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If you have the book, you'll have noticed the layout in the format. So the early chapters of the book, including an early chapter by Nancy and by myself, and then a handful that follow, are laying out the problem. What is the set of issues that are being encountered that are challenges for BIPOC leadership, clergy, non-clergy, lay, etc, within our communities. And then the center part of the book is stories, examples of how in a variety of communities folks are working with these energies or these set of needs as constructively as can be. And then the last part of the book is some blessings, some forward vision of what's possible and in an epilogue, some principles to keep in mind. So not solutions or a checklist, but really broad principles to hold in mind. That's the structure of the book. With that, we're going to share some excerpts from the book itself. I will get us started. And my chapter in Seeds of a New Way is called Encounters with Dave.

It captures an experience that I've had in multiple congregational ministries, but most acutely in one in particular. And where you're going to join in this chapter is there has been a search process in which I, as a BIPOC leader have been heavily courted for a position, viewed and treated as if I'm the most ideal candidate on earth for the position. By the way, this is not an unusual position for somebody who's BIPOC to find themselves in. These are the types of energies that actually occur, this exotic appeal or aura of desirability because you may represent the thing that is desired or we want more of in our communities. And then that reality changing, moving away from almost this exaggerated courtship to something different. So that's where we're going to pick up. And then I'm going to share a few paragraphs from my chapter Encounters with Dave.

Okay, so this is no sooner than the contract. The clergy agreement is signed and then you're picking up.

From there, I was repeatedly advised that my job was to learn how Dave the elder, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied white male, former senior minister, did the job and to try my best to be like him. The weeks and months that followed were astonishing. I was advised what timetable Dave kept for appointments. I was advised, which ties shirts and stoles I should or should not wear. I was advised what programs I should offer, what activities I should participate in. Inevitably, these were exactly the programs and activities that Dave had offered or participated in. At the board table, board members would openly share that they had visited with Dave at his home or talked with him on the phone or had dinner with him, and then go on to share the outcome of their consultations with him on the affairs of our community.

On and on, the reference point for everything was Dave. When I deviated, at times, even slightly from how Dave might've done something, I would be greeted at best with long silent stares of disappointment. And at other times, with open ridicule and hostility with, for example, members of the choir laughing at me and passing condescending notes to one another, while I was actively leading Sunday worship. As if we were children in grade school. These experiences were simultaneously confusing and humiliating. I was told that if I cared about the community, that if I was "community-minded," I should try even harder to do exactly what the community was telling me to do, which was to be more like Dave and less like myself. To undertake my job in a manner that allowed for my genuine gifts to shine through was the exact word used, "I was selfish," they would say.

That would be placing myself above what the community was unequivocally indicating its needs were. Selflessness could only be demonstrated by my commitment to be more and more like Dave. The community wanted the poster of diversity that my family and I could provide, but they also wanted Dave, the wizened white male elder's wisdom perspective, life experience, and way of being, not mine. The pressure to conform became a way to control the thing that this community never really wanted. Authentic and integrated diversity, something deeper and richer than the mere symbolic presence of it. Thank you for hearing my excerpt from my chapter.