

Welcoming the Stranger: Unity in Diversity (USCCB)

A PARISH GROUP STUDY on MULTI-CULTURAL INCLUSION

CYCLE II: THE CALL TO CONVERSION

SESSION 1: A call to move beyond the popular anti-immigrant, the nativism and racism that continue to reassert themselves in our communities. (p. 22- 26)

Opening Hymn: *Prayer of St. Francis*

Scripture Reading: Dt. 10:19 “*You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in in the land of Egypt.*”

For Discussion:

Recently an Illinois law gave undocumented students the right to pay in-state tuition to study in colleges. There is a movement to allow undocumented persons to obtain a driver’s license using an ITIN tax number in place of a social security number. What emotions, feelings, do these actions cause in you?

“Though we celebrate the diversity within our communities, we bishops must also confess that today, as in the past, the treatment of the immigrant too often reflects failures of understanding and sinful patterns of chauvinism, prejudice, and discrimination that deny the unity of the human family, of which the one baptism is our enduring sign. Such patterns, in the words of Pope John Paul II, ‘show the urgent need for a transformation of structures and a change of mentality, which is what the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 asks of Christians and every person of good will’.” (WTS P. 23).

1. What specifically do you think the Bishops are referring to in the above underlined quote from WTS?
2. Describe the “structures and a change of mentality” that need to be transformed? What could bring this transformation about?

“Today immigrants of all sorts too often face prejudice within the Church. At times their legitimate desire to worship in their own language, according to their own traditions, has not been satisfied. Some have been turned away by pastors or find their petition for a Mass in their own language and a share in parish facilities opposed by members of the parish community....where the Church has not been welcoming, many have turned to other sources of community and religious fulfillment, but at the expense of abandoning the riches of their catholic faith and native traditions.” (WTS, P. 24)

1. As parishes become larger and space becomes less available, what are some practical ways that the spiritual needs of immigrant groups can be attended? E.g. counseling in tragedies, sacrament of reconciliation, access to meaningful liturgy close to their homes?
2. How can parish staffs be helped to respond to these needs?

“A kind of nativism appears in the Church itself when established members insist that there is just one way to worship, one set of familiar hymns, one small handful of familiar devotions, one way to organize a parish community, one language for all – and that immigrants must adapt to

that way of doing things. In doing so, such nativists forget not only that their ancestors spoke different languages and worshiped in different ways not long ago, but that their devotions and familiar saints, even their patterns of church organization, sprang from encounters between differing traditions within the Church.” (WTS P. 25-26)

For Discussion:

Comment on each of the speakers below: Look for signs of racism, nativism or genuine desire to be reconciled. Are some of them still “missing the boat”?

John: “I believe we should not coddle the immigrants because our ancestors came over here and they had it really bad... the prejudice against the Irish was incredible. Why should these immigrants be any different?”

Mary: “Since the Hispanics don’t speak English, there is just no way I can communicate with them.”

Alfredo: “A smile is a smile in any language!”

Lucy: I think the reason that the immigrants don’t mingle better with us is that they are just shy. And they are more comfortable with their own kind”.

Hannah: “In my opinion, we need to look at the reasons WHY immigrants come...to survive! Maybe we should be looking at what U.S. economic and other policies seem to promote so much migration. Perhaps that is the starting point.”

Father William: “Well, we can’t afford songbooks in English and Spanish, so we will have to run off sheets of music in Spanish. I just hope they can find a good volunteer to lead the music.”

Anna: “I think once we get to know each other on a personal level, the language thing will take care of itself!”

Mamie: “I think there should be a new Hispanic parish established somewhere in DuPage County and all the Hispanics should go there. Then they could do things the way they want, and the Diocese should pay for it.”

Closing Prayer: Song: “All are Welcome” (Marty Haugen, @1994 GIA)

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another. As the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfections.” (Col 3:12-15)

Resources:

Eric H. F. Law: *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, Inclusion, and Sacred Acts*, Holy Change, Chalice Press
NCCB, *Brothers & Sisters to Us: U. S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1979.
NCCN, *Love Thy Neighbor As Thyself: U. S. Catholic Bishops Speak Against Racism*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2001.
Diocese of Joliet Peace & Social Justice website: www.paxjoliet.org
Office for the Pastoral Care of Migrants & Refugees: www.usccb.org/mrs/pcmr

CYCLE II, THE CALL TO CONVERSION

SESSION 2. (p. 26-28)

“We are called to reach out to ethnic communities that exist side by side in our parishes and neighborhoods with little connection to one another.” (USCCB Pub. No. 504)

OPENING PRAYER: Loving God, your reign embraces all of the world’s people. May your love transform our lives and open our minds and hearts. Teach, lead, and guide us. Be with us as we listen, learn, and celebrate our wondrous diversity! Grant this through Jesus Christ, Your Son and our Brother. Amen.

“The cultural mix of the Church will likely become greater, to the point where no simple group forms a majority...Parishes are going to have to become “safe spaces” where issues of identity, culture, belonging and trust can be worked out”.

Fr. Robert Schreiter, CPPS, The Church of Tomorrow.

We come to a point in our discussions when we need to be proactive. What can I/we do? How are we called to this conversion? The best ideas for promoting unity in diversity are those that work for a specific community. Each community must search out responses based on unique circumstances, and their own sacred narratives.

1. Who are my neighbors? Do I really know them?
2. What have we learned about other cultures that we had not known before?
3. What similarities do we recognize among various cultures?
- 4. What differences have we discovered that need to be acknowledged and respected?**

We recognize two elements that divide communities: Competition for resources, such as Mass times, use of space, among others. This leads to cultural fears: not knowing how to encounter another, or relying on stereotypes, that because people are different, they are somehow inferior, “dirty,” or dangerous. Negative images can be destructive.

Language shapes how we think. It can be an instrument of domination or social transformation. Language can penetrate harmful stereotypes or offer alternatives that are nonviolent and inclusive.

What is hurtful language?

Denigrating terminology toward racial-ethnic groups flows freely in everyday speech. This ugly phenomenon has a long history. ***What will we do to change this?***

Commitment to inclusive, non-racist language reflects a need to create new prisms through which to view and relate to the world at large.

CLOSING PRAYER: Our God, you have given us in your Word the stories of persons who needed to leave their homelands: Abraham, Sarah, Ruth, Moses...The life of Your Son, Jesus was filled with events of unplanned travel and flight from enemies. He showed us how to relate to and care for persons from different nations, regions, and cultures. All-loving and compassionate God, we ask you for an abundant outpouring of Jesus’ Spirit upon us. We ask this in His name. Amen.

RESOURCES:

8th Day Center for Justice. *Creating Just Language*. Chicago, 1999.

Eric H. F. Law: The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, Inclusion, and Sacred Acts, Holy Change, Chalice Press

Cycle II THE CALL TO CONVERSION

Session 3. (P. 28-30). **Institutional Obstacles** Cultural Pluralism

The Church of the twenty-first century requires a profound conversion in spirit and in its institutions to reflect its own cultural pluralism.” (WTS P.30)

Opening Prayer:

Creator God, all life and all holiness come from You.
Created in Your image, there are so many faces, so many colors, and people.
There is so much that each of your children offers to the beauty of the earth.

We gather here today to reflect on the cultural pluralism that illuminates our world.
From days of old, you called the Israelites to welcome the strangers among them.
Just as the Israelites were once people drifting, looking for a place to call home,
So too, in our neighborhoods, in our churches, people are looking for homes.

We pray for appreciation of differences.
We pray for respect among Your people.
We pray that more reason is found to draw together at one table.

We pray that we may be open to Your Holy Spirit,
Moving among us,
 Bringing us together,
 Being Your hands,
 Serving those in need.

Amen.

A Story

Please divide up the following story and read it loud for the whole group.

Winnie left home knowing that it could be quite a few years before she was going to be able to visit her parents and her siblings. Although she was very sad about that, she knew that going to America was the only way to get through medical school in any reasonable amount of time. In her country, student walk-outs and faculty strikes happened so often that it could take a student three years time to get through just two semesters of college.

After the planes and airports, the taxi to campus, after going from office to office to settle her tuition, class schedule and housing, Winnie wearily brought her bags to her dorm room and threw

them on the bed without so much as a look at the place. She left the room, locked the door and went off to find the campus chapel.

She prayed for a good long time. She prayed for her family. She thanked God for the safety of her trip. She prayed for good grades and good experiences over the next four years. In that chapel, Winnie was comforted by some of what was familiar about the surroundings; the cross, the tabernacle, the lingering smell of the candles. After she read the campus ministry brochure and saw all the retreats, service projects and faith formation opportunities that were offered and after she was able to attend the noon-time liturgy that day, she thought, "This is feeling more like home."

For Discussion

When we move into a new place and feel alien, threatened, alone or vulnerable, we seek comfort in things that are familiar to us. It might not even matter if that familiar thing is necessarily safe—it is just something familiar and that may be the best thing going at that moment.

1. The strangers among us may feel alien, threatened, alone and vulnerable. They may have real serious needs too. What does your church community offer that will welcome him or her to make those needs known to you?
2. In your church community, what are some obstacles to strangers in general or to specific groups of people?
3. What can your church do to become a familiar beacon to strangers in need?

Closing Prayer:

Use the song "Sing A New Church."

Take time for reflection and finish with shared prayer and intentions that reflect the discussion that you have had.