

by Pat McCaughan and Bob Williams

Achieving Competence in Cross-Cultural Ministry

Competence in cross-cultural ministry is increasingly a goal of Episcopal congregations and dioceses. To become competent in cross-cultural ministry, a congregation must move beyond basic self-identification as multicultural and into deeper levels of awareness and community.

An expert in these skills is Genethia Hudley Hayes, an Episcopalian who is a past president of the Board of Education that oversees the 750,000-student Los Angeles Unified School District. Hayes is also a former regional executive of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and once served a parish day school as principal. She routinely encourages schools and churches to avoid superficial multiculturalism — an exercise that generally goes no deeper than well-meaning bulletin boards and potlucks — in favor of achieving truly integrated leadership and balanced power structures. “I can see the Mariachis and the drill team at some other point in time,” Hayes says of visiting school and church campuses. “What I want to see is leadership” — an inclusive team of leaders who are competent and representative of the community’s constituent cultural groups.

Strategies for achieving competence in cross-cultural ministry can begin with several observations and points of action:

- Episcopal congregations are uniquely poised for achieving cross-cultural understanding and competence given the international fabric of the Anglican Communion. Also helpful is Anglicanism’s commitment to the *via media*, or the “middle way” between polarizing forces.
- Anglican Christians have long recognized the importance of faith expressed in native languages and cultural contexts (see also Section 3 Report of the 1998 Lambeth Conference: “Called to Be a Faithful Church in a Plural World”).
- Episcopalians are called by the church’s baptismal creed “to respect the dignity of every human being” and “to strive for justice and peace among all people.”
- The Episcopal Church stands committed to eradicating racism and injustice.
- Younger generations approach the world largely from an inclusive place of understanding its increasing globalization, diversity and interconnectedness.
- Racism, elitism, classism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of exclusion can be addressed and mitigated in honest, proven ways using such resources as those of the National Conference for Community and Justice (www.nccj.org) and the Kaleidoscope Project developed for congregations by Episcopal priest Eric H. F. Law, who is currently Missioner for Congregational Development for the Diocese of Los Angeles (www.ladiocese.org).

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groundwork

- It is often optimal to retain a consultant (either a paid professional or a qualified volunteer) to facilitate dialogue and change-related processes with fresh vision and neutrality.
- Competence in cross-cultural ministry — and especially in neighborhood/parish outreach — begins with respect, power-sharing, and mutuality in goal-setting.
- Cultural groups ideally bring gifts to one another in a spirit of mutuality and equanimity; groups are best viewed as equal partners, not as rivals, nor with one group as dominant.
- Cultural groups are enriched by learning about each other: many speakers of English only are inspired to learn a new language.
- “New wine skins” are generally needed for new wine (Matthew 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37-38): Congregations can at times start over or start a new mission congregation more effectively than adapting old, entrenched systems.
- Time, patience, diplomacy and grace are needed when pursuing change.

Encounters with Icebergs

The Kaleidoscope Project is a congregational development curriculum formed by Episcopal priest Eric Law. Central to Law’s work is the image of an iceberg — a reminder that much context is found “below the surface” in any cross-cultural encounter of individuals or communities. Law helps his students realize that a multiplicity of experiences, beliefs, values, patterns, and myths are found deep in the “icebergs” of each personality and corporate culture, and that such behaviors are often subjective, unconsciously held, implicitly learned, and therefore difficult to change. Yet, change is achieved, Law emphasizes, as groups operate within a “grace zone” rather than a “fear zone” or “safe zone.” In this regard, he notes:

“To help a community draw an outer parameter, we must work with the tension between stretching the boundary too far, which will push the community into the fear zone, and not stretching it far enough, being too safe. If we are too timid in drawing this outer boundary, fearing that we will push the community into the fear zone, the community may not extend its boundary far enough to allow for meaningful, constructive exploration. If we are too anxious to get things moving and push too far, the community may shut down, returning to its tightly guarded safe zone. For this process to work, we must spend a substantial amount of time negotiating this outer parameter until all the key players agree on a grace margin that is not too fearful, but not too safe. This requires gentle pushing and pulling, deliberate truth-telling, clear use of language in terms of what we will and will not do, and most importantly, patience” (from “Inclusion: Making Room for Grace,” p. 63).

Throughout the Kaleidoscope Project, participants demonstrate a set of stated “Respectful Communication Guidelines” and engage in Bible study and group exercises that explore high- and low-context communication styles, analysis of power and societal norms, the practice of sharing ideas by mutual invitation, identification of organizational life cycles, and evaluation.

Resources from the Episcopal Church Center

Additional insights are offered in a variety of publications available on-line from the Episcopal Church Center. Visit www.episcopalchurch.org, and access:

- **The Office of Asian American Ministries** (www.episcopalchurch.org/asian_american.htm)
- **The Office of Black Ministries** (www.episcopalchurch.org/black.htm)
- **The Office of Hispanic Ministry** (www.episcopalchurch.org/hispanic.htm)
- **The Office of Native American Ministries** (www.episcopalchurch.org/native_american.htm)

Congregations or dioceses seeking to establish a Spanish-language mission will find a helpful guidebook available to download from the Office of Hispanic Ministry. The guide is titled: “Hispanic Mission: Things to Consider in Starting an Hispanic Mission.”

Learning More About Blended Cultures

On the subject of cultural blending and societal change, author and essayist Richard Rodriguez addressed the Episcopal Church’s House of Bishops in September 2004. Following is a report of his observations.

‘Think Brown’ in terms of blended cultures, Richard Rodriguez tells House of Bishops Author emphasizes importance of being a ‘learning church’ willing to listen to others

by Pat McCaughan
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(ENS, Spokane, Washington) — San Francisco author and essayist Richard Rodriguez challenged a gathering of 132 bishops to think “brown,” as they meet here through September 27 to discuss reconciliation and communion.

The story of Christianity is the story of brown, the story of melded cultures and blended traditions, he said. An amazing array of racial and generational complexities challenge the world and the church today, Rodriguez told the bishops, who are discussing ways to deepen collegiality and hospitality.

“There is nothing browner in the history of time than the mystery of the Incarnation, of God, intruding into history, God entering history, in Jesus Christ, true God, true man, that’s very brown, I think,” Rodriguez said.

“Brown is everywhere in the Christian tradition, Christ was the great experimenter who dared to come to love us in ways that frighten us. Love turns out to be the stumbling block in the church right now.

“It’s a scandal, that the church is having difficulty loving,” he said.

Definition, description

Rodriguez, a frequent PBS essayist on the Lehrer News Hour and a Pacific News Service editor, said the history of our nation and our lives are filled with brown, yet we struggle with its definition and description.

His book, *Brown: The Last Discovery of America*, grew out of his agent's suggestion that he write about Hispanics as the fastest growing ethnic group in the country. After traveling to Chile and Ecuador and to Latin America many times, he concluded: "there are no Hispanics in Latin America. I had to go to Dallas, Texas, to meet one."

He said former President Richard Nixon invented the racial category in 1972, along with another category, Asian/Pacific Islander, for use on government forms. "Hispanic" appears between white and black on those forms, yet many Latin Americans prefer to self-identify as Latinos or by their specific national identities such as Guatemalans or Chileans.

"We appear as people in the middle which, logically, would make us grey," Rodriguez said. "We can't compare to black and white. Hispanics don't constitute a race. There is every racial group in Latin America: white, black, indigenous, Asian, Lebanese, Thais, and a vast population of mixed-race people who are not properly described."

And America's "one drop" theory for racial designation — the notion that if you have one drop of African blood, you are considered black — doesn't work, he added. Rather than being black, Rodriguez says, one drop makes you brown.

"Brown is a color we're afraid of; we can't deal with brown. There are more than 300 words in Brazilian Portuguese for brown. In America, we are between white and black.

"It's too much of a complication, too embarrassing. We give Pulitzer prizes to people at Yale and Harvard who wear bowties and write dreadful histories and leave out Thomas Jefferson's relationship with his slave Sally Hemmings. We don't ask who are the brown children playing outside Monticello? Who are the brown children?"

He cites other examples, like U. S. Secretary of State Colin Powell who says he is "Caribbean African, Scots Irish and Native American, but every newspaper in the country identifies him as the first black secretary of state."

Or, a friend who identifies himself as black but admittedly has Native American ancestry.

"'Then you're not black, you're brown,' I told him,'" Rodriguez said. "He replied, 'I'm black as long as that's what a policeman sees when he pulls me over.' *Touche*, I said'."

The history of our nation and of the world is filled with stories about brown.

"In 2004, we open the newspaper to see the daughter of Sen. Strom Thurmond. It seems that this Dixie-crut was publicly saying there should be no mixing of the races but privately he was involved with brown. He was even tender toward his daughter and she, toward him. And she says to us, who barely believe it, I am brown."

He recalled an immigration official "who looked at my parents' two brown faces and wrote down white on a form for them," Rodriguez said.

"All things brown in time. I can't give you my blood, I can give you my culture. I can

cook my culture and you can eat it. I can wear my culture, drink my culture, sing my culture late into the night. Yet there we are, between white and black.”

In the 18th century, when slaves were imported to Mexico, the Africans and Mexicans “began to melt into each other. Everything melts,” Rodriguez said. “Their children came out looking Asian. Chinos, they were called, Chinese. Sooner or later all of us are going to be Chinos and everything will taste like chicken.”

World, church are browning

Brown is not a primary or a secondary, but a tertiary color, created by three or four colors, Rodriguez says. “The mixing of colors is what I’m talking about today. America is browning, the world is browning, the entire vast world is browning. I’m here to talk about us, my relationship to you, yours to me.”

“Brown is denied even by a number of churches. We have stumbled over the issue of love, have forbidden brown marriages. But, the founding palette of this country was white, red and black.”

History omitted the love of the other, he said.

“We happily give children history books about hatred; it doesn’t bother us in the least. There is talk of civil wars, massacres, invasions, no talk of love. I’ve always been grateful for Pocahantas.”

The story of the birth of Mexico goes beyond the story of “a rape. The birth of Mexico was a rape — no cherry trees there. It is the story of the Spaniard and the Indian, his lust for her, his control over her. I never trusted that version because it gives the Indians a passive role,” Rodriguez told the gathering. “The truth is closer to her, who makes love to Cortez. After nine months I was born. I am 400 years old. I am Indian and Spaniard, Conquistador and victim, rapist and raped, I am brown, I am other, all within me.”

The nation’s browning is continuing, he said.

“The assumption in America is that the Indians have gone somewhere — maybe to a casino in Nevada. But, they’re coming across the borders and the cavalry can’t defend us against them. They’re Central American, Mexican. They’re painting houses in New York, making pizza in Chicago, gardening in L. A. Indians are on the move.

“Some young men I met in Tijuana in 1999 worked for Victory Outreach and were planning to come to America to convert us to Protestantism,” he said. “They considered the U. S. to be post-Protestant. And they’re going to Europe to convert the Europeans, to Paris, to London, to Frankfurt, and God, help them, to Amsterdam. It has taken a long time to happen. I do not know what the story of Columbus means yet but we are surrounded by a new world.”

Brown synchronism

Rodriguez noted that often, during talks at local schools, he is approached by Anglo youth who say: “I’m white, I’m nothing, I have no culture.”

“It’s too big a price to pay for Americanization. The idea was that you came to America and lost your otherness, lost your Italian grandmother. I tell them, you’re not white. You are the first generation in your family to go to college. Your mother has breast cancer and your dad has been out of work for nine months. You have a story and you’re not white.”

The limits of language and the outdated notions of race have resulted in a failure to our youth, he said.

“Many children have invented names for themselves because adults have no names to give them. There are Blaxicans in L.A., Negropinas in New Jersey, and I have a friend of Jewish and Hindu descent who calls herself a Hidge.

“Like Tiger Woods, who says he’s not black. Who says that to say I’m black would dishonor my mother. I am African and Thai and American Indian and white. Name it,” he said.

“The world is so different. We are living in an age of brown synchronism. There are brown children in this world, there are brown children in this city and we don’t know what to say to them. It’s unprecedented. It’s a mystery.

“And yet we approach them with a 19th century construction, as though we were explorers in the African jungle, coming upon natives who speak a language we don’t understand. They have taken language to a place we have yet to go.”

Religious fundamentalism is also on the rise, in proportion to the browning of the world, Rodriguez said.

“Fundamentalists have overcome tribalism with faith. As brown rises, as this melting goes on, there is a need to clarify, to cleanse. Mixed meaning gives rise to ultimate meaning of clarity.”

The challenge for the church, Rodriguez said, is to become a “learning church” and to find a way for “reconfiguration of the way we imagine priesthood.

“For so many years now, we’ve gone all over the world teaching others. Now, can we learn from them? We must become familiar with others’ traditions, their saints who aren’t part of our tradition. There’s no map, just lead me.” ■