**Guide: Cultural Autobiography**

**GFM New Staff Training Year 2**

**Pre-course learning assignment (summer/fall)**

1. Please reflect on the questions below and write your own cultural autobiography (2-3 pages). This does not need to be amazing writing! This written autobiography is meant to help you articulate some important parts of your cultural autobiography so that you can share some highlights of your story verbally with others. You don’t have to share what you’ve written with anyone, unless you’d like to.

The cultural autobiography is a narrative that explains your self-awareness concerning your racial and ethnic heritage. This is to be a combination of story and reflection – a sequence of experiences and thoughts. Begin by reflecting on the questions below\* and making notes on each. Then take the time to craft a narrative around experiences and how you interpret their impact on your ethnic identity. (For this exercise, we use the words ethnic and ethnicity to refer to cultural and racial elements plus other major sociocultural factors.) Because our ethnic journeys are still unfolding, you do not need to provide any “closure” – rather you may want to summarize what you appreciate about your culture, what you struggle with, and what questions you have.

1. What do you know (or can you discover) concerning the ethnicity and national origins of your parents, grandparents and earlier generations? If this is different from the heritage of the household in which you were raised, describe those differences.

2. When were you first aware of ethnic (or racial) categories? When were you first aware of persons who were different?

3. How did your parents and grandparents voice ethnic matters or convey to you what they perceived or what they thought was important? How did other members of the household contribute to your understandings about your own ethnic heritage?

4. Think about phases of your life – childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, middle and perhaps later adulthood. How did your ethnic identity affect you? How has your awareness changed? What difference did it make in relationships, where you lived, what activities you participated in, how you experienced school, and how you experienced your society (city, nation)?

5. How have you experienced societal matters of discriminations, prejudice and inequality among ethnic groups? What do you remember about experiences of being treated unfairly because of your cultural identity? Or of treating others unfairly?

6. How have you experienced significant boundary crossing (either in travel, through relationships or in some organization)? What did you learn about others and yourself?

7. What is the relationship between your ethnic identity and your faith? What difference did or does it make in church? In your beliefs or theology?

2. Share highlights of your cultural autobiography with your staff team.

Ask your team leader or supervisor for an opportunity to share a portion of your cultural autobiography with the local or area team (preferably if team meets in person, or on a team call). Take 7-10 minutes to share highlights, including any photos or other media that would help communicate your ethnic journey. Then allow time for your team to respond with questions, reflections, and/or prayer.

\*Adapted from Branson, Mark Lau, and Juan Francisco Martinez. 2011. *Churches, Cultures & Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.