

ERIC H.F. LAW

FEAR

NOT

LIVING GRACE AND TRUTH
IN A FRIGHTENED WORLD



“Once again, Eric Law has gifted the Church with a vibrant and relevant resource for creating authentic community from which to heal and change the world. In a time when our culture is being held hostage by fear-based messages seeking to harden our hearts against each other, Law offers a liberating way through. This book will bless faith communities with hope, courage, and strategies for building the beloved community God calls us to in dark times.”

— Jacqui Lewis, Senior Minister at Middle Collegiate Church,
New York City

“Holy Scripture tells us that perfect love casts out fear, but we do not find many places in our religious culture that provide tools to help us as we seek to engage that perfect love and overcome our individual and collective fears. Eric Law in *Fear Not* provides the reader tools that are clear and concrete enough to help in navigating the culture of fear that surrounds us.”

— Catherine Meeks, Executive Director of Absalom Jones
Episcopal Center for Racial Healing, Atlanta

“I related to this book so much—to how trapped in fear we are, but also to how there is something better that we can create! The stories encouraged me, the scripture grounded me, and the content empowered me. I want more than risk management; I want life. I can’t wait to gather some friends so we can read this, create grace-filled life together and Fear Not.”

— Sandhya Jha, author of *Transforming Communities: How People Like You are Healing Our Neighborhoods*

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Saint Louis, Missouri

An imprint of Christian Board of Publication

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*For my mother, Law Tam Un-Oi,
and my brothers and sisters:
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Michelle Sau-Fong Ng, and Horatio Hung-Yan Law
for their unconditional love for me.*

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Cover design: Jennifer Pavlovitz

ChalicePress.com

Print 9780827211322
EPUB 9780827211339
EPDF 9780827211346

Printed in the United States of America

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Preface

It has been more than ten years since the publication of the first edition of this book, then titled *Finding Intimacy in a World of Fear*. To be honest, I was disappointed at how little impact this book had made over the last ten years. I wrote the book as a response to the fear-based reactions to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and the way fear was used in subsequent years to motivate people to act in constructive and destructive ways—mostly destructive. My goal was to help readers to address fear in constructive and faithful ways. My hope was that these constructive analyses and processes would spread, at least through churches within the major denominations, to help reverse the ever-increasing fear trend in the United States. But the fear-exploiters and marketers continued to skillfully deploy their weapons, gaining power and money. Ten years after the initial publication of this book, I found myself living in a world where fear reigns supreme, regardless of one's political or ideological perspective: fear of politicians and government officials such as Trump, Obama, or Clinton; fear of government agencies such as the FBI, Department of Justice, and the White House Administration; fear of terrorism, disaster, climate change, immigrants, police, or people of color. The list goes on.

Meanwhile, intimacy—a time and place where we can be face to face with one another to share truth—especially among those who are different politically, racially, and economically, is getting harder and harder to achieve.

I was interviewing Scott Bader-Saye for another writing project. Scott published *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear* around the same time that *Finding Intimacy in a World of Fear* came out. We were commiserating because we felt that our books were not having the impact that we had hoped. What we had both offered in our books was a rational, intellectual approach to fear. Yet fear is a powerful emotional and intuitive thing, and has been used from the beginning of human community to effectively motivate people for good and for bad.

Scott shared with me that he had been reading in the field of moral psychology¹ for his own research. He said, “Over the last five to ten years, these psychologists have consistently been telling us that most of our moral judgments are arising not out of reflection but intuition. People rarely make ethical decisions based on reason. It’s a reaction out of intuition, out of their gut.”

One of the authors Scott had read, American social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, said that while reason plays a role in moral judgment, it “is far less powerful than intuition, so if you’re arguing (or deliberating) with a partner who lives on the other side of the political spectrum from you, and you approach issues such as abortion, gay marriage, or income inequality with powerfully different intuitive reactions, you are unlikely to effect any persuasion no matter how good your arguments and no matter how much time you give your opponent to reflect upon your logic.”²

Scott also pointed me to the work of Bryan Stevenson, author of *Just Mercy*, who talks about the importance of proximity with his work among prisoners on death row. Stevenson proposes the following “four steps to really change the world”:³

1. **We have to get approximate to the problems we care about.** Stevenson’s point is that we cannot solve a problem at a distance. We need to get up close, because that “proximity” will help us to truly understand others—their experiences, perspectives, and possible solutions they may offer.
2. **We have to change the narrative.** Stevenson believes that U.S. culture is based on “a narrative of fear and anger.” This rings true to me because so much of my work in facilitating gracious and courageous conversation begins with changing the narrative from a fear-based, debate model to a mutually respectful, community-building, story-telling scenario.
3. **We have to remain hopeful.** We may not be successful all the time, but hope keeps us going. Stevenson identifies hope,

¹Scott named the following authors and books as his sources: Jonathan Haidt’s *The Righteous Mind*, Joshua Greene’s *Moral Tribes* and Daniel Kahneman’s *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.

²Jonathan Haidt, “Reasons Matter (When Intuitions Don’t Object),” *The New York Times*, October 7, 2012, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/07/reasons-matter-when-intuitions-dont-object/>.

³Martin Saunders, “Bryan Stevenson: Four steps to really change the world,” *ChristianToday*, July 16, 2015, <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/bryan-stevenson-four-steps-to-really-change-the-world/59211.htm>.

driven and enabled by faith, as the key ingredient in fighting injustice for the long term.

4. **Sometimes we have to do uncomfortable things.**

Scott said at the end of our conversation, “We tend to talk about others instead of talking to them in person. Left-leaning Christians need to connect with right-leaning Christians and say, ‘Let me hear your story’ and vice-versa. How do we come into proximity with each other without the posture of judgment or superiority? How do we express authentic curiosity toward those who whose opinions and views differ from our own, and not act as if we are there to study them as strange creatures who voted for the other person?”⁴

Achieving intimacy in a world of fear is not about using words and trying to reason our way in. Intellectual discourses are not going to get us very far without the context of face-to-face relationships and close proximity to each other. This will be uncomfortable because being in proximity with differing others will trigger our fears—fear of rejection, as well as fear of emotional and even physical harm. For this reason, changing the narrative away from fear and debate is essential; start with an invitation to enter into a gracious and brave space for dialogue and then introduce and affirm a set of respectful communication guidelines before any interpersonal engagement. In my book *Inclusion: Making Room for Grace*, I illustrate how to create a “grace margin.” Creating a grace margin is my way of changing the fear narrative and preparing the way for an up-close encounter.

In this new edition, I have added suggested activities and questions for discussion at the end of each chapter. I invite my readers to create a grace margin and form small groups to read this book together. Invite the group to meet periodically, face-to-face, to do the suggested activities and share reflection on the discussion questions. Diversity within the group will make for more fruitful conversations.

I have also added a new chapter. My original thought for this chapter was to add my reflections on fear and intimacy gleaned from the last ten years. Instead I decided that I would let my readers do much of that reflection themselves through the discussion questions. So the additional chapter offers processes

⁴The full interview with Scott Bader-Saye is in *Companion on the Episcopal Way*, coauthored by Eric. H.F. Law and Stephanie Spellers, published by Morehouse Publishing.

and practical resources for individual exploration, and for bringing diverse people together in close proximity to do the uncomfortable thing—build relationship and share their truth. I also included lyrics of songs I wrote in the past year. You can find recordings of these songs on the Internet.⁵ I have also included a dialogue process, “Prep for the Holidays,” from Building Bridges Now—an Internet dialogue resource—in the Appendix to show you how to create a grace margin for courageous conversations at holiday gatherings, especially when politics come up. A second dialogue process, “Disaster Preparedness,” is available to download from ChalicePress.com/FearNot. This session brings people together to address the fear, and plan responses to, a natural disaster. Hopefully these additional resources will help more people to live grace and truth in a frightened world.

I am longing for a day of seeing without tears
 I am yearning for a day of living without fears
 A day when ev'ryone's free
 And no one's bullied to conform
 A day with no threats of war
 No shields, no armored uniforms
 A day with no flood or draught
 And no more man-made angry storms
 A day when truthfulness reigns
 And grace and kindness is the norm
 Come and dream with me
 For that day of seeing without tears
 Come and work with me
 For the way of living without fears.
 Come and walk with me
 Walk the way of justice and of peace
 Come and pray with me
 Pray for grace and courage without cease

Eric H. F. Law
 May 2019

⁵You can find simple video recordings of these songs in my YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDtDLY83mHTSSsjkprJaF1g/> videos, and the songs are in an album titled *Up-Side-Down Town* by Eric H. F. Law available in iTunes, Amazon, CDBaby and other major music providers.

7

What Are You Doing Here?

Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

[The LORD] said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." Then the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also, you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place.

(1 Kings 19:9b–16)

Fearful for his life because of Queen Jezebel, Elijah escaped into the wilderness. After journeying in the wilderness for forty days, he came upon a cave on Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. The first thing God said to him was, “What are you doing here?”

Elijah answered with his usual complaint—I have been good, but they are after me, and I’m all alone. Then God instructed him to go outside and stand on the mountain to meet God. But wasn’t God already talking to him? Why then did God ask Elijah to go and meet him? Elijah might have been talking to God, but he had not met and known God. He had no intimate relationship with God. In this fearful time, God longed for Elijah to know God and to know what God was not. Elijah wanted God to come to him as the thunder, the wind, the earthquake, and the fire—all the things in nature that evoke fear in us. But God was not there. God was in the silence. In the traditional King James translation, God was in the “still small voice.” Contrast the presence of God in this story to the presence of God on Mount Sinai. God did not present herself in the traditional fear-evoking images. God’s way of working through our fear is not through violence and aggression that evokes more fear in others, but through listening to the sheer silence—that is the voice of the Holy. In this untraditional image of God—silence—a voice asked Elijah again, “What are you doing here?”

Elijah still did not understand what God was trying to tell him because he reiterated his old complaint—I have been good, and they are after me; I’m all alone. God then instructed him to go back and anoint people—the king of Aram, the king of Israel, and his own successor. One principle role/ministry of the prophet was to anoint. By asking Elijah, “What are you doing here?” God was trying to tell Elijah to focus on what he was called to do. In doing so, he would have allies who would support his ministry; and he would have a disciple who would follow him and carry on his ministry with him and after him. Elijah would not be alone anymore. By refocusing Elijah on the purpose of his role in ministry, God moved Elijah from a fearful paralyzed state to a proactive movement of empowerment of himself and others. He could return to face his fear, no longer alone, and function as a part of a network, a community of faithful people.

In 1979, I finally accepted the call to serve as an ordained minister through the Episcopal Church. I could use my established residency with any of three different church communities in three different dioceses to move through the process to becoming a

priest—the Chinese mission in Chinatown in the Diocese of New York; a church in Jackson Heights, Queens, where my family lived at that time in the Diocese of Long Island; or the Episcopal Church at Cornell, where I went to college in the Diocese of Central New York. I chose to enter the process through the Diocese of Central New York because I was afraid of being “stuck” in a Chinese ministry. I have seen quite a few burnt-out Chinese priests working exclusively in Chinese ministries with little support from their dioceses.

I thought if I went through New York or Long Island with their large Chinese populations, I would have to deal with the “stereotypical” expectation to serve in a Chinese-language ministry. I was fearful that if my first job was with a Chinese ministry, I would be stuck there with little possibility of movement into other kinds of ministries. Then in ten years, I would become a bitter, overworked, underpaid priest; in twenty years, I would feel a sense of incompetence and find myself living in depression. In thirty years, I would die of stress, high blood pressure, and heart attack. I might have been being a little dramatic, but I had seen Asian clergy who had gone through exactly that scenario.

At the recommendation of a mentor after I finished my first year in theological school, I decided to face my fear head on. At that time in Boston, a new Chinese ministry was developing at the Cathedral. The congregation consisted of mostly Chinese refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia. I entered into a field-education learning contract with the priest in charge, who was a man learned in Chinese and English. He preached with a Chinese vocabulary that was both accessible and theologically sound. His presence in the eucharist was spirit-filled, mainly through his use of the Cantonese language placing effective accent on specific words and phrases. I had a ninth grade level of Chinese language skills. Through high school and college in the United States, I had not used my Chinese language skills at all. At times I felt completely incompetent standing next to this gifted and learned minister. Fortunately, he was an excellent supervisor who was able to push me and nurture me at the same time. It was not easy, but I was learning a lot.

One year later, my supervisor left to start another mission on the West Coast. My worst fear had come true. I was on my own, stuck, alone. At first, I was trying to emulate the priest who had left. Within a month, I realized that as a part-time minister, still trying to finish my theological study, this was impossible. I felt like running

away to hide. But I knew running was not an option. What was I afraid of? I was afraid that I would be perceived as incompetent. Then I would get a bad evaluation and recommendation for my final application to become a priest. I would not be ordained. I would lose my self-esteem once more; and, this time, I might not recover, etc. As I linked my fear toward its ultimate destination, I became almost depressed. There seemed to be no way out.

Facing this dead-end street, I prayed. As I prayed, I heard a voice asking me, "Eric, what are you doing here?" I said, "I have been good and faithful in following Your call to ministry. I was courageous to face my fear and decided to work in this ministry. Why have You abandoned me? I am all alone." As I complained, I heard the question again, "What are you doing here, Eric?"

Having said what I needed to say, I calmed down. The question echoed in my head again and again, and I began to answer it. I was not here to imitate another person or show that I was competent in the eyes of others. I was called be a child of God among these wonderful people who gathered around Christ's table, watching me struggle through the sermon and liturgy in Chinese, and still loved and respected me. At that moment, I knew what I was going to do.

I started a monthly gathering at different church members' homes. At these gatherings, we would share food and a time of Bible reflection followed by a time of sharing of concerns and prayers. I was not the one in charge of these events. Each church member took turn in the leadership. Every month, excitement would build as we prepared to gather at another church member's home. They arranged for everyone's transportation, made the food, and packed it to travel. One month we would be eating, singing, and praying in an expensive condo in Cambridge. The next month, we would be laughing and praying in a one-room apartment in a low-income housing project sitting on chairs made out of cardboard boxes and crates. The location was not important as long as we had storytelling, laughter, food, and genuine concern for each individual and family. I remember fondly many moments at these gathering during which I sat back, silently thanking God that I was not alone. A small voice echoed in my head, "This is why I am here." I still struggled with the Chinese liturgy and sermon on Sunday, but the monthly gathering became true communion for this community.

What I learned from the years I served this ministry was that I was not very good at serving a Chinese community in its

traditional form and expectations of a priest. Yet, I was called to stay connected with the Asian communities, but in ways that might not be what others expected. By living fully with this fear, I mined from it a new vision for how I could serve, using my talents and gifts. As I was graduating from seminary, I was able to say “no,” without shame or guilt, to the part-time Chinese Ministry positions offered to me. Instead, I accepted a call to be the campus minister at the University of Southern California. As soon as I settled in Los Angeles, I immediately applied for a grant to begin a ministry with Asian youth and young adults. The program nurtured Asian young people, helping them face their fear as people living in-between cultures and communities. The overall goal was to enable them to become effective leaders in their own church communities. Eventually, this program became the model for a provincial program offering an annual training program for Asian American youth and young adults in the West Coast dioceses and Hawaii. In another three years, the program became a national program.

Miriam Greenspan wrote:

Joyful living is not the same thing as living without fear. It’s about living fully with fear. Joy is what we find when we act with our fear for the sake of life. Mindful fear moves us to act with courage and loving-kindness, in the service of ourselves and others. And these acts of compassion and service are the quickest route to dispelling fear. If you’re afraid of illness, serve someone who’s ill. If you’re afraid of disability, serve someone who’s disabled. If you’re afraid of not having enough money, work for the poor. If you’re afraid of death, volunteer at a hospice. If you’re afraid of loneliness, work with the elderly shut-ins in nursing homes. Then you will discover the alchemy of fear. Facing into our worst fears—of death, loss, pain, vulnerability, isolation and chaos—takes as much courage as trekking in the wilderness in a snow storm...[F]inding the core of our fear, we find our way. ¹

At the beginning of 2006, I started a new ministry called the Kaleidoscope Institute. The goal of the Institute was to train competent leaders in a diverse and changing world. This ministry was a recreation of the Kaleidoscope Project, a training program for

¹Miriam Greenspan, *Healing Through the Dark Emotions* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 2004), 196.

groups of churches offering a combination of skills for congregation development and for building inclusive community. I had successfully implemented this project in three Episcopal dioceses and two United Methodist conferences. The institute would have a new focus of leadership formation and local church community development. As I formulated this new organization, I created a line-up of workshops for local church leaders. I was sure that these programs would be successful. However, as February and March and April rolled by, the registrations for these programs were not coming in as I had expected. My increased effort in sending out more e-mails and notices did not seem to help. With only two or three persons registered, I was reluctant to cancel these programs until the very day before. I was hoping that a miracle would happen, when people would suddenly realize that they needed these programs.

I finally pulled back and asked: What am I afraid of? I decided to take a walk in the wilderness. I was fearful of people perceiving me as a failure. This would lead me to think that I, in fact, was a failure. The lack of interest in these programs might mean that I was no longer relevant in my writing and my consulting work. And this would lead to no income. I would go into financial trouble, and so on and so on. The linkage work led me, of course, to chaos, vulnerability, rejection, and even death.

As I journeyed in the wilderness, I realized how unfounded my fear was: I was not going to die or lose my livelihood if the Kaleidoscope Institute did not succeed as I had envisioned it. I had successfully made an income doing God's work before the Institute; I could still do it with or without the Institute. Having assured myself of that, I cancelled every program in May and June and gave myself an even longer stay in the wilderness.

In the wilderness, I heard the question that God asked me every time I was afraid: What are you doing here, Eric? I said, "Well, God, I thought you wanted me to form this institute. I have been following Your lead for so long. But why have you abandoned me now? I am all alone again."

But again, the question simply repeats itself: What are you doing here, Eric? I calmed down and tried to answer this question. I said, "I am here to share what I've learned over the years in building faithful inclusive community and to empower more and more people to do this work in more and more places." With this, I knew I was not here to re-create an old program that had

worked before. I was able to let go of the old paradigm that made the Kaleidoscope Project a success, which included commitment and support of the dioceses and conferences with which I had contractual agreements. With this new institute, I did not have the explicit support of the church institutions. I had to find another way to connect with local church communities and leaders. I knew what I needed to do.

I spent a month listening to local church leaders to find out what their needs were. Based on the listening, I was free to re-vision the Institute based on the needs of the church communities that I was trying to serve. Then I called a meeting, inviting people whom I had trained in programs of the last five years. I presented this new vision to them, and they were excited, agreeing that the Institute would be a success. In August 2006, we had our first Kaleidoscope Summer Training Institute. We envisioned an event for twenty-five people. We were thrilled to have over thirty-five participants from five states and five Christian denominations. On the last day, we commissioned over fifteen people who had made a commitment to become trainers for the Institute—learning the skills, models, theories, and theology of this ministry and becoming proficient in sharing this ministry with more local church communities.

Again, the question, “What are you doing here?” was the key for me to face my fear, moving me from being alone to forming a community of trust. The question refocused my energy away from worry, anxiety, and fear and toward reclaiming what God was calling me to be. I was called to anoint others, building a community of the faithful, to continue the ministry of God.

I arrived at a city in the South to do a twelve-hour workshop for a major Christian denomination. Peter, who was my contact up to this point, picked me up at the airport. As he drove me to my first meeting with the staff at the denominational office, he said, “You’re in for a real challenge.” I sensed fear coming from him—perhaps fear for my safety. For most events, I usually arrived late the day before or on the day of the workshop. This time, Peter insisted that I be here a full day earlier to meet with the “key players.” With a few probing questions from me, he shared that, as a White male who was advocating for a workshop on multicultural ministry, he had received very negative feedback from both the African American and European American leaders. He had encountered resistance from all sides, and ownership to this program was low.

My fear meter went up a few degrees as I listened. What have I gotten myself into?

I was entering into an unknown environment with people with whom I had no relationship or preestablished trust. I should be afraid. But I said to myself, “Practice what you preach, Eric. Create a trustful environment; help them get to know you, then you should be okay.” That was my mental preparation before I entered into the first meeting. Complication! The leader of the group was delayed. I was not in position to suggest affirming a set of Respectful Communication Guidelines. As we waited, people started talking. I knew this meeting was getting off on the “wrong foot.” Almost immediately, the group went into a familiar destructive ritual—an African American spoke in very forceful way that doing a “multicultural ministry” workshop was just another way of ignoring the issues of the African Americans in the South. Besides, what could a person from California know about our issues? The ritual continued with the rest of the group not able to challenge his blatant assumptions of me, though I was sitting right there. Instead, they sat in silent guilt. In my anxious silence, I knew I couldn’t count on anyone there to support me. My fear meter went up a few more degrees. I felt alone.

What Am I Doing Here?

Ten years ago, I would have become defensive and launched an aggressive counterattack upon the ones who belittled me. Instead, I stayed silent and observed the group interactions and, more importantly, what was going on inside me. I asked myself: What does this fear reveal about me? I quickly recalled how the issues I faced as a Chinese American were often ignored and trivialized when I participated in anti-racism workshops back in the 1980s. During one such workshop at a seminary, after the Black and White panel finished sharing their perspectives on racism, I got up and spoke about the issue from a Chinese immigrant’s perspective. I basically said something like, “As we move forward to address the issue of racism, don’t forget there are minorities of other races besides African Americans.” The response from one of the African Americans on the panel was: “If you want to be on the panel, why don’t you speak up? We can’t read minds.” The European Americans responded: “We are so glad that you are finally claiming your racial identity.”

Twenty-five years later this fear I had of being rejected and belittled was being triggered again. If I had gone on the counter-attack, I would have replayed the same ritual that played itself out twenty-five years ago. Then the familiar question came, "What are you doing here, Eric?" And I answered, "I am here not to replay old ritual that escalates more fear and hurts. I am here to build bridges across misunderstandings. I am here to build trust and share what I've learned."

While I was arriving at the above conclusion, the group around the table was playing out another ritual. Consciously or unconsciously, those who had power in this context simply allowed the division and competition among the "minorities" to continue. As long as they were fighting over what to call this workshop and who was supposed to know the real issue of racism, the powerful did not have to do anything or face their own fears. How could I keep myself from being dragged into this ritual? As their consultant, how could I help this group to step out of the unhelpful ritual and move into a more productive, faithful approach to the issue? How could I not be the fear-bearer or fear-conqueror? How could I expose the fear-exploiters' scheme to destroy the possibility of intimacy in this situation?

The leader of the group finally arrived. I took that as an opportunity to ask the group to introduce themselves so that I would know who they were. The person to my right began her introduction. As they went around the room, I listened. Finally, it was my turn. My instinct said to me that they needed to know who I was, not what I could do. I opened my mouth and found myself telling my story as an immigrant coming to the United States in 1970. The first stop was Augusta, Georgia, where my aunt lived. I sensed the group was a little surprised. I spoke about how I reacted to the brand of racism in the Deep South. Then I moved on to sharing my experiences moving to New York City, going to a multiracial school, living in a multicultural community. I shared my experience of multicultural living at Cornell, the intercultural issues I encountered in Seminary in Boston, my first job as a priest at the University of Southern California, and how I got into this ministry of building inclusive community by teaching at the School of Education there and being active in AIDS education. I shared how, after the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, I created dialogue programs on racial reconciliation for people from nine major religions. I concluded by saying two key things:

1. I admitted that I did not know the African American experience, especially in the South, but I was here to share what I knew hoping that what I would share would be helpful.
2. People who did diversity and multicultural workshops and did not address racism from a Black/White perspective in the United States were not doing their jobs. In another setting, the Black/White dynamics/history may not be as pertinent. But doing a diversity workshop in the South, addressing the Black/White issues had to be an essential part of the program.

As I spoke, I made connection with each one of them based on their sharing. To connect with the African American, I shared my reflection on “A Day without Immigrants Protest” that had occurred the week before across the United States. Los Angeles had had one of the biggest turnouts and had gotten a lot of coverage. I used the opportunity to talk about how the media and the politicians were trying to use the divide-and-conquer technique again to divert people’s attention away from the real issues—the joblessness rate in Mexico and the United States employers’ exploitation of these workers by hiring them at below a living wage, while claiming that they did not have any rights because they were “illegal.” Instead, the media and politicians were projecting the issue as the illegal immigrants taking away jobs from African Americans and other struggling low-income families. As long as the illegal immigrants and the minority and low-income citizens were fighting over who was taking whose jobs, we remained distracted from addressing the fear-exploiters’ political and financial gains. As this community moved forward in the work of dismantling racism and building multicultural inclusive community, we had to resist being sucked into this divide-and-conquer pattern.

As I responded to the person who suggested that most people in the region were in denial about racism, I launched into a description of the stages of intercultural sensitivity.² I said, “First, we have to expose those who are in denial to people who are different. Then if they are truly in denial, they will react defensively. This defensive

²See Milton J. Bennett, “A Developmental Approach to Training for Intercultural Sensitivity,” in *Theories and Methods in Cross-Cultural Orientation*, ed. Judith N. Martin, International Journal of Intercultural Relations, vol. 5, no. 2 (New York/Oxford/Beijing/Frankfurt/Sao Paulo/Sydney/Tokyo/Toronto: Pergamon Press, 1986), 179–96. I also described these stages in Eric H. F. Law, *The Bush Was Blazing But Not Consumed* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1996), 46–60.

posture is actually an improvement from denial because they are at least aware that there are people who are different." In doing so, I affirmed the good work that Peter had done by coordinating the workshop and stated that people's defensive reactions were actually a sign of progress.

I continued, "We then need to help people in the defensive stage to get to know their own culture by doing intragroup dialogue processes. Then engaging them in intergroup dialogue would be the next step. Then they might move to the next stage, in which they would say differences are not important and that sharing what we have in common is the way." I explained how this stage was not productive and that they needed to provide educational programs to help people to move toward acceptance of differences. By this time the African American who implied that I could not know or understand his issues was taking notes.

A childish part of me said I was vindicated. But this involved more than being vindicated. I had achieved a little intimacy with him and with this group of people who did not know me or trust me an hour before. Ultimately, it was my trust in God that got me through this fearful experience. It was God's question, "What are you doing here?" that helped me focus and live through this fear. A part of me knew that God, through Christ's ministry, invited me to stand up and be the prophetic voice since I was perceived by some in the room as a powerless person. Another part of me knew that God, through Christ, invited the powerful side of me (in this case, I was the expert, brought in to give this workshop) to take up the cross and let go of my ego. I decided to do both. My actions in declaring that I did not claim to know the experience of African American was my willingness to take up the cross. At the same time, my faith in God also empowered me to speak the truth about myself, which began with my knowledge of myself—my fear, my gifts, and my abilities. As they knew more about me and as they realized how I had listened to them and attempted to connect with them, trust began to build. This group of people became my allies the next day when I facilitated the workshop. Through their verbal support and their comfort-giving posture throughout the day, participants, who were apprehensive about coming to the workshop, felt more at ease and were able to participate more fully in the dialogue and learning processes. I was not alone.

"What are you doing here?" This is the question I ask myself before every speech, every workshop and training program that

I give. Believe it or not, I still have fear before I get up and speak. The moment I think I am fully prepared, and have no fear, I am not taking my audience seriously because every audience is different with different contexts, experiences, interests, and needs. Having this fear is actually a gift. The way to focus my energy and live through this fear is to ask: What am I doing here?

This is the question that God asked Elijah when he was fearful. Like Elijah, we will go through stormy emotions as we run away from our fear. But, eventually, we have to find that quiet place, the sound of sheer silence, the still small voice that is the voice of the Holy. This is the place where we become intimate with God. Here, we will hear the question echo again: What are you doing here? When we can answer that question, we recapture our relationship with God. We reclaim our status as children of God. And God clarifies our call to ministry. Then, we are ready to go back to do what we are called to do. In doing so, we will empower others to work with us in community. In the trust and intimacy of community, we will be able to face and work through any fear that comes our way. We are not alone.

Questions and Activities

1. This chapter included three examples of how the author worked through his fears to achieve intimacy by answering the question: "What are you doing here?" Try this the next time you are facing a fearful situation.
 - a. Name a fearful situation.
 - b. Answer this question: What am I doing here?
 - c. Take time to be silent. Write down what emerges from your silence.
 - d. Then ask the question again: What am I doing here?
 - e. Spend a little more time in silence. Write down what transpired in the silence.
 - f. Then ask the question again: What am I doing here? Silence.
 - g. Write down again any new insight that comes to you.