deviance, that variety is positive not negative, that the “body” needs more body parts, not less, that God doesn’t make copies, God makes originals and therefore all have equal value. Imagine what life could be like then!

## Handout in this Package

1. Participant’s Notes



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## Additional Resources

- Baker, Delbert; ed. (1995). *Make Us One*. Namp, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- DeYoung,, Curtiss Paul, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Chai Kim (2003). *United by Faith: The Multicultural Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Emerson, Michael O. and Christian Smith (2001). *Divided by Race: Evangelical Faith and the Problem of Race in America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Graybill, Ronald (1970). *Ellen G. White and Church Race Relations*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association.
- Kubo, Sakae (1993). *The God of Relationships*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.
- Law, Eric H. F. (1993). *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press.
- Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. and Marvin K. Mayers (1986). *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.
- Pollard, Leslie; ed. (2000). *Embracing Diversity: How to Understand and Reach People of All Cultures*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.
- Sepulveda, Ciro, ed. (1997). *Ellen White on the Color Line: The Idea of Race in a Christian Community*. Biblos Press.
- Sweet, Leonard (1999). *Soul Tsumani*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Wallis, Jim (1996). *Who Speaks for God?* New York: Delacorte Press.

## DVD and Video

*Connections* is an official training curriculum of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America. You can obtain a copy through AdventSource. Information is at: [www.adventsource.org/dvdvideo\\_2.aspx?ID=30299](http://www.adventsource.org/dvdvideo_2.aspx?ID=30299)

## Websites

The Bradford-Cleveland-Brooks Leadership Center at Oakwood University provides the perspective of Adventist scholars and commentators on issues related to diversity and the changing culture: [www.bcbcl.org/index.php](http://www.bcbcl.org/index.php)

Leonard Sweet is a United Methodist Minister and professor of evangelism at Drew University seminar in New Jersey. He is the author of many books on dealing with the diversity that exists in contemporary society. He blogs and announces new books, etc. at: [www.leonardsweet.com](http://www.leonardsweet.com)

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## Discussion Questions

1. What is the most “different” characteristic about you that you’re willing to share?
2. List as many as possible advantages and disadvantages to infinite diversity.
3. Compare and contrast the terms “diversity” and “unity.” Are they mutually exclusive? Mutually necessary?
4. In the imaginary universe of *Star Trek*, the highly logical Vulcan culture has as its motto, IDIC (Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combination). In your imaginary perfect universe, would this motto fit in? Why or why not?
5. Have you experienced people who professed to be Christian who appeared to be attempting to stamp out diversity?
6. Have you experienced people who professed to be Christian who embraced and encouraged diversity?

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## Group Activities

**Purpose:** To set our imaginations free and create the “perfect community.”

**Preparation:** Obtain large paper, markers, paints, pencils, scissors, glue, magazines, Tinker Toys, pipe cleaners, Lego’s, or anything else you can think of that could be used to create something. You will need enough tables to have one for each team of four to six individuals. Scatter these supplies over the tables. On a board or flipchart, write these questions: “If you could find the perfect group to belong to, how would you describe it? What would it be like? What do you need a group to be for it to be meaningful to you?”

**Assignment:** Divide the large group into teams at the tables. Tell them their task is to create a representation of the Perfect Group. It should meet the needs of every person at their table. They may use any and all materials, plus discussion, sharing and action, to create this model.

**Debrief:** Allow enough time for each table to share their vision through a spokesperson. Then discuss insights, reactions, and emotions. Was it possible to meet all needs? Ask: Does the perfect group exist somewhere? If not, what prevents it?

**Time:** Allow a couple of minutes for moving to the tables before you start timing. Then time with a watch at least 30 minutes for them to create their model of a perfect group. Allow about 10 minutes per table for sharing at least another 20 minutes for debriefing as a total group.

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# Handout

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### Participant Notes

#### 1. The Reality of Diversity

A. Sony's Ad Campaign: \_\_\_\_\_

B. American Culture

28.4 million Americans were born outside this country

13% speak a language other than English at home

More than 50 of the 100 largest U.S. cities are predominantly immigrants and ethnic minorities

Tiger Woods: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. Design of the Universe

A. The Big Bang Model

The diversity of forces and elemental particles – fermions, quarks, leptons, neutrinos, antiparticles, bosons, gluons, photons, mesons

B. The Creation Model

Genesis 1 description

C. Today's Variety

Number of **plant** species: \_\_\_\_\_

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Number of **animal** species: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. God's Life

"Can we expand our vision of community beyond our own skin, family, race, tribe, culture, country and species? Spiritual life is more than what we believe, it also includes how we relate." (Jim Wallis, Sojourners)

A New Testament Metaphor: \_\_\_\_\_

"The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ ... Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, 'I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,' that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, 'I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,' would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

"But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, 'I don't need you.' The head can't say to the feet, 'I don't need you.'

In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad." (1 Corinthians 12, New Living Translation)

### 4. God Values Diversity

A. An early Christian hymn: "Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the [heavenly location] of deity and showed the nature of deity – he [humbly] took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion." (Philippians 2:5-8, The Message, adapted)

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### Exploring Christianity: A Church That Values People

B. The cornerstone of Divinity is \_\_\_\_\_

C. Wynton Marsalis (jazz trumpeter): “If you can’t have humility to be in balance with others, you won’t be as good a jazz musician as you might be.”

## 5. God Values Inclusiveness

A. A Radical Old Testament Call to Action: “This is what the Lord says: Be just and fair to all. Do what is right and good, for I am coming soon to rescue you and to display my righteousness among you. Blessed are all those who are careful to do this. Blessed are those who honor my Sabbath days of rest and keep themselves from doing wrong.

“Don’t let foreigners who commit themselves to the Lord say, ‘The Lord will never let me be part of his people.’ And don’t let the eunuchs say, ‘I’m a dried-up tree with no children and no future.’ For this is what the Lord says: I will bless those eunuchs who keep my Sabbath days holy and who choose to do what pleases me and commit their lives to me. I will give them—within the walls of my house—a memorial and a name far greater than sons and daughters could give. For the name I give them is an everlasting one. It will never disappear!

“I will also bless the foreigners who commit themselves to the Lord, who serve him and love his name, who worship him and do not desecrate the Sabbath day of rest, and who hold fast to my covenant. I will bring them to my holy mountain of Jerusalem and will fill them with joy in my house of prayer. I will accept their burnt offerings and sacrifices, because my Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations. For the Sovereign Lord, who brings back the outcasts of Israel, says: I will bring others, too, besides my people Israel.” (Isaiah 56, New Living Translation)

B. Why did God send this message to the people of God? What was the problem with the religious community at that time?

C. What two groups of people did God single out for inclusion, why, and what did God promise them?

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## 6. Your Response

If you could find the perfect church to belong to, how would you describe it? What would it be like? What do you need a church to be for it to be meaningful to you?