



In Your Shoes: Exercise

Total time: 35 minutes

Supplies Needed: Set of cards, enough for each participant, marked into four quadrants.

The facilitator hands out cards marked into a grid with four quadrants (make enough cards for each participant to get one, with a few leftover just in case):

Class	Generation
Sexual Orientation	Race

A. Trading Places

5 minutes

Each person takes a card. In each quadrant, consider this part of your identity. Are members of your group likely to be the targets of oppression, in society or in your congregation? If yes, then write down the name of a group that would not be the target of oppression in this area. If no, then write down the name of a group that would likely experience oppression in this area. In other words, trade places.

In cases where there are several choices, think about your context and the groups present in your surrounding community, particularly the people your community might be challenged to welcome. Try on that identity for this exercise.

For instance:

- **Class:** If you enjoy economic privilege (you are middle-class or wealthier), then write down “working-class,” “lower-class” or “poor.” If you lack economic privilege, then write down “middle-class” or “upper-class.”
- **Generation:** If you are 37 or older, then write down “young adult” (20s and 30s) or “youth” (teens or younger). If you are 36 or younger, then write down “middle-aged” or “elder.”

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- Sexual Orientation: If you are straight, then write down either “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual” or “transgendered.” If you are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered, then write down “straight.” (If your community is dealing with tensions between various sexual minorities, you may opt to trade places with the group that represents the other side of the conflict in your context.)
 - Race: If you identify as a person of color (including those of mixed heritage who are treated as people of color), then write down “white.” Depending on your cultural context—for instance, if you are part of a black church in neighborhood that now has lots of Latinos—then you might write “Latino” on your card. If you are white or a person of mixed heritage who identifies primarily as white, then write down any group of people of color.

B. Center and Margins

10 minutes

Now, bringing the cards, gather in a wide circle or in a line with plenty of room in front. The facilitator calls out these queries; for each, participants should take a step forward if most people in the groups they now identify with would answer “yes” and remain standing if most people in the groups they now identify with would answer “no.”

1. People in my congregation are very pleased when someone of my class background visits the church.
2. My denomination was founded and shaped by people who share my racial background (yes or no) and class background (yes or no).
3. Most members of the finance committee and vestry/church council in my church share my class (yes or no); my generation (yes or no); my sexual orientation (yes or no); or my race (yes or no).
4. I rarely have to hunt for a church that prominently incorporates my generation’s tastes in music and art (yes or no) or my cultural group’s contributions to music and art (yes or no).
5. Few people would be nervous if I applied to be the head pastor of a church, considering my sexual orientation (yes or no), racial background (yes or no) and age (yes or no).
6. I am likely to see lots of people of my generation in the pews of most churches.
7. The people my church serves in its social ministries are rarely those with my racial background (yes or no) and class background (yes or no).

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8. When I go to a wider church gathering, most of the people I meet share my generation (yes or no), sexual orientation (yes or no), and racial background (yes or no).
 9. No one would protest if someone of my sexual orientation worked with the church's children (yes or no).

C. Reflection

20 minutes (or longer, time permitting)

At the end of the exercise, see where everyone is standing. From these places, conduct a brief discussion, using these guiding questions:

- Who is closest to the center of the circle or the front of the room? What was it like to take those steps forward? What did you feel or think as you moved along? How does this compare to your usual experience in churches?
- Who is still standing on the margins or toward the back? What was it like to remain in place? What did you feel or think as you stood still? How does this compare to your usual experience in churches?

Participants may now return to their seats for a general discussion of the exercise. These questions may help to focus the conversation:

- What did you learn?
- Which queries made you pause and think a little longer? Why?
- Was it difficult to trade places and imagine what this other person would experience? What made it easier, if anything?
- How might you have moved differently if you had kept your actual identity?