

## Understanding Our Blind Spots

Part One of a Two-Part Study on Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Light + Life Group Conversation and Study Guide

Based on the article by Bishop Linda Adams  
in Light + Life Magazine, May 2021



Begin your group gathering by reciting in unison the following passage of Scripture:

“Open the eyes of my heart, Lord,  
Open the eyes of my heart.  
I want to see You, I want to see You.”<sup>1</sup>

### Cross-Cultural Collaboration

*Crunch!* I watched in horror as the hood of my VW Jetta crumpled like tinfoil while I honked the horn with all my might. The driver of the big truck in front of me had backed into me so fast he totaled my car in two seconds.

“I’m so sorry!” he groaned. “I never even saw you!”

I guess the load piled high in the back of his truck blocked his rearview mirror, and his side mirrors’ view proved too wide to see my little car. I was in his blind spot. He didn’t mean to hit me. He just didn’t see me.

It’s sort of like that with cross-cultural blind spots. Without intending harm, we make false assumptions about people’s existence because we’re seeing them only through our own cultural lenses. As Jesus warned, we could very well have a plank in our own eye while we point out the speck of sawdust in another person’s

eye (see Matthew 7:1–5). An African proverb says it this way: “Strangers have their eyes wide open, but they see very little.”

For the American context, it is significant to know that 75 percent of Whites have “entirely White social networks without any minority presence” and that the same kind of reality holds true for almost two-thirds of Black Americans (“The Third Option: Hope for a Racially Divided Nation” by Miles McPherson, quoting statistics from the Public Research Institute). This social divide inevitably creates blind spots. How can we learn not to judge one another without understanding each other? Can we find ways to “walk a mile in each other’s shoes”? How can we work collaboratively to reach the variety of people in our cities and communities with the Good News of Jesus if we live in isolation from one another?

As a group participate in this simple and fun exercise in observation. Take a common object — it can be most anything. As you pass it from person to person, have everyone name one attribute of the object (e.g. a tennis ball might be “fluorescent” or “fuzzy”). Continue through three complete cycles and have someone write down all the responses. Now reflect on these questions together.

1. For the first person to receive the object, how easy was it for you to name an attribute? How much time and thought did you give to your response?
2. For the last person to receive the object in the third round, how much time and thought did you give before responding? How did your experience differ from the first person to name an attribute of the object?

Bishop Linda’s car accident was an example of what happens when we have “blind spots.” Bishop Linda says, “Without intending harm, we make false assumptions about people’s existence because we’re seeing them only through our own cultural lenses.”

1. Describe a time where another person made a false assumption or judgment about you.
2. How did that make you feel? How did you respond?
3. When we hear the words “White,” “Latino,” “African,” “Black,” and “Asian,” we tend to immediately have images and words enter our minds. Without responding aloud, consider those images and/or words and ask yourself, “Could any of these be false assumptions?”

For those who are White, reflect on Bishop Linda’s statement that, *it is significant to know that 75 percent of Whites have “entirely White social networks without any minority presence.”*

1. Consider your own social networks (friends, colleagues, social, professional, et al.) Are they made up of only White people or are people of other races involved and viewed as peers/leaders?
2. Based on your responses above, how does having monochrome social networks (regardless of race) increase the likelihood of false assumptions and judgments?

Consider this and discuss: People are not like the object we passed through our circle. They are people. We use objects, but when we use people, we objectify them rather than humanize them.

## Missions Trips and Open Eyes

For many Free Methodists in the U.S., cross-cultural exposure has first been experienced on short-term international mission trips. Tens of thousands have gone on [Volunteers in Service Abroad \(VISA\)](#) trips to visit and serve in another part of the world. Almost always, VISA teams return home reporting eye-opening and humbling experiences: “The people we met had so little but were so generous!” “The children were poor but so happy!” “The church’s high-energy worship went on for three hours and nobody got tired!”

Lasting impressions have often been formed around memories of passionate faith, sacrificial hospitality, family solidarity and delicious, exotic food. The beauty of another culture was on full display, and the VISA team eventually realized, “We went to help, but actually we found out we were there for God to open our eyes to ourselves and our world. We learned far more than we taught.” And that is, in fact, one reason to send teams. People gain from the experience of “Crossing Cultures 101.”

But of course, only the most basic lessons can be learned in a week or two. And sometimes appearances deceive, and we are so blind to the impact of our own presence and culture that our learning is flawed. How can we get beyond first impressions and host/guest politeness and begin to understand at a deeper level? How can we gain a worldview shaped by intercultural intelligence rather than surface realities?

That’s where collaboration comes in. We need each other. When our brothers and sisters around the world become our real partners, we take a learning posture with them. When they recognize in us a desire to be true co-laborers, they can speak the hard truth and ask the hard questions and learn from us as well. We all move beyond judging based on outward appearances to appreciating something closer to what God sees, the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). Humility can lead to true knowledge, which enhances love and respect and empowers our shared mission. Sometimes people who have begun to have their eyes opened move on to educate themselves further through reading, joining groups, or taking courses like [Perspectives](#) or those involving the [IDI](#) (Intercultural Development Inventory).

[Free Methodist World Missions](#) now works in 98 countries. We also celebrate the existence of 19

general conferences, each governed by its own Book of Discipline, bishops, and boards. We embrace the way of intercultural engagement, moving beyond old mindsets toward profound cross-cultural collaboration. The church in many countries sends missionaries to reach other tribes and language groups in their own country, as well as to evangelize and raise up leaders and churches in other nations. In the U.S., we welcome Christian leaders who immigrate here, recognizing their unique ability to organize new churches filled with immigrants from their region of the world. In all these cases, we acknowledge our own limited vantage point and recognize how God has designed the body of Christ to cooperate for the greater good.

Similar efforts are beginning in the church here in our racialized American society, but the process involves hard work and gets pretty messy. I asked an African American pastor friend how she sees our reality. She replied, “It has been my experience that most people within the church are open to having a multiracial church but not a multicultural one. This happens because we are open to allowing others to come and *share* our experience, but we are not so eager to allow others to come and *change* our experiences. Others are allowed to become one of us, but we do not always allow them to remain true to themselves. What’s missing is deep (and often painful) conversation to build meaningful relationships. We need to explore different perspectives on history, culture, the gospel, and politics. That takes a lot of time and energy. There is no way around this. There are fewer people willing to sign up for that type of collaboration!”

If “Crossing Cultures 101” was offered across the ocean, why can’t “Crossing Cultures 201” be offered across the city? It can! It must.

Last summer, interviews with our bishops and several elected African American leaders in the Free Methodist Church were livestreamed so others could hear their perspectives on racial justice. During the past year, hundreds of Free Methodists have read books and joined groups for intentional listening and learning across racial lines, expanding beyond Black/White to explore life from the vantage point of Latino, Asian, Native American, and multiracial brothers and sisters. Many have begun to notice how we distance ourselves from “the other,” whether that

otherness involves gender, ethnicity, religion, political party, age, differences in ability, or any other feature that separates us. Conversations are happening. Sometimes we lament what has been lost. Sometimes we repent for our complicity and blind spots. We are always seeking to offer grace in this journey toward becoming one in Christ and experiencing a full and diverse expression of that oneness throughout our church.

[“The Love Required of Us.”](#) by [Liz Cornell](#), is our recommended Free Methodist curriculum that is

being used in multiple churches across the country to promote cross-cultural understanding in the body of Christ. Testimonies of how God is using these groups to transform lives and communities are now being shared. Greater diversity is being sought and welcomed. Areas of cultural blindness are coming into focus, leading to the admission, “Once I was blind, but now I can see.” Visit [freemethodistbooks.com](http://freemethodistbooks.com) to order the curriculum as a paperback book or as an e-book/PDF.

Have you been on a short-term mission trip? In your group, discuss those trips and what you learned.

Bishop Linda says, “I asked an African American pastor friend how she sees our reality.” Reflect on the responses of the African American pastor and discuss them:

1. We want a multiracial church but not a *multicultural* one.
2. We prefer sharing our experiences over allowing others to *change* them.
3. We desire for others to become one of us, without remaining *true to themselves*.
4. Deep (and often painful) conversations that would lead to collaboration are missing.

Discuss the four points above. Do you agree with those statements, disagree, or have additional thoughts to share?

For those who are White, how often do you ask your friends of color about their opinions, viewpoints, feedback, or experiences?

What might be one step we can take in our church and personal lives to open the door to pursue collaboration with others?

## Two Extended Study Opportunities

Bishop Linda recalls two conversations with FM leaders of color in 2020. As a group, consider watching these two videos (lengthy but well worth the investment of time) and openly discussing them together.

- Talk, Listen and Learn Together: <https://vimeo.com/433676666>
- Continuing the Conversation: <https://vimeo.com/433676666>

Additionally, Bishop Linda mentions *The Love Required of Us* by Liz Cornell, recommended by the Free Methodist Church as a resource to pursue greater racial understanding. Consider doing this study as a group.

- Purchase online (print or PDF e-book) at [https://freemethodistbooks.com/?s=required&post\\_type=product](https://freemethodistbooks.com/?s=required&post_type=product)