

Chapter 5

Belonging and Appropriation

Dear Facilitator(s),

This workshop series was crafted, reviewed by a multiracial team, and revised with several important issues in mind.

1. The series design allows facilitators to use one or more activity sections as standalone events or in various combinations. There are approximately 5 hours of content available for each chapter. It is unlikely that any group will have enough time to work through all sections. Therefore, facilitators should select from the various options, perhaps following one or two thematic strands. (See the Workshop Series Overview for more details about thematic strands.)
2. Moving through these workshops without reading the corresponding *Living in the Tension* book chapter will markedly reduce workshop effectiveness. It will make the process more challenging and is not recommended.
3. A primary purpose of this series is for groups to enhance the leadership capacity within their community. Detailed facilitator notes are provided for each activity so that one or more group members can practice facilitation while leading the series. A few notes of caution: a) the same facilitation team should run the entire series, b) the team should read the entire book in advance of leading workshop sections, and c) sufficient debrief opportunities should be created to discuss how each workshop went so that facilitators' skills can be developed.
4. The intended audience includes white people who recognize the need to support racial justice efforts and want to improve and solidify their anti-racism practice. The series has also been constructed with the understanding that some people of color might resonate with the tensions described in the book and find value in the exploration. For this reason, questions within the majority of sections are crafted to allow people of any racial background to participate. Sections designed specifically for white people's development are also noted. This series can be used in a racially caucused (affinity group) or mixed-race format. (See Facilitation Guide for more information.)
5. First-time facilitators are encouraged to use the language scripts provided in the openings, directions, and wrap-up portions of each agenda. Deviating from the language and tone may create confusion and undercut the purpose of the section.
6. Facilitators are encouraged to create a welcoming, inviting space where participants feel free to speak the truth of their experience without fear of shaming or reprisal. It is essential for facilitators to understand that a hallmark of both the book and the series is the need to validate some element of people's perspectives while seeking to add to their understanding.

Best wishes,
Shelly Tochluk

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Living in the Tension - Chapter 5

Belonging and Appropriation

5.0 – Warm up – A Little Revelation (15 minutes)

Materials needed: None

Purpose of piece: To begin sharing information about one another related to personal decision-making and its relationship to individual and collective needs.

Say to group: We're going to start by doing an activity in three parts. During each section you'll introduce yourselves with a small revelation about yourself. You'll be given a prompt so you'll know what kind of detail you'll be sharing. What you want to do is to tell your revelation to as many people in the group as possible, one at a time, during the time given, which will be just a few minutes per rotation.

Read the first statement to the group, and give participants 5 minutes or less to introduce themselves and tell their revelation to the other group members. Stop the group after 5 minutes (or if anyone has finished revealing themselves to everyone in the group), and move to rotation 2, etc.

- Rotation 1: Hi, my name is _____, and when I'm feeling particularly selfish (or individualistic or self-centered), I _____.
- Rotation 2: Hi, my name is _____, and when I'm feeling particularly communal (or community oriented, or altruistic, I _____.
- Rotation 3: Hi, my name is _____, and when I'm feeling particularly conflicted about something, I _____.

Wrap up: This warm up activity is meant to highlight that we all have moments when we're operating out of personal desires, when we're attentive to others' needs, and when we're not sure what to do.

5.1 --- Developing our Community - Exploring the Tensions Together (35 minutes)

Materials needed: None

Purpose of piece: To explore and share participants' personal experiences with tensions related to Chapter 5 in order to create a shared understanding among group members.

Say to group: This investigation of tensions focuses on a primary concern, how we as individuals negotiate our need to listen to and respond to the needs of others. The ultimate concern is that each of us is an individual, and we celebrate what it means to be a human: our intelligence, our

capacity to reason, and our need to make decisions. At the same time, if we take racial justice seriously, then we are asked to recognize our interdependence and we may be asked to make uncomfortable choices. We might say we believe in respecting one another. What does that mean exactly? When decisions are required, and disagreement is apparent, how do we choose between our personal feelings, thoughts, and desires and those of people we say we respect, but with whom we may or may not agree? This activity asks us to talk to each other about how we understand individualism, how it affects us, and how it affects our ability to respect our interdependence.

Say to group: We're now going to count of by 1, 2, 1, 2 to form two groups. Number 1's are going to stand in a circle facing outward. The number 2's will stand in a circle facing inward. This is often called a wagon wheel, because the two groups will be standing in circles, one larger and one smaller, facing one another. (5 minutes)

Facilitator note: You will need even numbers for this exercise. If you have an odd number, either a facilitator can step in, or you can create one triad. Ask the first question and give the pair 2 minutes to answer, 1 minute per person. After the 2 minutes are completed, ask the outer row (number 2's) to move one person to the left. The participants now have a new partner. Now ask the new pairs the second question. They have 2 minutes to dialogue, 1 minute per person. Continue this process until all 5 questions have been asked and answered. The groups will have changed partners between each question.

Say to group: We are going to answer questions in pairs. To do this, I'll first read a question. You'll have about 20 seconds to think about your answer. I'll then invite one of the pairs to answer first in one minute. After that minute, I'll ask you to switch, and the second partner will have one minute to answer.

(15 minutes)

1. What do you associate with the term individualism?
2. What do we lose because of individualism? How does it hurt us?
3. What does it mean when a person rejects individualism?
4. What does it look like to respect our interdependent web of life?
5. When confronted with a dilemma, and someone is asking you to do something that feels uncomfortable, how do you figure out what to do?

Large group debrief: (15 minutes)

1. What stood out for you during this exercise?
2. What can we do to create a deeper sense of community for ourselves?
3. What helps us take other people's opinions seriously, even when they conflict with our own?

Facilitator's note: If you are a member of a UU congregation, you may recognize this information as a dialogue between Principles 1 and 7. Below is a quoted reference from each, taken from the UU website.

Every person has inherent worth and dignity.	and	All of existence is an interdependent web and deserves respect.
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<p>“We celebrate the gifts of being human: our intelligence and capacity for observation and reason, our senses and ability to appreciate beauty, our creativity, our feelings and emotions.”</p>		<p>This statement “is our response to the great dangers of both individualism and oppression. It is our solution to the seeming conflict between the individual and the group.”</p>
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Wrap up: Hopefully, through this activity we learned more about one another so that we will understand each other’s responses to future challenges and be able to work together to find resolution.

5.2 - Developing our Community - Exploring a Dilemma (55 minutes)

Materials needed: Copies of Scenario Response Worksheet (5.2a or 5.2b), pencils or pens.

Purpose of piece: To use a scenario to reveal participants’ thoughts about how various tensions manifest, provide an opportunity to create a common understanding of the issues, and strategize future responses.

Facilitator’s Note: *Two scenarios are provided so that you might select the one that is most appropriate for your group. Each has its own handout version. Skilled facilitators who are aware of a particularly relevant issue that the community is facing may want to write out an alternative scenario and use that in place of those printed below. Keep in mind the degree to which it aligns with the specific tensions highlighted in this chapter, and modify the exercise accordingly.*

Facilitator’s Note: *To prepare for implementation of this section, reflect on the first question yourself and develop possible answers regarding what tensions exist in this scenario that relate to the book content. Share these with the participants as prompts as you begin the exercise.*

Say to group: Read this scenario silently to yourself. Then answer the first set of prompts on the worksheet: 1) what are the tensions in this scenario, 2) to what degree do the themes in this scenario play out in communities of which you are a part, 3) how is privilege and/or racism manifesting, 4) how would you feel if you were in this situation, and 5) what would you say in response? (*Silent reading/reflection – 10 minutes*)

Scenario 1 (Handout 5.2a):

A white music director, working with an almost exclusively white church congregation, approaches you with a quandary. She tells you that a few white church members recently approached her individually with concerns about the Negro spirituals that are periodically sung during Sunday service. She feels conflicted because she inherited the program, and the story she heard is that the spirituals were included by the previous director years ago after consultation with church membership and after questions were discussed regarding whether or not it would be a respectful form of appropriation. From what she understands, the decision to include the songs was made based in part on one of the community members

conferring with a Black friend (not a congregant) who agreed that it would be alright to sing the spirituals as a way for this white church to take regular note of the pain and suffering experienced by Black people in the U.S. (There were no Black congregants at the time, and there are relatively few today.) The current Black congregants have made no comments about the songs, but a visiting Black attendee mentioned to her white friend that it made her feel uncomfortable. The white woman is one of those who approached the music director with her concern.

Scenario 2 (Handout 5.2b):

A yoga studio offers a special deal for newcomers. An Asian-American woman decides to try out the studio and brings along her white friend to an evening session. Upon entering, they exchange glances as they immediately notice a huge dream catcher where the yoga teacher stands. The co-owner of the studio is wearing a t-shirt that says “Straight Outta Yoga.” And, in a far corner, there is a sage bundle burning on an altar which includes spiritual elements from Hindu and Buddhist traditions. After the yoga session, the white woman approaches one of the owners and alerts her that there are some things in the studio that could be considered cultural appropriation and that these may be offensive to people, especially those from the cultures of origin. The yoga teacher says the studio doesn’t really have any problems like that since only white people come to the studio.

Say to group: Now that we’ve finished with the silent reflection, let’s get into groups of 4 or 5 to share our responses, each person taking two minutes to share what they wrote down. (*Small group sharing - 10 minutes*)

Staying in the same small group, discuss the next set of questions on the worksheet: 6) How would you hope people would respond to this situation, and 7) How could the use of “both/and” thinking inform the response? (*Small group discussion - 15 minutes*)

Facilitator’s Note: *Prior to beginning this workshop, try to answer the large group discussion question #3 for yourself. Be prepared to offer an example for the group.*

Say to group: Let’s come back together and talk as a whole group about this scenario and what we can take from it. (*Large group discussion – 20 minutes*)

1. In what ways do the communities you are a part of deal with the issues raised in this scenario?
2. How do people tend to respond? Where do we learn these ideas?
3. How would a “both/and” approach be helpful, and what might that look like?
4. *For faith-based and spiritual communities:* Where in the principles, scriptures, philosophy, and/or theology is support for these ways of thinking found?

Wrap up: The purpose of this activity was to dig into a complicated issue in order to learn more about each other and our tendencies so that we can be more prepared to respond when something arises in our own community.

5.3 – Developing our Analysis – Appropriation in the Community – (1 hour 10 minutes)

Materials needed: Appropriation Resource Sheet, Personal and Community Appropriation Checklist/Cultural Appropriation Scenario, half sheets of paper, pens and pencils

Purpose of piece: To deepen understanding regarding types of appropriation, how they manifest in one's life and community, and the underlying motivations.

Say to group: We'd first like to take a few minutes to review this resource sheet in order to ensure that we are starting with a similar understanding of the various types of appropriation, some typical examples, and the criticisms about them. Let's take a few minutes for an individual, silent review. Feel free to begin sharing with a person next to you when you finish your silent review. And then we'll talk through any questions we have as a group before we move into the activity. (*Silent review, pair share, and group questions, 15 minutes*)

Facilitator's Note: *The purpose of this review is to ensure that participants have a relative understanding of the issues and to provide a few moments for questions. It is not meant to become an extended argument over the correctness or incorrectness of the list. If participants question what has been included on the list, let the participants know that this is just one opinion among many. You can ask the participants to hold their concern about any particular example as something to consider further, maybe do additional research on later, and let them know that you're hoping to get back to the specific purpose of this activity, which is to look closely at what is happening in our communities and why it happens.*

Facilitator's Note: *If this activity is used in a multi-racial context, be sure to focus attention on the last paragraph of the Appropriation Resource Sheet.*

What about people of color and appropriation?

- 1. When people of color adopt patterns of the dominant, white culture this is often not considered appropriation. This may be assimilation. This is often done in order to survive and may be forced upon the minority culture by the dominant culture.*
- 2. Whether some people of color should be critiqued for taking on styles or traditions of other people of color is best left to people of color to negotiate amongst themselves. White people, as the dominant group in the U.S., can stay in right relationship to these issues by focusing on our own actions, instead of monitoring the actions of people of color.*

Say to group: Using what we have learned so far, we're now going to complete a Personal and Community Appropriation Checklist to see how appropriation is occurring in our lives and/or within our communities. *Distribute the checklist. (Individual review, 5 minutes)*

Pair share (5 minutes)

Say to group: In addition to learning more about cultural appropriation in order to avoid it personally, we also want to explore why people make the choices they do. This can help us as we encounter others who are actively appropriating and think that it is a compliment to the other culture or is an expression of appreciation. To explore this, we are going to review a scenario and

talk about the motivations underlying the decisions. This scenario is located on the back of the checklist (Title – Cultural Appropriation Scenario). (5 minutes)

Group discussion: (20 minutes)

1. Reflecting on this scenario, how is appropriation taking place, and what do you think is driving it for each person?
2. Is there a meaningful difference between appropriation and appreciation? What is it?
3. What sorts of cultural holes might these individuals be trying to fill?
4. From what aspects of white culture might the people in this scenario be trying to distance themselves?

Facilitator's Note: *Some of the themes you want to pull out include the following:*

- *What are we running away from? (cultural blandness, meaninglessness, oppressive history/relationship with whiteness, patriarchy, idea of humans as sinful, individualism etc.)*
- *What are we running toward? (rich culture, sense of personal and community wholeness, inclusivity, communal values, respect for the earth/indigenous, earth-based values, etc.)*
- *Be sure to highlight that U.S. white culture typically does not provide a sense of unconditional value and care that often characterizes indigenous and/or people of color communities. White people are frequently envious of people of color because we don't have this sense of communal culture. And when we try to get it, we often reach across difference harmfully. We can be perceived as empty beings trying to gobble up something that isn't ours. We appear dangerous.*

Say to group: A common theme when talking about appropriation is that many of the underlying motivations to do it stem from either feeling dissatisfied with white (or western) culture or wanting to distance oneself from whiteness or modern society. We often face the question of whether we are appreciating another's culture (which may not be so bad) or appropriating (and transgressing boundaries). For our purposes, we should consider the question of why we are moving toward another's culture. What kind of cultural holes might we be trying to fill, and what kind of culture building would help decrease psychologically unhealthy forms of appropriation?

I'm going to pass out a set of half sheets of paper. What I'd like you to do is jot down words or phrases that would describe the culture you want to be part of. If that's not clear, another way to say it is, if you could create an ideal culture for our society, what words would you use to describe it? How would you describe the community? (5 minutes)

Say to group: We'll now take these papers and post them on the wall. Once they're all posted, let's take a few minutes to read our collective responses. (5 minutes)

Group debrief: (10 minutes)

1. What stands out for you from this exploration of appropriation?
2. How can this help us engage in more productive dialogues with others about issues of cultural appropriation?

Facilitator's Note: *The rationale for writing down what we wish our ideal culture looked like is that if we recognize that our current, dominant culture does not reflect our values, then we need to develop*

artistic and cultural practices that exemplify another way of being. The appropriation of practices and rituals from another culture will not ultimately satisfy the need for us to co-create a different culture for ourselves that exemplifies the values we hold dear.

Facilitator's Note: For faith communities, an important additional resource for follow-up may be a 10-minute segment within the [Decentering Whiteness in Worship Webinar](https://smallscreen.uua.org/videos/decentering-whiteness-in-worship-webinar) available at: <https://smallscreen.uua.org/videos/decentering-whiteness-in-worship-webinar>. Beginning at 46 minutes, 50 seconds, the presenters engage in a 10 minute discussion on appropriation that includes issues of Dia de los Muertos rituals and Black spirituals being used within services.

Wrap up: As we can see from this exploration, there are many forms appropriation can take. What we've tried to highlight is that some occur because our modern, U.S. culture leaves many people dissatisfied and with a sense of cultural loss. Realizing this can help us support others to understand that we have the responsibility to try and create a culture for ourselves that is infused with the kind of community that we long to have.

5.4 – Developing our Emotional Capacity – Mindfulness Practices – (55 minutes)

Materials needed: Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction Overview handout, History of Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction handout

Purpose of piece: To explore how a spiritual practice appropriated by the U.S. has become commercial, linked with western medicine, and made accessible to those with socioeconomic privilege. Consider our contemporary responsibility.

Say to group: This exercise is going to explore an example of appropriation that is prevalent in U.S. culture – mindfulness practice. We're going to start by reviewing this short overview of Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction. (*Silent review, 10 minutes*)

Facilitator's Note: *Distribute the handout. After about 5-7 minutes, ask if there are any clarifying questions before moving forward. Full text is taken from:*

<http://www.webmd.com/balance/tc/mindfulness-based-stress-reduction-topic-overview#1>

Say to group: We are now going to do a brief mindfulness exercise called the Body Scan. (*10 minutes*)

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable place like a carpeted floor, couch or chair.
- Although you may feel sleepy or your mind may drift while doing this exercise, the goal is to try and remain alert and aware of the present moment.
- Gently close your eyes. Let your shoulders drop down and away from your ears. Bring your attention to your breathing. Breathe in...and out... and just allow yourself to continue to breathe naturally.
- The aim of this exercise is to bring awareness to the physical sensations in different parts of your body.

- Your mind is probably used to labeling these sensations as good or pleasurable; or bad, uncomfortable, or even painful. For this exercise, see if you are able to just notice what you feel without judgment - for example, do you notice tingling, warmth, pulsating, tightness, or other sensations. Again, it's not about whether these sensations are good or bad, it's just about noticing them.
- Continue to breathe at your own pace, allowing each breath to come as it may, without any conscious effort to change your breathing.
- Notice your lungs slowly fill with air when you breathe in and deflate when you breathe out.
- Now, bring your awareness to where your body makes contact with the floor, couch or chair.
- On each outbreath, allow yourself to let go, to sink a little deeper into the surface below you.
- Scan your left foot for any sensations. Simply become aware of them.
- Scan your left calf. Notice and allow any sensations that may be present.
- Scan slowly, up through your thigh now. Allow yourself to feel any and all sensations.
- If you don't feel anything at the moment, that's okay. Just allow yourself to "not" feel anything.
- If you do become aware of tension, or other intense sensations in a particular part of your body, see if you can "breathe in" to it — using the in-breath to bring a gentle awareness to the sensations present in your body, without trying to change them.
- Now, scan for any sensation in your right foot your calf and thigh.
- Simply notice all sensations and feel what is happening.
- Continue to bring awareness, and a gentle curiosity to the sensations in your right leg. The mind will inevitably wander away from the breath and the body from time to time, which is normal. When you notice your mind has wandered, gently acknowledge it, and then return your attention to the part of the body you intended to focus on.
- Now focus on your stomach. Can you feel it rising as you breathe in and sinking as you exhale? Nice and slow. Your heart rate may slow down. This is normal. Remain aware of your stomach, your breath. Breathe in... and out...
- Continue to notice any sensations in your stomach area. Now scan for any sensations in your left hand and arm. Simply become aware of the different sensations and feel what is happening.
- Continue to bring awareness, and a gentle curiosity to the sensations. Again, If you don't feel anything at the moment, that's okay. Scan for any sensations in your right hand and arm.
- Continue to bring awareness, and a gentle curiosity to the sensations.
- Come back up to your chest. Continue scanning up along your neck, and to your face.
- Feel the sensations in your jaw, and your throat. Notice how the back of your head rests against the surface under you. Bring your awareness to the top of your head.
- Now, take a moment to notice how all your body parts are connected. Let any sensations come to you. Just notice what kind of sensation it is – tingling, warmth, coolness, heaviness, floating.
- Accept whatever sensation there is as just that, a sensation that will arise and slowly and gradually change. It is just another part of you.

- Continue to focus on your breathing for as long as you like. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and bring your attention back to your surroundings.

Facilitator’s Note: *The text is available as a pdf at http://youth.anxietybc.com/sites/default/files/Body_Scan.pdf, if you’d like to produce copies for your participants.*

Say to group: Thank you for your participation in that exercise. Now, we’re going to look briefly at the history that resulted in the incorporation of mindfulness into stress reduction as practiced by western medicine. (*Silent review, 10 minutes*)

Facilitator’s Note: *Distribute the handout. After about 5-7 minutes, ask if there are any clarifying questions before moving forward.*

Small group discussion (groups of 4-5): (*20 minutes*)

1. How was this spiritual practice translated to serve a white population?
2. What experiences have you had with mindfulness, meditation, and/or yoga? What was the demographic where you learned and/or practiced?
3. Who is finding peace through these new westernized forms, and who is not?

Large group discussion: (*15 minutes*)

1. What are you taking from this discussion?
2. How could these practices be made accessible to those who do not currently have access?
3. What responsibility do privileged people who are taking advantage of the appropriation have to work toward expanded access for those living in our community who come from the culture where this practice came from? How do we support them in leadership roles? How do we learn about the original culture’s history and current struggles?

Wrap up: When we participate in appropriated activities that are healthful and enhance our quality of life, its origins in historic oppression are often dismissed. One thing we can do is advocate for a responsible approach which includes taking action to ensure that the practice is accessible to more than just a privileged few and that the political, cultural, and/or social concerns of the original culture are taken seriously.

5.5 – Developing our “Both/And” Skill Set – Conversations about Appropriation (1 hour 15 minutes)

Materials needed: “Both/And” Appropriation Strategy Sheet, Sample Situation Prompts handout, butcher paper, markers

Purpose of piece: To develop strategies for conversations related to appropriation and practice using role plays.

Say to group: We're going to spend some time today specifically practicing our conversational skills about issues of appropriation. We'll start by exploring some strategies, and then consider how we'd use them in day-to-day practice.

To start, we want to focus on how we want to have the conversation. We know we're interested in uplifting the "both/and", the fact that complexity is something we can accept. What we also want to do is release the "they should know better" and "they should do things differently" attitude.

To really sink into that, let's do a quick brainstorm of what our approach might look like when we're in a frame of mind that captures the attitude we want to convey. In other words, what is the mental orientation we'd like to have when we engage in these discussions? (10 minutes)

Say to group: We're now going to review some potential strategies we can use when engaging with people who are engaged with cultural appropriation. Let's read these aloud, one by one, and then see if there are any questions. (10 minutes)

Facilitator's Note: *You'll likely want to mention that these are not required approaches. They are simply some ideas that might prove useful, handy thoughts to keep in mind as tools. Also, you may find it useful to do a mini role play so people can get a sense of what this looks like. Or, a facilitator might model with a co-facilitator or participant.*

Say to group: Let's now get into triads to work through some situations. The idea is for each person to have a turn playing out a situation they select. We should have about 30 minutes, so each person would get about 10 minutes. For each "round," each person will play a role, either yourself, a focus person, or a witness. When it is your turn, you will play yourself and select a situation to practice. One of your partners will be your focus person. This is the person you will engage with directly. The focus person will take on the persona of the person in the situation. The third partner will be a witness and will observe the interaction, paying attention to what it feels like to experience the exchange. (Group formation – 5 minutes)

Say to group: It is not required that you use the sample situation prompts provided on the handout. If there is a situation you are facing, a conversation you know you need to have with someone in your family or community, feel free to use that one instead. (Review sample situation prompts – 5 minutes)

Facilitator's Note: *If you elected to use the 4.6 Developing our "both/and" Skill Set – Eliciting Personal Stories section when discussing Chapter 4, then you might want to skip reading the paragraph below. However, if you did not elect to use that section or you think it would be a good reminder, you can review this recommendation to try out the role play.*

"We know how easy it is to talk about a scenario and never play it out. Please push yourself to do the role play. Many facilitators of this structure report dramatic learning that comes from playing out the scenes, practicing in the moment. The real insight often comes from the focus person and witness providing feedback regarding what it felt like to experience the conversation at different points, what statements drew them in as well as which statements pushed them farther away. Please take the risk to try this and see if you can reap the same benefits."

Trial role plays (30 minutes)

Large group debrief: (15 minutes)

1. How was the process for you?
2. What was challenging? Why? What worked well? Why?

Wrap Up: Navigating questions of appropriation are generally difficult, as they confront people's sense of personal freedom. They can be murky too, in terms of looking for a "right" answer, especially if people receive mixed messages. One way to stay in the conversation for us to continue asking "why" questions when we get stuck. This way, we at least can explore the personal motivation underlying the choice. Locating an underlying desire might provide a place for connection and move things along.

5.6 – Closing Ritual/Checkout – (10 minutes)

A closing reflection to read before participants offer one word or sentence to capture their feeling.

A prayer by Clyde Grubbs and Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, from *Voices from the Margins*

History's Road

Source of Life,

The road of history is long, full of both hope and disappointment. In times past, there have been wars and rumors of wars, violence and exploitation, hunger and homelessness, and destruction of this earth, your creation.

We have become a global village, with a growing realization of how fragile this earth is, and how interconnected we are to each other and to all creation.

We cannot continue to live in the old way. We must make a change, seek a new way. A way toward peace with justice and a healthy planet.

O Great Creative Spirit: You have given a vision of the good, and we yearn for a new way. But where are we to find the courage to begin this work? We know that a different tomorrow is possible, but how can we build it?

We think of the prophets, women and men, who voiced unpopular opinions, who made personal sacrifices, and sometimes lost their lives, for the sake of justice.

We think of Isaiah, who called out to let those who are held in captivity go free, to give solace to the poor and homeless. Let us be inspired by all who work to overcome misery, poverty, and exploitation.

We think of Harriet Tubman, who called out to people of good will to join her on an underground railroad, to lift a dehumanized people from the bondage of slavery to the promise of freedom, even when it meant challenging unjust laws. Let us be inspired by those who are outlaws for freedom.

We think of Gandhi, whose belief in “Soul Force” – the witness to Love’s Truth – helped to overthrow the oppression of an empire and gave witness to the way of nonviolent action. Let us be inspired to become witnesses for peace.

We think of Chief Seattle, who reminded us that we belong to the earth, and not the earth to us. Let us be inspired by all those who work for the healing of creation, of Mother Earth and all her creatures.

Who are the prophets who inspire you? They may be well known, or known only to you, offering personal inspiration, courage, and hope.

*May they join a great cloud of witnesses to a new way of life – the way of peace and justice, the way of justice lived according to the way of peace, the beloved community.
So may it be. Amen.*

Book Reference:

Jacqui James and Mark D. Morrison-Reed (2012). *Voices from the Margins*. Skinner House.