

Beloved Community

Friday, November 14, 2014

Attending: Camille Brown, Julia Bebeau, Vivan Martindale, Dean Parker, Kenneth Kho, Dianne Steelman, Wesley Sun, Shirley Fair, Kelly Legg, Pat Hernandez

- Camille called the meeting to order with prayer.
- Dianne – struck by conversation re: UM that Beloved Community is going to be an even higher priority as we move forward trying to create relationships with other pieces of ABC-USA.
 - Julia and Camille also echoed that note.
- Pat invited us to each share our contexts for ministry by way of introduction and reminder.
- Wesley shared with us about his previous experience on an ACT around beloved community.
 - Much energy around diversity. He felt there needed to be greater clarity around the definition of diversity (for instance, does the beloved community exclude an ethnic congregation which speaks in a native language)?
 - He wants us to wrestle with the reality that it's OK we cannot necessarily build a certain viewpoint of beloved community everywhere (for instance, you cannot expect racial diversity in an area where there is none; can we celebrate beloved community in slightly different formats depending on the region, etc).
 - He saw what they did as more of a conversational piece without producing a final piece. That's why we're here today, in part, to pick up where the ACT left off.
 - Pat reminded us of the charge we were already given from Don Ng.
 - “ABC life has welcomed and celebrated the great diversity and gifts that its members bring in the making of the whole. Statistically, ABC is more multi-ethnic than any other Protestant group in the US. While we have affirmed such God-given richness, we still have not attained the spirit of a “beloved community.” What does it mean to be the Body of Christ that values all of its members? How is power shared among its members? The composition of BGM is designed to reflect a “beloved community” in its members but how may we truly function in spirit? This Action Group will continue the ACT on this topic with the hope of identifying findings that would influence the work that BGM does such as the Biennial Mission Summit.”
- Dianne began a discussion around the UM ACT challenge. If we're going to regain the trust of the congregations and regions again, then we must function as a beloved community. What would it look like to visit with all the churches and begin making those connections?
- Dean Parker serves on the board of the PBA (Philadelphia Baptist Association) and shared with us that many of the congregations, while affiliated with the PBA, don't know what that means or how the PBA serves them. He's been visiting with the local churches in an effort to build community between region and congregation, reintroducing the region and explaining the ways the region blesses the ministry of local churches.
 - Working to build a *partnership*.
 - Recognizing that they cannot ask people to be a member of an organization when they do not yet know what the organization does.

- He recommended a book by Peter Block, *Community: A Structure of Belonging*.
- Pat asks: What do we feel we can do regarding the broken connections/trust between ABC-USA, regions, etc? How do we help in the shift from self-interest to interest in the whole?
 - Wesley – He’s noticed a push on BGM for ethnic and age diversity, particularly around leadership. Also seen theological and gender diversity. For him the glaring omission is sexual orientation.
 - Shirley – She’d like to see us talk about something other than just diversity, as we do talk about that so much. She sees our goal as helping all of our churches to feel part of a beloved community. That takes communication, personal involvement, etc.
 - Julia – There are churches where the diversity question isn’t as obvious, but they somehow feel disenfranchised from the denomination due to location, size, or theology.
 - Vivan – There are different levels of diversity (this group, BGM, regional leaders, congregations, etc). We begin here to learn to appreciate one another’s viewpoints, giftedness, etc. Then we take that to the next level.
 - Wesley – I don’t have a problem when certain groups are excluded. I have a problem when a certain group is always excluded.
 - Dianne – We need to focus on getting people to buy-in to this community.
 - Camille – The sexual orientation question is what tore ABC-USA apart. Churches left; many have not come back. So, yes, that’s a subject that is not much talked about because we’re trying to rebuild and heal.
 - Julia – If there’s to be healing, we cannot exclude a people group or topic.
 - Ken – Spoke of a work his church does with Spanish-speaking Japanese individuals in his area. They discovered a people group not being reached and ministered to in his context; their voice is not heard because they do not fit any of the categories. Is a beloved community, then, meant to help discover voices still hidden within our community?
 - Wesley – A beloved community creates the space for disagreement in a God-honoring way. Can we disagree “tooth and nail,” but still love each other? How can this group and board model that for others?
 - Dianne – Ohio churches are worn out over the homosexual issue. We’ve lost dozens of churches. If we’re going to concentrate on this one particular thing over the diversity issue, we will have missed the chance of delighting the congregations across the land.
 - Kelly – How can we teach people to love each other the way Jesus does, no matter their theological stances? We must also make sure that in our radical inclusion, we’re not excluding the evangelical any more than the person who is very liberal.
 - Dean – Let’s adopt John 3:16 as our marching orders. How do we radically love the BGM folks? Let’s take *action* not just champion a particular diversity issue. A beloved community is an action team that shows love to the people they’re given.
 - Dianne – In the ecumenical group she’s part of they can agree on *nothing* theologically, but they can come together around mission projects. Is it possible to get beyond the differences by focusing on the mission?
 - In her community, an African American church refused to have a joint service because she was the female pastor. She chose to step back and allow her lay

- leaders to do everything, because she saw the community as more significant than her own role.
- Pat – In one of the reports that's been done on our denomination, someone lifted up a sense that if we never deal with homosexuality, then we'll never move forward. Soul liberty dictates that we need to learn how to include the voices, even if we disagree strongly. Cited two churches (one evangelical and one liberal) who withdrew because they felt Roy had not made a strong stance on the homosexual questions in either direction.
 - How do we help our churches belong? That very much ties with mission giving.
 - How do we love like Jesus loves? How do we do so on all the different layers represented from church to association to region, etc?
 - How do we help more voices to be brought to the table? How do we find the ones that aren't here, yet?
 - Julia – When our action groups were set into motion, what was the executive committee looking for in the end?
 - Pat – That we don't lose the adaptive challenge of a beloved community and we impact the work of the BGM.
 - Julia – Might we explore the question of how Jesus loves by the adaptive challenge format?
 - Vivan – Saw a pretty clear consensus from the UM ACT that what they put forward is feasible from us. Whatever overarching strategy as a board that we come up with for UM, needs to be infused with a sense of beloved community. How can we focus on that?
 - That would give us a greater focus to our efforts right now.
 - Camille told us that EC charged the Identity action group with taking on the identity piece from the UM ACT.
 - Vivan – is there something tangible we can ask people to do in our report tomorrow?
 - Dean – at his church they asked people to recommit their time, talent, testimony, and tithes to Christ for 90 days. They wrote down their commitment, placed it inside a box (called it a 'tabernacle'), and kept it in the sanctuary for the 90 days.
 - He wonders if we could ask people to commit to how they could create a 'beloved community' back in their regions and have them live that out between now and June. Request those testimonies at our next board meeting. "How will you be the beloved community when you leave?"
 - Look for *actions* not a definition.
 - Pat – we could request permission to meet between board gatherings so we have more time to flesh this out. We could also ask to bring someone into a board meeting to lead us in an adaptive challenge exercise centered around beloved community, as Katie Choi Wong did last November.
 - Vivan – Phone calls severely limit communication. It would be better to be in the same physical space or at least using GoToMeeting for video conferencing.
 - Actionable Item for our Saturday Report

- Vivan – “What would the Beloved Community of Jesus Christ look like to you?” “How will you commit to living as a participant of the Beloved Community?” Couple with the understanding that in the June meeting we want them to report back at some point during the June meeting. We would keep their answers and utilize it as “grist for the mill.”
 - Wesley will email the collated version to all of us by Thanksgiving.
- Dean – recommends we use John 3:16a as part of our report.
- We’ll request that the ABC-USA staff will print the questions on ½ sheets and have ready before we begin. Request that folks fill it out. We’ll ask Judy to create space during closing worship for people to turn it in then.
- Theme verse: “For God so loved the world . . . love each other as I have loved you.” (John 3:16a, 15:12) His action toward us leads us toward our action to others.
- Pat – Desires that we not forget that Jesus calls us to lay down our lives for one another, as we move forward. How do we recall that there are other voices not yet at the table? What does it look like to actually live out radical inclusion? Loving like Jesus is very hard work; after all, He offended everybody with His love!
- Vivan – May we send an action point to the total board saying that whatever comes out of the UM ACT needs to be done somehow in relation to Beloved Community.
- Vivan/Dianne – Raised the question “what exactly are we meant to produce as an action group”?
 - Wesley read our paragraph explanation in the action group definitions.

Respectfully submitted,
Kelly Legg