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Introduction

The Continual Call for Hospitality amid Diversity

The results of the recently conducted United States census confirm what we already know from experience: the face of our country and the Church in the U.S. are changing. Immigration from Latin America, Asia, the Pacific Islands, and Africa has added richness and vitality to U.S. society. It has also created tensions and misunderstandings as these newcomers, in search of the freedom and economic opportunity we all enjoy, adapt to their new country and become an integral part of our communities. In some cases, the presence of new immigrants is obvious. In our larger cities, whole neighborhoods have changed ethnically over the space of a few years. In other areas, especially in the suburbs and rural areas, the presence of newcomers is more subtle and sometimes not even recognized by members of the mainstream community. Yet it is important for the larger community to be sensitive to this new presence—in all its richness and with its particular needs.

Since a sizeable percentage of these new immigrants are Catholic and look to the Church for welcome and a way of maintaining deeply held cultural values that are so entwined with their faith in Christ, their presence in Catholic parishes throughout the U.S. poses challenges for ministry. Ten years ago, the U.S. Catholic bishops described well the situation before us.

The presence of so many people of so many different cultures and religions in so many different parts of the United States has challenged us as a Church to a profound conversion so that we can become truly a sacrament of unity. We reject the anti-immigrant stance that has become popular in different parts of our country, and the nativism, ethnocentricity, and racism that continue to reassert themselves in our community.¹

The Church is continually called to manifest its unity in Christ. This is not merely an option for those who have an interest in different customs and languages. Rather, it is an intrinsic aspect of what it means to be a Catholic Christian in the twenty-first century. Just as the Church in the U.S. developed different ways of welcoming previous generation of immigrants who came to this country in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so today we are called to do the same. The Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People in its landmark document, “The Love of Christ toward Migrants,” points out that this call to welcome people of other cultures is a worldwide ministry of the Church. It is also a pastoral practice of the Church manifested since its founding and considered an essential part of living out the Gospel.

Welcoming the stranger, a characteristic of the early Church, thus remains a permanent feature of the Church of God. It is practically marked by the vocation to be in exile, in diaspora, dispersed among cultures and ethnic groups without ever identifying itself completely with any of these. Otherwise it would cease to be the first-fruit and sign, the leaven and prophecy of the universal Kingdom and community that welcomes every human being without preference for persons or peoples. Welcoming the stranger is thus intrinsic to the nature of the Church itself and bears witness to its fidelity to the gospel.²

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Migration (BCM), *Welcoming the Stranger among Us: Unity in Diversity* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 2001), 2.

² Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, “Instruction *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* [The Love of Christ toward Migrants],” (Vatican City, 2004), no. 22, found at

In the U.S., one of the most common ways in which the Catholic Church welcomed immigrants was by establishing national parishes. The vestiges of these parishes still remain in many of our larger cities, where in a two or three block radius one can often still find a variety of churches and schools built to serve the needs of the immigrants from Germany, Ireland, or Italy who lived in the neighborhood. Today national parishes have largely disappeared due to the original national groups that built them dispersing into mainstream U.S. society. The new immigrants, because of the different housing patterns brought about by mobility and the fact that many do not bring with them their own clergy from their countries of origin, can no longer look to particularly “national” parishes as the solution to pastoral care. Rather, the parish that contains one or more cultural groups is steadily becoming the norm, even in the most remote areas of the country. As the number of priests continues to decline vis-à-vis the Catholic population and dioceses continue consolidating parishes, bringing together increasingly diverse assemblies, the experience of worship with people who are of other cultures is becoming steadily more common.

It is also important to keep in mind that there are cultural groups present in the U.S. that also form part of our national Catholic community but are not recent immigrants. The most obvious group in this category is the First Nation people-- Native Americans -- whose culture and language were often threatened by European colonists and later by the American settlers during the westward expansion of the United States. Also present are our African American sisters and brothers, many of whom have been Catholic for generations —especially in Louisiana and the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area— and who have held onto the faith in the face of racism and rejection by much of the surrounding culture, both secular and Catholic. While the Hispanic / Latino presence in some parts of the country is often considered a recent development, it is also helpful to remember that large parts of the U.S. Southwest as well as California were first settled by people from Spain, and later, Mexico, long before the English colonies declared their independence from Great Britain. The new immigrants in this part of the country are really not the Hispanics but the European American settlers who came west with the expansion of the U.S. toward the Pacific Coast.

Finally, it is useful to note that while this *Guide* deals specifically with bringing together different cultural groups in common prayer, ministers and those developing liturgical or devotional activities need to be sensitive to other possible causes of division within the community. These include the exclusion or lack of welcome of whole segments of the parish such as the economically poor, the developmentally disabled, and physically challenged, as well as those who often find themselves “on the margins” in parish life — young people, women, singles, gay and lesbian Catholics. Methods for including these members of the parish community should be a cause for pastoral reflection, especially for those entrusted with preparing the community’s prayer. The U.S. Bishops’ document on preaching, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, describes well the challenge of our diverse assemblies.

The Eucharistic assembly that gathers Sunday after Sunday is a rich and complex phenomenon. Even in parishes that are more or less uniform in ethnic, social, or economic background, there is great diversity: men and women, old and young, the successes and failures, the joyful and the bereaved, the fervent and the halfhearted, the strong and the weak.³

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/rc_pc_migrants_doc_20040514_er_ga-migrantes-caritas-christi_en.html, accessed on 9 February 2012.

³ National Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly* (Washington, DC: National Conference of Catholic Bishops [NCCB], 1982), no. 8 in in *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*, Volume One, Fourth Edition (TLD1) (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2004).

Though a challenge, our parishes should embrace such diversity. It not only reflects our social reality, it represents the milieu in which Christ calls us to proclaim the Gospel.

Why should we take up the Challenge of Multicultural Liturgy?

We live in an increasingly culturally diverse society and Church, and need to deal with this reality since it is not going away. A key area affected by cultural diversity is parish liturgy. This *Guide* will examine various responses to worship within a multicultural parish. One possible response, of course, is to ignore the situation, maintaining, in effect, separate “parishes” which use the same building but never come together. An approach based on cultural separation has the advantage of allowing people to do “what they have always done” and mitigates the real sacrifice necessary for different cultural groups to assemble as members of the same parish. While this may be the only practical solution for a given parish at a given time, in the long term we are called to ask ourselves, “Is this consistent with the Gospel?” Even if a kind of “separate but equal” arrangement is arrived at between the groups (often rarely equal), will it be consistent with Christ’s challenge for us to look beyond our own cultural limitations and prejudices to the universality of the Kingdom of God? As the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., remarked in 1963, for the majority of Americans, eleven o’clock on Sunday morning was the most segregated hour during the week. Sadly, this remains true almost fifty years later.⁴ As we have seen from documents issued by both the Holy See and the U.S. bishops, as Catholics, our tradition invites us to work toward a different response.

Recent developments in parish ministry and pastoral outreach have also made working toward the ideal of intercultural liturgy more of a necessity than simply “a good thing to do.” The consolidation of parishes in many parts of the country accompanied by a continuing shortage of priests has increasingly brought together culturally diverse assemblies. Church leadership, both on the diocesan and parish level, is striving as never before to answer emerging pastoral needs that were not evident as recently as ten years ago.

A basic way we Catholics can respond to this challenge is in the context of the liturgy which is the “source and summit” of our common life in Christ.⁵ But it needs to be noted at the outset, that, “the liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church. Before people can come to the liturgy they must be called to faith and conversion”⁶ No liturgy, however welcoming and participatory, can substitute for a truly intercultural approach to pastoral care in the parish at large; such hospitality must inform all levels of parish life and not be limited to liturgical celebrations. If the only time the various members of a diverse parish community come together is at worship, these celebrations run the risk of being disconnected and artificial because they fail to reflect the life of the community. Consistent with the above quotation and principles, this *Guide* presupposes that the liturgical ministry in a parish with a multicultural community is but one aspect of the general pastoral care and hospitality the parish and diocese offer to the various cultural groups present in the community. Catechesis, ministry to the sick, social outreach, adult education, as well as other parish and diocesan services are all crucial in helping the liturgy attain the noble goals sketched for it in our liturgical documents—especially in a multicultural context. Thus, extra-liturgical interaction and cooperation among the various groups in the parish serves as the indispensable context for multicultural liturgy, making common prayer a natural part of parish life.

⁴ See Scott Williams, *Church Diversity: Sunday the Most Segregated Day of the Week* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 2011).

⁵ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*,” (CSL) no. 10 in International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Documents on the Liturgy, 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1982).

⁶ CSL, 9

The Basic Goal of this Guide

While this *Guide* deals with the complex issue of the relation of culture and the expression of faith, it should be understood from the outset that the goal of multicultural liturgy is not to celebrate cultural diversity. As with all Christian liturgical celebration, the goal of these celebrations is to celebrate what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, and what God continues to do for all humanity through, with, and in the Son who suffered, died, and rose again for our salvation. By its very nature, liturgy celebrates our common identity in Christ as Catholic Christians—an identity that flows from our common baptism. Catholic Christians of the Roman Rite worship in a liturgical tradition that has been influenced by the many historic periods and cultures in which the Good News of Jesus Christ has been proclaimed and lived. It is important to realize that our received liturgical tradition is itself not culturally neutral. Nevertheless, it is crucial that all involved in preparing a multicultural liturgy understand that the overarching goal of planning such celebrations is assisting a diverse assembly to find its unity in Christ rather than merely showcasing cultural differences.

In preparing multicultural celebrations, the spirit of the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council should always be paramount. Its “principal point,” as Pope Paul VI noted, was in promoting the “full, conscious and active participation” of the assembly in the liturgical action.⁷ All of those present should be invited and enabled to take part in the celebration, to feel that they “belong” and are respected members of the assembly notwithstanding differences in language, culture, economic position, or educational level. This invitation has to do with the hospitality that we are called to show to one another in Christ and which helps our liturgical prayer to flourish.

⁷ “The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people’ (1 Pt 2:9; see 2:4-5) is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.” CSL, no. 14 (DOL 14). See also Pope Paul VI, “Il «Decalogo» per il nostro colloquio con Dio,” (Address to a general audience, 22 August 1973): *Notitiae* 9 (1973) 297-300; Mark R. Francis, “Liturgical Participation of God’s People,” in *With One Voice: Translation and Implementation of the Third Edition of the Roman Missal* (Washington, DC: Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions [FDLC], 2010), 55-86.