Roadmap to Reconciliation

Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice

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Landmarks of Reconciliation

Lament, repentance, reconciliation and justice are not peripheral to the gospel but intrinsic to it.

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I used to belong to a church that no longer exists. We were founded on a vision of being a multicultural worshiping congregation that was empowered by the Holy Spirit to do innovative outreach in the community. For me it was a dream come true. However, after I had been a member of this thriving church for twelve years, it folded. It's hard to pinpoint the ultimate reason for our demise, but as I look back on it, we couldn't successfully navigate the complexities of creating a diverse culture to facilitate lasting change. Our leadership was not equipped to help move people out of old patterns and did not empower others to deal honestly with the need for healthy systems where issues of trust could be adequately addressed.

Many churches and organizations *want* to promote and facilitate racial reconciliation, but most make very little progress in actually changing the intrinsic culture of their group. By examining the theology, sociology, psychology and organizational change theory in-

volved in reconciliation, I discovered that a journey with landmarks and distinctive phases is the best way to think about the reconciliation process. This is what will help churches and organizations and communities actually move themselves forward in the reconciliation process. Transformation is rarely linear. It's usually more of a winding process. Understanding this is the crucial first step in the Reconciliation Roadmap.

BREAKING GROUND

I began the process of analyzing and explaining the reconciliation process when I was a doctoral student. My goal was to develop a viable model based on my years of experience with racial and gender reconciliation as a consultant to churches, Christian colleges and organizations. It wasn't enough, though, to simply document the many personal and professional experiences reported by my students and other participants in the diversity trainings I facilitated. Nor was it enough to generate a theory that captured my *ideas* of reconciliation if they could not be duplicated or implemented in other contexts.

It was crucial to develop a process that was rooted in solid principles of individual and systemic change. Therefore, undergirded by the theological urgency established in the previous chapter, the first conceptual brick of the model came from social psychology. In the midst of my studies I came across a theoretical framework known as Contact Theory, which suggests that relationships between conflicting groups will improve if they have meaningful contact with one another over an extended period of time.[1] This contact must occur in a *mutually* beneficial learning environment and involve multiple opportunities for the participants to have cooperative interactions with one another. According to the theory, this type of contact will likely decrease the hostility between groups because the animosity is typically fueled by stereotypes that result from limited exposure.

Contact Theory proposes that if diverse groups spend extended

time together, their intergroup conflict and the negative effects of racism and ethnocentrism will gradually decrease and possibly even disappear altogether. A theoretical way to explain what many of my students, clients and colleagues had experienced over the years as they engaged with one another in extended positive contact was *exactly* what I had been looking for! Contact Theory was the key that unlocked the conceptual door of the Reconciliation Roadmap.

After I established Contact Theory as my theoretical foundation, the model continued to evolve, and my focus shifted toward practical application. When I was working as a consultant and developing my own curriculum for training, I identified specific characteristics and skills that indicate whether a person or group is actively engaged in reconciliation. Not all people have the same social skills and motivation to cross vast racial and ethnic barriers, regardless of any moral concern they might express. Valuing reconciliation is *not* the same as actively engaging in a process that requires commitment and sacrifice. I understood the need for people to interact in positive ways for an extended period, but I wondered how I might actually motivate people to do it!

Then I was introduced to Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy: an ordering of learning objectives within education. In Bloom's classification system, learning at a higher level is dependent on having attained prerequisite knowledge and skills at a lower level. As these skills are achieved, the taxonomy clearly describes what the learner should be able to do as a result of having acquired certain skills. I applied this taxonomy to the Reconciliation Roadmap as a means of motivation and a rubric for development. Here are the key objectives this taxonomy helped me address:

- describing what a reconciler should be able to know, feel and do as a result of progressing through each stage of the model

- listing the specific skills or metaskills that a person must develop in order to become an effective agent of reconciliation

- naming the specific landmarks and clarifying the intended goal of each one

- identifying what people need to learn before moving on to the next phase

Early on this model was conceptually grounded in social psychology and educational theory and focused on individual learning rather than group or organizational change. That was not enough. I want to teach people how to be reconcilers, yes, but I also want to train them to build *communities* of reconciliation. It's not enough to build a model for individual change if we ignore the groups that shaped them and the communities in which they live. Cultural transformation in a church or organization *must* go beyond interpersonal models of changing "one person at a time," which dominates Western evangelical thinking. The goals of reconciliation need to shift from interpersonal acceptance to building reconciling communities of racial, ethnic, class and gender diversity.

People around the world are experiencing *significantly* different types of conflict, however, and therefore their approach to reconciliation will necessarily differ. For example, some people are living in sites of "hot conflict." When there is shooting, bombing, raping and genocide, there isn't time or space or capacity for discussing a reconciliation model! Instead, with "hot conflict" the emphasis must be primarily on ending the violence and finding ways to mediate the immediate conflict and facilitate some stable boundaries to negotiate peace.

"Cold conflict," on the other hand, is an indirect ongoing ideological confrontation that does not offer hope of peace or honor for those who engage in it. The absence of direct and active violence in zones of cold conflict can lead to the assumption that there *is* no antagonism there. However, chronic inequality and devaluation of people groups engender a strife that hovers just beneath the surface, and we often see it erupt over even the slightest provocation. There

are *many* instances in the United States of racially charged aggression, gender inequity and systemic injustice, and the majority of these would be characterized as "cold conflict." The strategies necessary to bridge the racial, religious, gender, tribal and cultural divides of cold conflict can be difficult to grasp. It is for these spaces and places of cold conflict that I offer the Reconciliation Roadmap as a guide.

DEFINING THE LANDMARKS

I have identified five primary landmarks as signs of progress that will produce lasting personal and cultural change in people and groups who seek to live out the biblical vision of reconciliation together as a diverse community:

- catalytic events

- realization

- identification

- preparation

- activation

Catalytic events are vital in the reconciliation process, as they are the primary vehicles for moving people out of old patterns, assumptions and perceptions and into transformative cycles of change. The other landmarks focus on the attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary to grow and achieve authentic and lasting reconciliation.

This model is unique in that it goes beyond the historical practices of adding personnel and increasing the number of culturally diverse people in a group (which rarely, if ever, works). Such strategies have not proved effective in transforming the patterns of how people relate to one another. And education and training alone can't do it either. The Reconciliation Roadmap demonstrates the ongoing process necessary to produce systemic change and aims to teach you how to build communities of reconciled

people. Take a look at the Roadmap diagram to get a feel for each phase in the model.
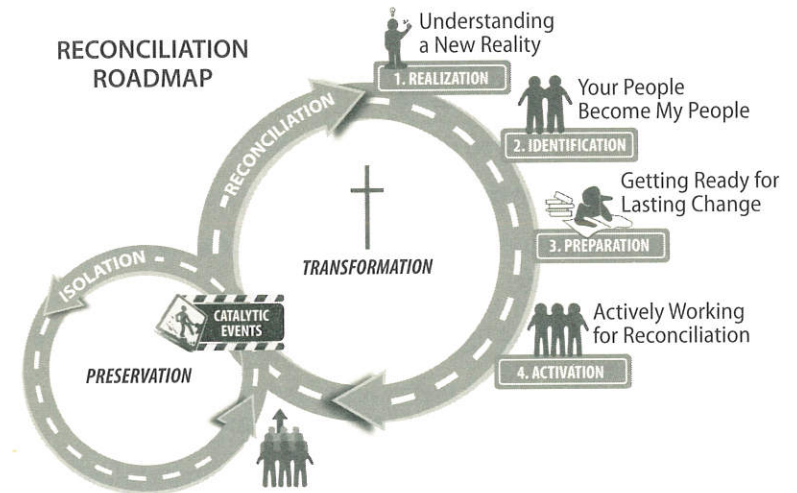
The Reconciliation Roadmap guides the process for reconciling communities with racial, ethnic and other societal differences. It helps individuals *and* groups navigate the arduous path to enduring systemic change. Ongoing interaction in a collaborative environment is inherent in every phase, and a foundational commitment to forgiveness, humility and the pursuit of justice is woven throughout the model.

Now that you have this overview, I invite you to join me on this transformative reconciliation journey. I guarantee that there will be personal and systemic transformation as we engage in this life-changing process of social healing together.

⫸ GETTING PRACTICAL

Our racial and ethnic identity is important to God. Without our cultural and ethnic backgrounds we have a limited and incomplete

perspective of who God is. Use a puzzle to help your group experience Contact Theory and to illustrate the complexity and difficulty of coming together for reconciliation. This exercise should take about forty-five minutes and will help your group see how we're all interconnected and therefore need each other to complete the work God has called us to do.

Objectives

This exercise will help participants to learn

- what it takes for people from different racial and ethnic groups to come together

- what strategies are necessary to pursue racial and ethnic reconciliation

- why racial reconciliation is so puzzling and confusing

- what the joy of unity and racial reconciliation feels like when we achieve it

- how to move beyond racial segregation to reconciliation

Scripture

Ephesians 2:10-22

Materials Needed

- one puzzle with enough pieces for each person to have one

- flip charts or whiteboard

- colored markers

- table or flat surface large enough to hold assembled puzzle

- Bible

Facilitating the Exercise

Opening

- Give every person a puzzle piece as they walk in.

- Establish ground rules (see "Creating Safe Spaces" in chapter 5).

- Open in prayer and read Scripture: Ephesians 2:10-22.

Phase 1

Using the following questions, ask each person to examine his or her piece of the puzzle:

- What piece of the puzzle do you have?

- What do you know about your piece of the puzzle?

- What does it tell you?

- What do you think it is?

- How do you feel about your puzzle piece?

- Are you one of those who do not like to put puzzles together? Why? What makes it difficult?

- Or are you one who enjoys putting puzzles together? Why?

- What do you want to do with your puzzle piece? Why?

Phase 2

Allow the group to put the puzzle together. Observe group dynamics such as the following:

- Who seems to emerge as the leader(s) of the group?

- Does everyone participate? Why or why not?

- What process do they use to put the puzzle together?

- How do they communicate?

- How do they coordinate their efforts?

(Please note that everything is instructive and can be used in the debriefing process.)

Phase 3

Large-Group Debriefing

- After the puzzle is assembled, have people go back to their seats.

- Use the following questions to debrief the experience and help the group to see how the work of ethnic diversity and racial reconciliation is similar to the work necessary to assemble a puzzle.

- Write their responses to the following questions on the board or flip chart.

  - What do we know now that we didn't know before the puzzle came together?

  - What does this suggest?

  - How did it feel to complete the puzzle?

  - What did it take to put the puzzle together? What did you experience or observe about the process?

  - If our different ethnicities and cultures are compared to a puzzle, why is each piece so important? What happens if one piece is missing?

  - Why is your piece of the puzzle important? What happens to the picture if your piece is missing?

  - In what ways is ethnic diversity like a puzzle?

  - How are the issues of race and ethnicity puzzling to you?

  - What would it take for our ethnic and cultural pieces to come together in this group?

  - What are the obstacles we face in putting our pieces together?

Phase 4
Wrap up the session by having everyone complete the following sentence:

Today I learned that _____.