

CATHOLIC CULTURAL DIVERSITY NETWORK CONVOCATION

May 6-8, 2010

GROUP PRAYER/REFLECTION: IT'S BETTER TOGETHER

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor 12:13)

Welcome and Prayer (15 minutes):

Welcome the participants and ask them to briefly introduce themselves in the language of their preference. Start with a simple prayer centered on the theme of Christian unity amidst the diversity of cultures and peoples. Create a welcoming environment, including the use of religious symbols of different cultures, and use Jaime Cortes's bilingual song "Somos el Cuerpo de Cristo/We are the Body of Christ" (*Breaking Bread*, #416, Oregon Catholic Press, 1998).

Objective:

Our objective is to promote knowledge, mutual acceptance, and collaboration among the diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups that form the faith community and to ask for their prayers for the success of the **Catholic Cultural Diversity Network Convocation**.

Sharing Our Experiences (40 minutes):

The increase in cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity is changing the face of our neighborhoods and communities of faith. This diversity enriches the communities in marvelous ways, but it can also create tension. To strike a balance between the needs and aspirations of groups that are so diverse is no easy task. Adequate scheduling of Masses in different languages, representation on the parish council, equal access to parish facilities, and contributions and use of economic resources are some of the areas of frequent tension within the faith community. In the social arena, racism, poverty, and in some cases violence, are sources of great preoccupation. To know the culture and to be aware of the aspirations and the challenges faced by the different members of the community creates opportunities for understanding and mutual acceptance. Open dialogue reduces tension, overcomes fears, and helps to build a strong and united community. We are all called to form a single Church, nourished by the same Spirit (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, no. 34). This call has a special importance at the dawn of the third millennium. To adequately respond to this call, we must open the doors, both to Christ and to his message of unity that comes to us through the Holy Spirit (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente* no. 44).

Discussion questions:

1. What positive experiences have you had in relation to persons of different ethnic or cultural groups?
2. What attitudes, behaviors, and activities create unity and harmony amidst diversity?

3. What attitudes or behaviors create tensions among the different groups of the community?

Reflecting on Our Faith Tradition (40 minutes):

The biblical story of the Tower of Babel is a symbol of proud societies choosing to separate themselves from God's plan (Gn 11:1-11). God created a richly diverse humanity and invited them to share the gifts of nature and of one another. But the domination of one group over others led to confusion between different groups, cultures, and languages. In contrast, the Feast of Pentecost offers a redeeming vision of human diversity. It is a vision of unity among peoples that goes far beyond their differences and in which all share the same human dignity. The Holy Spirit empowered the Community united by the same Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit and the intimate connection of the members of the faith community give unity to the body and in this way, stimulate and produce love between the believers (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, no. 45). A strong temptation in a diverse society is to expect uniformity from all its members, in order to be a community without tensions. This expectation to assimilate can create a great deal of division and inequity. This was the case at the beginning of the Church when it was expected that the pagans fulfill the requirements of the Mosaic Law before they became Christians. In discussing this issue, the apostles affirmed that it is the Holy Spirit who brings true unity to all believers, and not specific Jewish customs (Acts 15:1-12).

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This issue of fulfilling the requirements of Mosaic Law in order to be accepted as a Christian was the main reason to convoke the first ecumenical council of the Church. This council points out the need to distinguish between what is essential to our faith and what is a culturally bound way of expressing, organizing, or celebrating our faith in a particular country or culture. God's incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ speaks to us of the universality of God's redeeming action and of our faith, and how our faith is expressed and lived out in specific ways within each culture. The son of God, by taking upon himself our human nature, became incarnate with a particular people, even though his redemptive death brought salvation to all people. The gift of his Spirit and his love are meant for each and every people and culture, in order to bring them all into unity. For this to happen, it is necessary to inculturate preaching in such a way that the Gospel is proclaimed in the language and in the culture of its hearers (*Ecclesia in America*, no. 70).

Just because a Catholic does not understand or express his or her belonging to a faith community in a way that is conventional to a specific culture, this does not mean that this

person is less Catholic than the one who does. To understand and respect this distinction is key to achieving the U.S. bishops' goal to foster cultural diversity within the unity of the Church (*Go and Make Disciples*, p. 1g).

Discussion questions:

1. What are some cultural expressions or ways in which the various groups in your parish express their Catholic faith tradition?
2. How are these similar or different from the way you are accustomed to expressing your faith tradition?
3. How does the Spirit of Pentecost bring Christian unity to the diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic groups in the different areas of parish life?
4. To what extent are different cultural and ethnic groups actively involved in the decision-making process of your faith community and in civic society?

Putting Our Faith into Action (40 minutes):

The event of Pentecost demonstrates that language differences, or any other differences, will not be a barrier in the community that Christ has formed (cf. *Many Members, One Body*, no. 6). Faithful to the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Church affirms the dignity of everyone and presents the diversity of races, cultures, and languages as a gift from God, not as a problem. In a call toward unity in Christ, the bishops of the Diocese of Galveston-Houston wrote a pastoral letter in 1994 entitled *Many Members, One Body*. In that letter, the bishops advise us that we cannot be satisfied with a coexistence with different cultures from a distance or just with mutual toleration. The catholicity of the Church and our union with Christ require that the different cultures get to know each other and form relationships in the pastoral, liturgical, and social framework (*Many Members, One Body*, no. 26). The bishops exhort the faithful to confront "each case of prejudice, each cultural stereotype and each expression of racism that divide the people of God:" They also invite them to celebrate the differences that make the Church a beautiful tapestry in which each community shares its unique experience of God (*Many Members, One Body*, no. 27).

Action steps:

Brainstorm actions and projects that promote collaboration and Christian unity among different cultural, ethnic, and linguistic groups in your community. (One example of such an action is to participate in the diocesan eucharistic celebration of the jubilee year.) It is important to identify at least one action in each of the following areas of Christian life:

- Religious education and catechesis
- Service and advocacy
- Decision-making process
- Liturgy
- Building Community and leadership development

Organize actions according to their priority and identify lead agents for each action that the community decides to take.

Gathering Our Experiences (15 minutes):

Discussion questions:

1. What facilitated participation in the session, and what made it difficult?
2. To what extent was there greater knowledge of each other and mutual acceptance?
3. Was a deeper knowledge of our faith achieved, and was a commitment made to implement the identified course of action?

Celebrating Our Faith as a Community (25 minutes):

- Opening hymn/song
- Invocation or invitation to prayer
- Scriptural reading
- Prayer of thanksgiving or petition
- The Lord's Prayer
- Final prayer and sign of peace
- Closing hymn