

SIX-FOLD TEST FOR MULTIETHNIC MINISTRY

SERMON SERIES: POPULATION | PARTICIPATION | POWER | PACE-SETTING | PURPOSEFUL NARRATIVE | PRACTICING SOLIDARITY

SERMON SERIES INTRODUCTION

Becoming a Beloved Community

PAUL ROBINSON: Grace and peace, Mosaic Mission Friends! I am Paul Robinson, executive minister of Love Mercy Do Justice, which is one of five mission priorities in the Evangelical Covenant Church. I bring you greetings as a guest on the historic lands of the Wahpekute people. Wahpekute is a Sante word roughly translated “shooters in the leaves.”

The Evangelical Covenant Church seeks to join God in God’s mission to see more disciples among more populations in a more caring and just world. One of the ways we live into this effort is through the rubric we call the Six-Fold Test for Multiethnic Ministry. The Six-Fold Test has informed and shaped what it means for the Covenant to grow as a multiethnic church.

I’m excited to introduce you to a series of sermons, which are biblically rooted explanations of the Six-Fold Test. But first, it’s my pleasure to introduce Mary Chung March, chair of the Mosaic Commission. She will provide a historical perspective of the Six-Fold Test before I continue with an overview of the sermon series.

MARY CHUNG MARCH: Greetings, Mosaic Mission Friends! My name is Mary Chung March and I serve as chair of the Mosaic Commission and president of the Covenant Asian Pastors Association.

As a denomination founded by Swedish immigrants in 1885, the Evangelical Covenant Church takes seriously both the mission of Christ and the unity of Christ’s

church. Our founders affirmed God’s call to live out the whole mission of the church as mission friends living into the Great Commission to make disciples and the Great Commandment to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. And we still affirm and live into our mission as a denomination as these two burdens converge at the point of pressing forward in ethnic ministry and diversity.

Because of our history and our commitment to Christ’s mission and unity, the Covenant is uniquely positioned to press forward in multiethnic ministry. We must remember that we are ultimately going to move forward as we relate to one another as sisters and brothers in Christ, dependent on the Holy Spirit to shape us as the family of God.

The creation of the Five-Fold Test (which later became the Six-Fold Test) began in conversation with leaders of color and denominational leaders in the Covenant in response to the deep pain and time of reckoning following the 1991 Rodney King beating, subsequent racial unrest, and historic systemic injustice, as well as the increasing ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity within the Covenant and more people of color being hired or elected into positions of denominational leadership. The ethnic associations and the Ethnic Commission were created. Intentional conversations were happening, the Ethnic Commission was meeting regularly, churches of color were being planted, and all Covenant leaders were required to participate in a Sankofa journey. The Covenant was leaning into what the Holy Spirit was doing to shape us as the family of God.

In 1999 and 2000, the Covenant held a historic two-year Midwinter centered on the theme of “Celebrating Ethnic Diversity.” A number of Covenanters were asking, “What’s next?”

The Five-Fold Test was born out of a desire to move from an ambiguous and unspecific commitment to cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity to a specific one. In response to “What’s next?” the Ethnic Commission began conversations around creating a framework to measure progress toward ethnic and cultural diversity. In 2004, the Five-Fold Test was created and brought to a symposium of Covenant leaders held in Mundelein, Illinois, to move those discussions toward action steps.



In 2019, the sixth “P” of “Practicing Solidarity” was added, making it the Six-Fold Test.

1. **Population:** Is the Covenant reaching increasing numbers of people among increasing numbers of populations?
2. **Participation:** Are we finding ways to engage life together through denominational, conference, and local events, service, and fellowship?
3. **Power:** Are the positions and structures of influence (boards, committees, and positions at both the conference and denominational level) influenced by the perspective and gifts of diverse populations?
4. **Pacesetting:** With additional perspectives, burdens, and gifts in our midst, what new ministry opportunities is the Covenant now better positioned to strengthen and initiate?
5. **Purposeful Narrative:** How do the stories of new backgrounds become incorporated into our overarching history? How do all of these streams flow together into one story moving forward?
6. **Practicing Solidarity:** In what ways are we standing with and advocating for the multiethnic mosaic? How are we sharing in the suffering of others on both an individual and communal level?

The six-fold multi-dimensional test has been adopted by the Covenant Executive Board, with the additional support of the Council of Administrators, the Council of Superintendents, and ethnic leaders in the Covenant.

The development of this tool included many contributors from across our movement but would not have been possible without input from Covenant leadership and the Ethnic (now called the Mosaic) Commission. Today, we find ourselves in yet another season of racial and civil unrest. Some historic fissures in the fabric of our “more perfect union” have become chasms that threaten the very foundation of the American democratic experiment.

We are experiencing similar symptoms from persistent forms of systemic racism and injustices that do not value, count, or treat all men and women equally. We are reminded weekly about the ways we are valued based on the color of our skin. Despite these trends, the Covenant remains committed to building bridges across differences

instead of erecting walls.

We are motivated by our commitment to both the mission and the unity of Christ’s Church. The world is fractured along the lines of race, ethnicity, culture, language, class, and gender. However, Christ has broken down the dividing walls. We find unity in him. Likewise, we know the coming kingdom will transcend all that divides. The vision of Revelation 7:9 captures this promise well: “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” The saints in John’s revelation come from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue.

This is an ethnically and culturally diverse multitude. They are different, but what binds them together is their devotion to Jesus, the Lamb of God. Their unity in diversity is symbolized by their white robes and palm branches in their hands. They are not required to be culturally and ethnically the same, but they’ve chosen to follow and serve the same God. We believe the Church here on earth is richer and stronger as it lives in the light of this future reality.

PAUL: The Covenant has made significant strides in the past several years. However, we believe that multiethnic ministry has multi-dimensional implications. Unless this dimensionality is approached with wisdom and resolve, the Covenant cannot expect to fare differently than other groups who have had similar intent, only to pull back. The work of Love Mercy Do Justice is aimed at joining God in making things right in a broken world. This work compels us to push ourselves and invite our movement to press ahead to create flourishing communities of shalom.

Now, more than ever we must forge ahead with holy boldness to claim the promise of unity in diversity. We must resist the urge to invest in rhetoric and actions that divide. Ours must be a multiplying cross-cultural effort predicated on truth that informs reconciliation, bound by love of neighbor, and inspired by the power of the cross. Our life together must not be controlled by any political ideology.

We are citizens of an eternal kingdom that cannot be shaken. The values that drive us must be those of the government that rests on the shoulders of Christ and not



of humankind. This suite of sermons is intended not only to inspire you, but to reflect God's unconditional invitation to all people, everywhere. We hope that this resource will help catalyze new vision and new commitments to love what God loves—justice. We pray these sermons will help your church embrace the promise and practice of the Six-Fold Test for God's glory and neighbor's good.

We have selected 12 mosaic mission friends from across our movement. They are an intentionally diverse cadre of preachers in several ways. For each of the six Ps of the Six-Fold Test we have assigned two preachers to exegete the same text. We think this will reflect yet another aspect of the diverse ways God uses us. I'm so excited to share this resource with you, so let's get started.

We're going to introduce the six Ps as they are listed, but remember, this resource is not intended to be sequential or linear. Feel free to start on the P that makes the most sense for your context, but each one is important to the whole.

Population invites us to ask the question, "Is the Covenant reaching increasing numbers of people among increasing numbers of populations? The Scripture passages our preachers will explore comes from John 4:1-42. You've probably heard many sermons about the "Woman at the Well." It is a powerful story of transformation for the unnamed Samaritan woman and members of her community, but it is also a story about Jesus crossing cultural and ethnic boundaries. John 4:4 says, "Now he had to go through Samaria." The contemporaries of Jesus who heard this likely would have asked, "Why would anyone go through Samaria, instead of around it?" What Jesus shows us is that true discipleship requires us to challenge and transcend stereotypes, prejudice, bias, and dysfunctional histories of conflict between people groups for the sake of the gospel.

We're delighted to hear from the Rev. Dierdra Clark from New York Covenant Church in New Rochelle, New York, and Rev. John Fanous from University Covenant Church in Davis, California.

Participation calls us to consider whether we are finding ways to engage life together through denominational, conference, and local events, service, and fellowship. The text our preachers will tackle comes from 2 Corinthians 8:1-15. Paul is writing the Corinthian church during a time of drought and famine in Palestine. The

famine was devastating for an agrarian culture like theirs. Christians in the Jerusalem church didn't have enough food to eat, and things were so bad that Paul appealed to Christians in Gentile churches to support the Jewish Christians. Paul's effort was successful in raising funds and also in connecting different cultures and bringing Jews and Gentiles closer.

We are grateful for the contributions of Rev. Sanetta Ponton from Metro Community Church and the director of Metro Community Center, both in Englewood, New Jersey, and Rev. Derek Boggs at Evangelical Covenant Church in Princeton, Illinois.

The third "P" is **Power**, and it asks us, are the positions and structures of influence influenced by the perspective and gifts of diverse populations? To help us answer this question we've turned to Acts 6:1-7. Here we find a rapidly expanding multiethnic and multicultural church experiencing some growing pains. The church is faced with a dilemma that threatens the peace and progress of the community, but what we find is Spirit-led leadership that recognizes, celebrates, and elevates leaders from the nondominant culture into positions of leadership and authority. Among other things the story shows us that diversity and equity are not the same thing. Power managed well must create opportunities for the most vulnerable in our communities to experience shalom.

We're pleased to have Rev. Adam Edgerly, director of Covenant World Relief and Development, and Rev. Susan Cosio, who serves as a chaplain at Sutter Medical Center in Sacramento, California, leading us in the discussion.

The Covenant Church has a reputation of being a **Pacesetter** movement. To sustain this value we ask ourselves, With additional perspectives, burdens, and gifts in our midst, what new ministry opportunities is the Covenant now better positioned to strengthen and initiate? The fourth P invites us to thoughtfully consider how we can leverage diversity of people and gifts to achieve more ministry effectiveness.

Cindy Wu, who is the program manager at Houston Welcomes Refugees in Houston, Texas, and Rev. Alejandro Carrizo from Las Buenas Nuevas Covenant Church in Houston, Texas, lead us in an exploration of Acts 16:6-40.

This is one of my personal favorites! After being prevented entry to Bithynia by the Spirit, Paul has a night vision during which a man from Macedonia was begging



for help. Discerning this to be a word from the Lord, Paul and his companions set out for Macedonia. Upon their arrival, the first persons they encounter are some devoted women led by Lydia, a worshiper of God and businesswomen. Later, Paul and Silas would encounter an enslaved girl trapped by an evil spirit and a system that disregarded and exploited her humanity. The Holy Spirit set this girl free, which led to Paul and Silas being beaten and jailed. Lydia, Paul, and Silas, the freed girl, and even the jailor are all examples of the power of pacesetting. I won't give it all away, but I know you will be blessed by these messages.

You know, friends, stories matter. Every person and every people group have a story. I believe part of our fracturing and division in this country and even in the Church is related to the fact that we are increasingly disinterested in the stories of others. It seems that only the perspective and worldview of our own tribe matters above all others. **Purposeful Narrative** invites us to consider how the stories of new backgrounds become incorporated into our overarching history? How do all of these streams flow together into one story moving forward? The Covenant began as an immigrant church. We must never forget what it was like for those who began our movement and their families. Finding their way in a new land wasn't easy. To reclaim this story better positions us to understand, embrace, and celebrate the stories of a new cadre of mission friends drawn to the Pietist tradition and our relational identity.

To help us better understand Purposeful Narrative, we have asked Rev. Peter Ahn, pastor of Metro Community Church in Englewood, New Jersey, and Rev. Stacia Michael, co-pastor of Gateway Covenant Church in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, to unpack the text of Acts 10 where we find Peter being updated by the Holy Spirit on God's vision for his church that includes not only Jews, but Gentiles as well.

The sixth P of **Practicing Solidarity** was added at a time when the Covenant Church wanted to affirm that we must stand with those who, due to unjust systems, find themselves marginalized and limited from experiencing the fullness of shalom. In a society stratified by race, ethnicity, culture, and economics, great disparities in well-being and quality of life exist. We believe the Scriptures invite us not only to call out injustice but to stand with those who suffer from it. In fact, our work

calls us to dismantle unjust systems like Jesus did in the Temple, turning over the tables of the money changers. Practicing Solidarity asks, In what ways are we standing with and advocating for the multiethnic mosaic? How are we sharing in the suffering of others on both an individual and communal level?

We have asked Rev. Evelyn Perez from Marantha Covenant Church in Richmond, California, and Rev. TJ Smith from New Song Covenant Church in Anchorage, Alaska, to guide us through Luke 10:25-37.

This is of course the story of the Good Samaritan, but we believe it should be our story too. We think the church should be actively engaged in efforts aimed at helping those whom the enemy has stripped of their dignity, beaten with the guilt of their past, and left half-dead and unable to experience their best lives. We are called to help those who are unable to fully engage life to the fullest get turned around and back on their journey—a journey we pray includes acceptance of God and his power to rescue and deliver those who accept God's great invitation.

Mosaic Mission Friends, we are experiencing new symptoms of old diseases of systemic racism, white supremacy, and white nationalism that masquerade as Christianity. These chronic ailments are not alone in the pantheon of social threats, but they are indeed persistent and stubborn. History has shown us that they morph and adapt like viral variants over time to survive, despite efforts to reverse their damage. If we all pull together, fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit and with hearts filled with hope, we will be victorious over those threats to justice and enemies of shalom.

**“The arc of the moral universe is long,
but it does bend toward justice.”**