

LCWR 2023 Annual Assembly Breakout Session
Intercultural Leadership: A Transformative Element for Religious Life
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The first session focused on the question: How do you understand leadership from the perspective of your culture?

Panel presenters were sisters from India, the Philippines, Ghana, and an African American sister from the United States.

India:

- Leadership in India is very hierarchical and patriarchal. Those in authority do love and care for members and are open to others' views. Sister's gift of travel and study abroad helped to bring a different consciousness to better understand what it means to work as a team.
- There are three languages that differ in meaning which requires clarification. It takes time.
- Oneness is about building trust.

Philippines:

- The Philippines have been deeply affected by colonization. They were under Spanish rule for 300 years, North American for 40 years and Japanese for 2 years. Racist and classist attitudes considered the mestizos as slaves or peasants, inferior and not worthy of leadership.
- The sisters tend to shy away from leadership and need to be asked to consider it!
- The gifts this sister brings is the realization that all cultures are equal and deserving of respect. Difference contributes to the common good.

Ghana:

- The different ethnic groups speak in story and in proverbs. Leadership is for service. Responsibility is the core of authority. A leader must be mentored. This begins in childhood with training in shared responsibility, building relationships to nurture dormant qualities of leadership.
- The office of leader is shared as a team with these dynamics at work: collective dialogue, ability to mobilize for the common good, courage to enable members with no gender suppression.

African American:

- The characteristic strengths of African Americans are determination, perseverance, grit, responsibility, courage to show up and keep going in spite of challenges and collaboration.
- "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."
- Learned leadership over the years through a friendship model. I benefit from your gifts-Ubuntu! I see you so there is no need for competition.

The second session focused on the questions what has been most helpful in becoming an intercultural community; what are some obstacles to work through in religious life?

Panel presenters were from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Kenya.

Puerto Rico:

- Awareness: Interculturality assumes a deep understanding and respect for all cultures. No one is left unchanged!!
- In Puerto Rico a child never leaves the house without a blessing!
- When entering a community in New York, the provincial at the time knew how important it was for her to have other Latinas for a support system for many reasons, but especially for the lack of understanding of culture and spirituality and the assumption that all Hispanics are the same. The attitude was that she was “less” because she came from the New York housing projects. The community needed to unlearn how it dealt with diversity. Racism always plays a part!

Dominican Republic:

- The first colonization came with Columbus. The first-hand colonization took place at all levels. People were treated as less than human. With the 1974 invasion by North America no one could leave. She is the only one in her family who lives in the US.
- Language is a great challenge!
- She was a professional woman in the Dominican Republic, but not so in the US. Many assumptions exist. She does not consider herself an immigrant, but a missionary who comes with the understanding that everyone should be respected, especially the foreigner.
- Her religious community brought a different face of America to her!

Kenya:

- Developing relationships is most helpful! Curiosity from the community led her to wonder if questions they asked were meant to affirm their assumptions.
- Obstacles she faced: verbal gymnastics (do you mean what you are saying or is it politeness?); low-language context (matters of the heart get lost). She needed help understanding her options and the agency to get where she needed to go.
- Africans are not all the same!
- Clarification regarding personality, ethnicity, and culture are needed. Spiritual direction and therapy are essential to becoming the Beloved Community of God!

Tools for Intercultural Competency:

The LCWR website will post guidelines from the Mexican American Catholic College for further Intercultural Competency, for example, communication styles, high-low context, etc.

Further Reflection:

- Clarify assumptions. What formed my mind-sets? How did I get here?
- Bias is human. Mutual encounters are needed for understanding.
- Be careful. Stories from the past can be painful for minorities.
- It is important to be aware of both the gifts and vulnerabilities of each culture, our own included.
- We need to be resilient. Change is possible, but patience is essential for the long haul as well as the ability to hold ambiguity.

- Conversations about power and communication need to take place.
- What are the non-negotiables of religious life?