

Resource for Equity, Diversity, and Belonging Ministries in Communities of Faith

Compiled by Rebecca Whiting, DLM

and

Westminster United Church Waterloo, Ontario

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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to share resources and Westminster United Church Waterloo’s learnings about equity, diversity, and belonging (EDB) work within the United Church context. This will aid other Communities of Faith in pursuing this work within their communities.

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To begin, let’s turn to scripture!

Matthew 13: 3-8, NIV

Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Reflection Questions:

How can we create good soil to scatter the seeds of Equity, Diversity, and Belonging?
How might those seeds, through God, grow beyond our wildest dreams?!

Our Story at Westminster United Church Waterloo

We share this story not to prescribe a set of actions every church should take, but instead to give context to the rest of this document as experiences, resources, and learnings are shared. For a visual timeline of these events, please refer to appendix A on page 13 of this document.

Westminster has been an equity seeking community since its creation in 1988. Westminster is housed at the Cedars, which is a building that was built in 1996 in partnership with Temple Shalom, who we continue to share space and relationship with. Westminster became Affirming in 1999, the first church to do so in Hamilton Conference. However, as a community of faith that is committed to equity and diversity, we are continuing to grow, learn, and change over time.

Rev. Andrea, minister to Westminster United Church from 2019-2025, initiated a series of Unpacking Racism conversations virtually in July 2020 in solidarity with Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities experiencing systemic violence. It became apparent that many members wanted to act and address implicit biases, and a grassroots desire for intentional conversations emerged. Council approved the formation of an Equity and Inclusion team in October, which led to recruiting in November and meeting virtually from December 2020 to June 2021.

In phase 1, a team of twelve Westminster members met 13 times to unlearn, listen, benchmark, and strategize to enhance equity and inclusion in our church. This crew, with support from community advocates, immersed themselves in questioning, reframing, and justice-seeking. It's not a secret; we need and want to do better!

On June 15, 2021, Westminster Council approved the team's recommendations including five goals and related actions for this year. On November 28, 2021, the congregation participated in a presentation and agreed to the proposal to move forward with hiring a suitable candidate for ministry with a focus on Equity and Christian Education initiatives. This decision was more than having a leader to meet our goals - it was also about nurturing students doing this work, providing an opportunity for students when there were not enough positions to meet demand, demonstrating what equitable hiring practices look like, and paying for work that typically is unpaid and was not well represented in our budget. Rebecca Whiting was called to fill this role in 2022 and continued in relationship with Westminster until her candidacy for ministry was completed in 2025.

In January 2023 phase 2 of our Equity, Diversity, and Belonging team began. There were some returning members from phase 1 and new members. The team identified three areas of focus for their work, and committed to integrating EDB practices into existing events, services and the general life of church. Since then, the team has continued EDB work in many forms: continuing and developing partnerships, education opportunities for the congregation, creating an EDB library, adapting worship liturgy, purchasing a braille printer and fixing the sound loop system, organizing events, and integrating EDB practices into all aspects of church life.

We are still on the learning journey and have many areas where we continue to work towards removing barriers, identifying our biases, and striving to address equity concerns within and beyond our community. Through it all we continue to turn to God as our encourager, supporter, and guide as we seek to live in a way that reflects God's hope for liberation and belonging on Earth.

Learnings from the Journey

The following learnings are shared so communities who are beginning this work might glean what may be helpful to their journey. Each community is unique, and so there is no one 'correct' way to do this work. However, when we share our learning with one another we can all grow in unexpected and Spirit-filled ways.

Forms of EDB Leadership

There are many forms of leadership for EDB work within communities of faith. For some it may be a dedicated team or committee, which may also report to the governing body. For others it might be paid staff or ministry personnel. Other communities might have a grassroots movement that takes a unique form for that community. While there are many ways that this work can come about, there are two cornerstones that are important in all EDB work: it must be intentional, and it is not meant to be done alone.

Intentional

When considering intentionality, it is important to recognize that this work does not happen on its own. The systems of our society and institutions are such that the default shapes of our communities are those that uphold systems of oppression, and it takes intention and care to move to a more equitable way of being.

In community

This takes us to the second cornerstone. EDB work cannot be done by one person. It is always meant to be done in relationship, in community, and alongside the Spirit. This is important for several reasons. First, collaboration encourages a diversity of experiences, perspectives, and ideas. This helps us in reducing the impact of implicit bias on our work and allows all to learn and grow in mutual relationships. Second, individuals all have unique passions, gifts, and talents. When we work in community, we can draw on those resources in creative and practical ways. This also reduces the effects of volunteer burnout and allows members to take time for rest when needed. Finally, it is important to remember that the Spirit is present in our midst as well. We can scatter the seeds and create good soil, but what takes root often cannot be predicted and is the work of God within and among us.

Creating a Team

If you are creating a team or reassessing the structure of your team, the following are some tips for invitation and structure.

Be direct and open with your invites

First, a group of interested individuals might form in an unplanned way. This is fantastic! Sometimes finding members takes more focused effort. However, in both scenarios it is important that the invitation is open. We are not trying to make an exclusive club! We have found that a mixture of open invitation and approaching specific individuals who have shown passion or interest in this area works best. I think we have all had the experience of making an announcement at the pulpit for volunteers with no follow-up response. This is where approaching people personally can

make a difference. People often respond well to a community member saying “Hey, I noticed this _____ thing about you that would be a big asset to our team. Would you consider joining? These are the details about the commitment”. This kind of invitation helps people to understand that they are not just a number so the team has ‘enough people’, but that you recognize the meaningful contributions they will make.

Special considerations

- What are minimum and maximum required for membership? Too big of a group can be challenging to navigate. Application forms (Appendix B) can assist facilitators to learn about participants, to modify process for accommodations and availability, to ignite early conversations regarding potential challenges, to decide on membership using criteria, and to have applicants consider how they will engage.
- Who is coming forward and expressing interest? Tailor your efforts accordingly to address gaps and to encourage diverse representation.

Communicate the commitment upfront

People are willing to commit, sometimes even if it is a big ask of time and effort, if they know exactly what will be expected for time and emotional labour. How often are we gathering? Will there be tasks required in between? Are there due dates for certain tasks? When forming an EDB team, it is important to name that there will be times where you are challenged and face hard questions about yourself and your community. Those who join the team must be willing to take on this work and have a learning mindset. This information can be highlighted in advertisements and application forms.

Express the value of the team and work

What is the ‘why’ that makes this volunteer role important and compelling to be a part of? As we are communities of faith, this is a great opportunity to reflect theologically on how this reflects our Christianity. Instead of making a simple announcement, perhaps you can move the invitation to after the sermon, where you can connect the Bible story to the invitation (think themes about call, stories about liberation, characters who have different gifts and skills, etc.). See an example of this in Appendix C.

Mitigate tokenism & embody anti-racist perspectives

Finally, and we consider invitation we need to address tokenism. Well-intentioned people creating teams have to navigate the balance between inviting diverse identities to the group and tokenizing people because of their identities. From an anti-racism perspective, Bryana Clover and Josh Riddick state:

“And the work can’t be dependent on the few Black and or Brown people in your congregation. Don’t burden them to hold all the answers and to lead, but approach it as a way for you to learn and to invite them into the conversation. Don’t assume that because they are Black or Brown, that they even want to engage in such a task force”.¹

¹ Kerry Connelly, Bryana Clover, and Josh Riddick, *Wait-Is This Racist?: A Guide to Becoming an Anti-Racist Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2022), 170.

They continue saying:

“Are these people being chosen [for the task force] just because they’re the few people of color? Or are they equipped in some capacity to do this work? As Bry said, not every person of color is equipped to lead this conversation. There are other skills that have to be there. And if those aren’t there, then it’s time to look for somebody outside of this space. I think churches really struggle with the capacity to listen to voices that are outside their four walls or outside their theological scope”²

It is important that we listen to the voices of those with equity-denied identities when they offer their time for education of those who are not within that identity, or how intersectionality affects that experience. However, this does not mean it is the job of all people within those identities to do the work. In fact, if a church is still at the beginning of their learning journey, it is a good first step is to explore your own privilege by hiring experts or connecting with people who have done the work who are not within those identities (ex. connecting with a white individual who has done the work to open up the conversation about understanding Whiteness). This step reduces further harm to people of diverse identities.

A helpful tool in constructing a team is to follow this template (from an anti-racism perspective) offered by Clover:

“Following are some important considerations if you plan to create an anti-racism task force, as well as some guiding questions. Create meaningful goals and objectives of the task force. Ask yourselves important questions, such as:

- Why do we want to create a task force in the first place?
- What do we hope to accomplish by doing so?
- How will we know if we are successful?
- How will we know if we are causing harm?

Strategically appoint the right people to lead and participate in the task force. It is not enough to casually ask a few people who seem to have a passion for racial justice to lead the task force. It is important to ask yourself questions, such as:

- Are the participants and leaders equipped to do the work of racial justice in our church?
- If the answer is no, How can we invest in our people so that they are more equipped to lead?

Sometimes the solution is to invest in race equity consultants to help with this.”³

Reduction of Barriers

There are many barriers that might impede someone from participating in the team. Some of these barriers are related to stages of life, such as planning meetings during the workday prevents working adults from joining. Another barrier is creating a team that has not yet reached a place of learning where individuals with equity-denied identities feel safe enough to attend (as

² Connely et al. *Wait-Is This Racist?: A Guide to Becoming an Anti-Racist Church*, 171.

³ Connely et al. *Wait-Is This Racist?: A Guide to Becoming an Anti-Racist Church*, 81.

discussed above). Other barriers exclude those with disabilities. Are all members able to drive to the church? If not, would someone be able to provide a ride, or should we change the meeting to an online format? Are all members able to access the materials in the format they are provided (ex. screen reader compatible)? During the meetings, are there barriers to hearing, using visual media that is not accessible to all, or overstimulating environments that may be a barrier to neurodiverse individuals? These are just a few examples to consider. When inviting individuals to the team and as you continue to meet, it is important to be explicit that a barrier-reduction approach will be taken, and that you are open to continuing to make changes as needs are named.

Team Models

Now that you have a group of individuals who are committed to this work, the next question is how you are going to structure your meetings and facilitate them. There are various models of facilitation and group leadership. There is a more classic model of committee within the church with a chairperson who compiles the agenda and leads the meeting. There are also collaborative models of leadership where the facilitation roles are shared within the group. When viewing leadership from a postcolonial lens, collaboration becomes an essential component no matter the structure you choose: “Post-colonizing leadership activities are consequently deeply *interactional* and *intersubjective*... Post colonial pastoral leaders need to work to build teams of caring reflective practitioners who have learnt the art of collaboration”.⁴ As with all things collaborative leadership is a balance. If power is held too tightly it will silence the other perspectives and ideas, and if it is held too loosely the group may lack direction.

The model Westminster’s team employed for the second phase of the EDB team is collaborative in nature, but maintains clear roles. There are always two co-facilitators at each meeting. One of these facilitators is the candidate for ministry who was hired to engage this work, and the other rotates between team members. The co-facilitators meet before the meeting to plan an agenda and divide the facilitation leadership by item of discussion. At times this means giving guidance and encouragement for those who are new to facilitation roles. The role of notetaker for the meetings also rotates based on volunteers within the group. This model works for our team and our community because it has clear structure, leadership, and facilitation, and allows for collaboration between the co-facilitators and the team. The co-facilitator roles also allow diverse perspectives when planning and discussing the priorities for discussion at the next meeting. This may not be the right model for your context, but it is an example of how we can get creative about leadership in ways that enhance our work and can create more diverse and equitable spaces.

BRAVE Spaces

When creating a space within a group, we often hear the term ‘safe spaces’. This was a great starting place for language, however, over time the EDB community has moved away from that language since no space can be guaranteed to be safe, especially for those who may experience

⁴ Pui-lan Kwok and Emmanuel Y Lartey, “‘Borrowed Clothes Will Never Keep You Warm’: Post Colonializing Pastoral Leadership,” essay, in *Postcolonial Practice of Ministry: Leadership, Liturgy, and Interfaith Engagement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 21–32, 30.

microaggressions (aka aggressions). Instead, another model is ‘BRAVE Spaces’ (Appendix D), which is an acronym for the following:

We strive, in this time of co-learning, to be brave by...

B – being accountable for the impact of both our words and our silence

R – reflecting on and naming our own biases

A – actively listening

V – vocalizing questions that arise from our learning

E – encountering new ideas with curiosity and wonder

I would encourage those who do EDB work (and other committees and small groups!) to share this at the beginning of meetings and to co-create norms with one another to remind each other of the ways we commit to being with one another. For instance, the Phase 1 Team at Westminster co-developed a group agreement and a shared covenant to provide common direction.

An additional aspect of creating BRAVE spaces is for the team to not assume what level of knowledge members have about different topics. Each person is at a different phase in their learning, and we risk alienating members if we use terminology that may not be understood by all without explaining the first time (for example, naming that TRC means Truth and Reconciliation Commission and stating a few sentences about what that means).

SMART Goals, Action, and Assessment

SMART Goals (Appendix E) are goals and actions that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely. Developing objectives and actions that fit this model helps to direct the work and give focus to the team. Usually 3-5 goals are manageable at a time, but more will overwhelm the team or reduce their efficacy in all areas. Goals could be around church education (unlearning and learning), specific actions, or about assessment of your Community of Faith. Assessment is an important place to start because a clear understanding of the current position and areas of improvement needed within your community can inform future education and action. There are several frameworks you can use to assess. Westminster used the GDEIB Benchmarks, which unfortunately is no longer available as a resource. As a final note, reflection is always an essential aspect of the work. When a team engages in a process of action-reflection they can learn from their experiences and better inform their future actions.

Encouraging Continued Engagement

As your community of faith continues EDB work, there is a trend where excitement starts strong and the fizzles out—seed that springs up quickly but has shallow root.

Invest in the work

When describing an anti-racism task force, Clover states,

“In order for a Dismantling Racism task force to go beyond doing anti-racism work and to be anti-racist, it must not be relegated to a ‘basement committee.’ You know, the committees that start with good intentions, or a great idea, and ultimately end up becoming exclusive, or in some cases, fizzling out over time... The committee was often met with hostility and defensiveness by church staff and leadership. While the committee looked good on paper, members spent hours strategizing, advocating, and facilitating meetings, often without any significant progress. The committee was never given actual power to influence and make decisions. It was consistently blocked from doing what it was intended to do”.⁵

She proposes these questions for churches to consider:

- How will you invest in your committee?
- What resources (time, space, financial, human) will be accessible to your committee to ensure its success?
- From what other projects might you be willing to divest resources in order to properly equip the antiracism committee?
- Determine if the Dismantling Racism task force is authentic rather than performative by interrogating whether the outward expression of the work is reflective of the actual work being done within⁶

Check in

From Westminster’s experience, another aspect for continued engagement is having regular check-ins, the ability for members to step away as needed, and to uphold the importance of rest and care. Check-in’s can be a semi-annual conversation about the structure of the team, the goals, and if the frequency of meeting still feels comfortable for members.

This also includes being transparent about the ability for members to step away. If people are stepping away, this might be an opportunity to re-invite the wider church to join the team. We sometimes can get into the habit in churches to try to hold onto as members as possible on our committees, and unintentionally make those who would like to step away feel guilty. This can damage relationships and mean that some members stay on out of obligation, leading to a team that is burned out.

Volunteer burnout is a reality in most churches. Because of this, even for those who do not wish to step away, the team should be aware of the general energy of the team and church community. This can be easier if you have a minister involved in the team who is more aware of the pastoral sense of the community. However, even without a minister the facilitators can pay attention to what they perceive the needs of the team to be and ask the questions in transparent ways.

⁵ Connely et al. *Wait-Is This Racist?: A Guide to Becoming an Anti-Racist Church*, 81.

⁶ Connely et al. *Wait-Is This Racist?: A Guide to Becoming an Anti-Racist Church*, 81.

Prioritize rest

A helpful reflection tool for those who feel guilty taking time for rest, especially within the justice and faith lens, is Tricia Hersey's Nap Ministry. She has a book and a deck of 50 affirmations and practices for rest and renewal. She states:

“Our collective rest is leading the change. It has always been a time for justice. It has always been a time for rest... Rest is a form of resistance because it disrupts and pushes back against capitalism and white supremacy... We cling to this truth like a lifeboat in a raging sea. We cling to the power of collective care. We focus on our collective rest, opening the DreamSpace to allow us to invent and imagine a new world rooted in rest”.⁷

I invite churches to continue theologically reflecting on how rest can be liberatory, and how by welcoming and celebrating rest we can show collective care. You have permission to rest. This does not mean to turn away from injustice, but to reflect on how rest can be built into a model of equity-seeking church structures.

Inviting the Wider Community into the Work

Our final learning is about the involvement of the whole church in the work of equity, diversity, and belonging. For instance, this could look like integrating EDB practices into existing events, revising and approving policy, reviewing reports and posting publicly, delivering land acknowledgements, hosting visioning sessions, identifying and supporting related community partners. It also involves modifying worship.

Modify worship practices

This could include a land acknowledgement and/or Affirming statement if your church has been through the Affirming process. Some churches can jump right into this, and some might need some time and education to accept worship changes. We would also suggest that a conversation happens with the minister and/or worship team to discuss how sermons and liturgy might include EDB-related themes. You may already be doing some of this, like using expansive language for God or having sermons end with how you can make a difference in the world over the coming week. These are great ways to begin encouraging a collective movement within your church, instead of being a small group of people who make little outward cultural changes within the church. Once again, EDB work is not meant to be done in isolation!

Refer to a checklist

Over time our team decided that a next step to support all members of the church to be responsible for this work is to create an ‘EDB Checklist’. See this document in Appendix F. This list includes 10 questions that engage people in considering if their meetings, events, worship, and more are meeting the EDB commitments of the community. For example, is the space physically accessible? Can all members access the content? Are there financial barriers to participation? This work is ongoing at Westminster (EDB work is a journey that never ends!), but we hope this list, while not exhaustive, helps people start thinking about the ministries of the church in an intentional way.

⁷ Tricia Hersey, “Slowly Emerging after a 3 Week Sabbath,” web log, *The Nap Ministry* (blog), July 14, 2020, <https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/>.

Testimonials

Sometimes this work can seem cerebral on paper. When done with intention and combining education, action, and reflection, it has a very real impact. We hope these stories from Westminster can help ground this work:

“I joined the EDB Team because I care deeply about fairness, equality, inclusion and justice. I also understand that, in my life context, I am often part of the problem – so I need to have a better understanding of what needs to change and what I can do to help foster that change. Being part of the EDB Team is one small but important way to change both me and a bit of the world around me. Every small step counts.” -Dona Harvey

“I joined the EDB team because I wanted to work with others who were committed to being intentional about reducing barriers to belonging at Westminster.” -Joan Tuchlinsky

“I joined the EDB team because I believe we all benefit when everyone has an opportunity to participate in and contribute to our church family. Welcoming a diverse group of participants enriches the church and is achievable when we remove barriers.” -Kim Brabazon

“When I was signing up for this team I felt ignorant, I felt nervous. I felt uncomfortable, which I think is appropriate given the complexity and the seriousness of the topic that we were about to go in, but I didn't know what I didn't know. I didn't know how to talk about the issues... Given the privilege that I have in my life... I wanted to be part of a community that was more equitable and inclusive, so I knew that it was important for me to be a part of this team. And so, what did I experience? What was it like for me? A better understanding of many different types of groups that are not well represented in our community. I experienced a lot of emotion and a lot of different kinds of emotion. These topics aren't easy, and they invoke a lot of emotion. I think the real key to the learning and to the conversation was that we had a safe place to explore these ideas.” -Dale Scott

“I have to admit I was surprised when I got a call from Westminster asking me if I might be part of the EDI discussions. I hadn't attended Westminster in some time, despite the fact that I still considered myself a member, but I was thrilled to be part of the conversation. It was an incredible learning experience. I appreciated being able to be part of the conversation with people who are really thinking hard through some really difficult questions about how we're called to be part of a world that recognizes the harms we've done, but also seeks to create communities that are welcoming and radically hospitable, and disrupt some of society's expectations and norms even when that's difficult. Even when that goes against the grain. I think what both surprised me but also made me really want to be part of the conversation is that it's my understanding that I was originally reached, called, that the group originally reached out to me because of my connection to disability and caregiving, and my life caring for my son with complex disabilities. And I understand that there

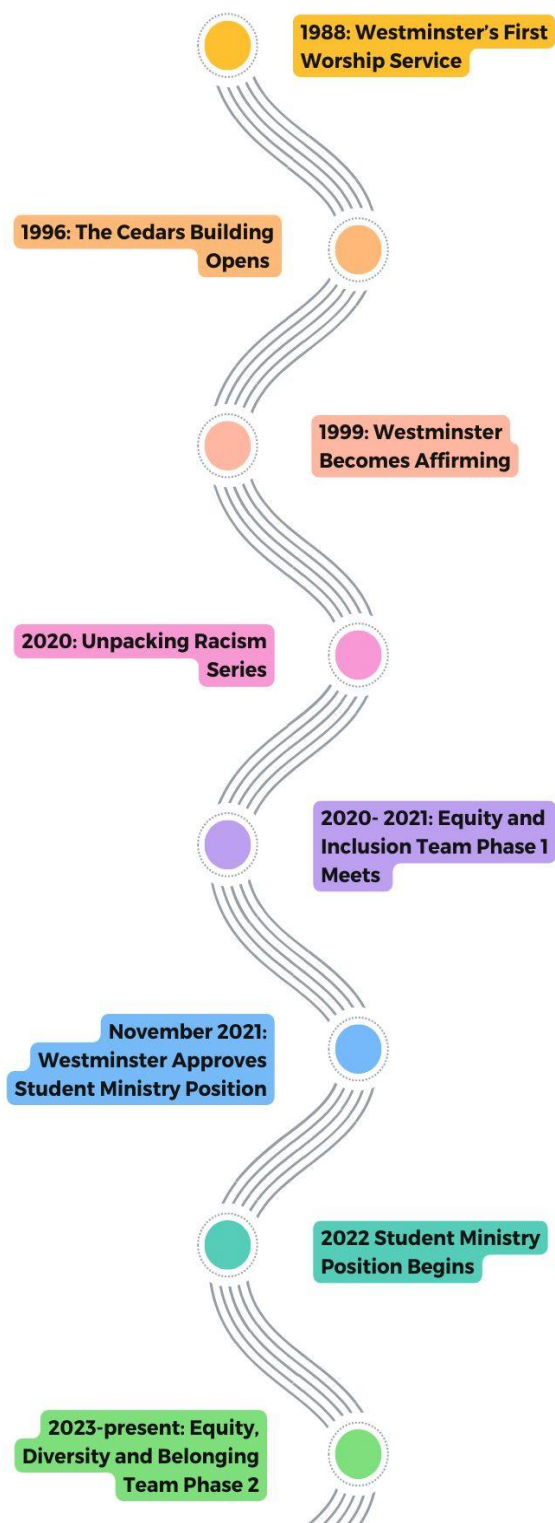
had been a bit of a discussion about who's at the table of this discussion and what voices are we missing, and what voices might help us work through some of the topics that we want to think through. And my name came up as someone connected to the disability and caregiving world as a mother, and I appreciated the invitation in part because it meant the group was really trying to think through the voices that were at the table, the voices that weren't at the table, and how can we reach out to the voices that maybe aren't at the table and make sure that they're part of the conversation. It was a fantastic experience and I'm just so grateful to have been part of it. Thanks, and I look forward to seeing where it goes from here.” -Laura MacGregor

“Inclusion doesn't necessarily just mean Braille printers and stuff like that. It means people coming up and chatting with you after service and treating you like anybody else. Because I know for myself what I'm looking for in the community of faith is to be able to have people to make friends with that have, you know, similar beliefs systems and learn from them and they can learn from me... The one story that came to mind is, it didn't happen here, but it happened because of here. Back in June I think it was, we went to another church. The four churches had these, they have these joint services. And I knew that there would be no bulletin, so I was prepared to just sit and listen like I've done for years and years and years before. And when we went up to the front—I have a table that I use here at Westminster that they gave me so that I can put my Braille binder on which makes it easier to read the braille— somebody from Westminster had put that table in their car and brought it to the other church, and on top of a braille copy of the bulletin that the church would be doing, just to make sure that I had what I needed... I would like to add that what's interesting about being here at Westminster is, making things more. inclusionary isn't just, ‘Okay, you've got a braille printer, we've given you coffee you can drink, and that's all we are going to do’. I can actually, literally, if there's an issue that has happened, I can talk to either the minister or student minister or anybody else, the people in charge of worship and say ‘Look, you know this didn't sit well with me. Somebody said something that wasn't exactly inclusionary and made me feel like I stood out’. And instead of being told ‘Gee, you know we're doing our best’, what I hear instead is a validation of ‘Oh! We're really sorry that you felt that way about that, and we're really glad that you can come to us with these things, and we're going to work on that’. And they do. It's not just words... So its work in progress, and it's like any relationship. We're sort of learning from each other, and I'm learning from them, and they're learning from me. And that's why I continue to stay here because I think there's something really that can grow.” -Ayla Mackie

Appendices and Additional Resource Library

Appendix A:

Westminster's Timeline



Appendix B:

Equity and Inclusion Team Phase 2- Application Form

Interested in joining us? First step is to download, fill out and save this form. To submit, attach the form in an email to <name> (Facilitator) at <email>. Contact <name> with questions or for assistance in applying.

* Required field - type in your responses

General Information

First or Preferred Name* Last Name*

Gender Pronouns (e.g. she, he, zhe, they, etc.)

What is your general availability currently for monthly 2-hour meetings? *

(Type "YES" in all that may work for you - will narrow options further in future poll)

	Morning (9am-12pm)	Afternoon (1-5pm)	Evening (6-10pm)
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Sunday	Aside from worship of course 😊		

Have you experienced barriers to equal access, opportunities, and resources? For example, based on race, ability, gender, sexuality, finances, etc. (*select one as you feel comfortable*)

If yes, is there something from your lived experience that you would like to share here (confidentially with the facilitators) to inform this process?

Position-Specific Information

Please provide (in 1-3 sentences) your response to each question so we can get to know you better.

What do diversity, inclusion, and equity mean to you?

Why are you called to join this team?

What skills, experience and strengths do you hope to bring to this team?

What do you require from the facilitator to be able to participate fully?

(e.g. accessibility needs, clarification on something, etc.)

We are excited about this opportunity for you and our church!

You can expect a response to your email within a couple days.

Appendix C:

Theological Reflection for Invitation to a team, written by Rebecca Whiting, DLM for the use of Westminster United Church, Waterloo. This was offered on Advent 4:

“As you may know, this January we will be starting phase 2 of the equity and inclusion team*. Over the last few weeks we have been exploring some themes and how they connect to the team. (past themes: There is room for every story, so what might your story bring? God meets us in our fear, so how might we say yes despite apprehension? How can we have courage to choose a better way?)

This week our theme in worship is ‘We see God in each other’. This is at the heart of the equity and inclusion team, and is a major contributor to its forming. Equity, diversity, and inclusion work is best done in a team, in a space where we can see God in one another. Each person brings their unique light, experience, and perspectives. And so we are made stronger by diversity. You don't need to have been a part of the equity and inclusion team in 2020 or 2021 to join this next phase, all are welcome, and not just accepted but celebrated. How can we uphold each other as we see God within? If you are curious or would like more details I invite you to reach out to me or take a look at the infographic posted in the hallway by the bathrooms. And as the Advent season comes to a close, I ask that those interested submit their applications by Dec 23rd so we have sufficient time to set the first date in January!”

*Please note that we used the language of ‘inclusion’ at this time but later changed to ‘belonging’.

Appendix D:

BRAVE:

Some norms for our time today are the BRAVE acronym.

We strive, in this time of co-learning, to be brave by...

B – being accountable for the impact of both our words and our silence

R – reflecting on and naming our own biases

A – actively listening

V – vocalizing questions that arise from our learning

E – encountering new ideas with curiosity and wonder

Appendix E:

SMART Goals

S- Specific

M- Measurable

A- Achievable

R- Realistic

T- Timely.

Appendix F:

Fostering Equity, Diversity and Belonging Checklist

This guide helps Westminster people in fostering greater equity, diversity and belonging in the life of their faith community. *It is okay to not be perfect!* It is our hope that you remember that this is a gradual growth, so we invite members to trust the process and not let overwhelm prevent us from making a start!

1. Ask what people need, don't assume. Often times a conversation is a good place to start!
2. Who is not at the table? Do all members have similar perspectives or life experiences? If so, how can we extend broader invitation?
3. Is there an opportunity to create norms/covenant within a group that will be meeting regularly?
4. What is the committee's bias? What biases might you hold? What assumptions are we making about the knowledge that people have? ie Truth & Reconciliation – does everyone have the same understanding of terms such as TRC?
5. How can we invite feedback explicitly, casually, and often? Foster an attitude of open-mindedness. ie repeat a message when requested, openness to expand learning and knowledge
6. Can everyone access the meeting/worship/activity materials? If not, how can it be made accessible? ie some people are not comfortable using google docs, or some may need a braille agenda or screen reader friendly online materials
7. Ensure wide passageways within rooms, washrooms, exits are accessible and kept clear
8. If food is being served, what dietary needs might we encounter and how can we prepare for those?
9. Are there any financial barriers to participation?
10. Can all members access transportation to the meeting/event? If not, what options might be extended?

This is not an exhaustive list, but an invitation to consider how we at Westminster can continue to prioritize thinking about how we can foster EDB actions and principles in our community life.

Additional Resource A:

Ableist Attitudes Example Sheet

The following is an example list of phrases, attitudes, and biases that are influenced by our ableist society. Many of these phrases highlight implicit teachings from our culture that we need to actively work to deconstruct. We encourage <insert committee or team> to consider how they may impact our church culture and take this document into consideration as you engage in your process of discernment of next steps.

People with disabilities are asking for too much.

- Many are simply suggesting/naming the options for accommodations that are needed to live in an equitable way to non-disabled individuals, which is not too much. In fact, many people with disabilities under-advocate for themselves due to histories of being dismissed.

The issues lie with the individuals who are disabled and not with the institution/society.

- This goes back to the social model of disability, which states that it's our society, institutions, and communities that need to work to reduce barriers. The issue is institutional structures, not individuals.

People with disabilities are an inspiration.

- This is a complicated topic and people with disabilities do not all fall into the same opinion about it. Due to the complicated nature, below is a link to an article that explores this complexity. I encourage you to take a look for an engaging discussion!

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewpulrang/2022/04/21/is-there-a-healthy-place-for-inspiration-in-disability-culture/?sh=709470fd1418>

There needs to be an equal exchange of how much we are doing for people with disabilities, and how much they are giving back.

- This ignores the fact that much of what is being done is just to be at a baseline level of accessibility. Additionally, relationship and equity work should not be measured in a transactional way.

People with disabilities should disclose the nature of their disability to others.

- The decision for people with disabilities to disclose their disabilities is personal and comes down to many factors. Some do not disclose because they are concerned about discrimination (for example, in an interview). At other times, strangers on the street may stop a person and ask "what's wrong with you". There is no requirement for disabled individuals to share this personal information with strangers, or even people who they have known for longer. Furthermore, this can sometimes be a painful question if a disabled individual does not yet have a concrete diagnosis. These are just a few examples of the way this belief can be harmful. As a best practice, it is best to let people with disabilities self-disclose when they are ready and within the parameters of trust that are comfortable to them. This includes

when asking for accommodations, as people with disabilities should be believed even without knowing the specifics about their conditions.

People with disabilities can't do (insert thing) because of their disabilities, or at least not as well.

- It is true that people with disabilities have some things they are unable to do, and some things that can be done but need to be in a different way. However, what those things are cannot be assumed, especially without having a discussion with the individual. They are the experts at what they can and cannot do.

Holding discussions where 'we' are talking about 'them'.

- Often times when discussions are held about disabilities the underlying current of the conversation is that 'we' are talking about 'them'. This may even be present in this document as it can be difficult to reduce this implicit sense. However, in discussions about disabilities it is helpful and important to remind participants that there are likely individuals with disabilities present in the room, even if it is not easily identified. It is likely not a homogenous group of non-disabled individuals, and if it is then that is also an important piece to reflect upon.

People with disabilities exaggerate their conditions for attention or special treatment.

- There are rare cases where one has a mental health condition where they seek treatment that is not necessary. However, in almost every case people who have disabilities do not engage in this behaviour. It is a negative stereotype that people with disabilities are faking or doing it to seek attention or financial gain. In fact, many people with disabilities minimize their symptoms. This belief is especially harmful in the medical system, as it can result in people with disabilities receiving sub-standard care.

We should ignore that someone has a disability and treat them the same as non-disabled people.

- Completely ignoring disabilities prevents the opportunity for accommodations to be made as needed. If an individual with a disability (or the wider disability community) indicates an accommodation or different way to engage that would allow for participation, it is important to make that accommodation if possible. For example, not all students should be treated the same, as some need extended test-taking times due to disabilities.

We are doing 'good enough'. People should be okay with/grateful for what we have in place now.

- While there are still clear barriers to equitable participation, not enough has been done.

Additional Resource B:

Three lunch'n'learn workshop outlines are available based on the work done at Westminster United Church. The themes are Truth and Reconciliation, Affirming Ministries, and Disabilities and Accessibility. These workshops are available for others to use as a model or to generate ideas, but we encourage you to adapt them to be a better fit for your community and goals. To access the outlines (which are too lengthy to place within this resource), please contact rebeccawhiting97@gmail.com.

Works Cited

- Connelly, Kerry, Bryana Clover, and Josh Riddick. *Wait-is this racist?: A guide to becoming an anti-racist Church*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2022.
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