



MULTICULTURALISM AND DIVERSITY



Did You Know?

by Willie Guadalupe, OFS

I had been toying with the idea of writing an article focusing on multiculturalism and diversity so that, as a Franciscan family, we can better understand the differences and commonalities of these two concepts. As I was searching the Internet, I found a June 2016 article on the DifferenceBetween.com website that helped define and explain these two terms. My ultimate goal is to help others better understand and embrace the different ethnic cultures within our fraternities. The following definitions are taken from that website article (see footnote).

Diversity: Diversity refers to the differences that exist among individuals, such as race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, and ethnicity.

Multiculturalism: Multiculturalism is when multiple cultural traditions are not only accepted in the society but also promoted.

Multiculturalism is the key to achieving a high degree of cultural diversity. Diversity occurs when people of different races, nationalities, religions, ethnicities, and philosophies come together to form a community. A truly diverse society is one that recognizes and values the cultural differences in its people.¹

Both diversity and multiculturalism have great relevance to our lives today. Diversity is a fact, a growing reality, in the United States and in our Order. Social media, immigration, and an increasingly global economy are bringing together people with different languages, races, and cultures. This encounter of diversity brings us challenges, but also great opportunities. The Secular Franciscan Order is being blessed with diverse multicultural fraternities and members. This means we need to overcome our fears, anxiety, and insecurities when dealing with those who are different from ourselves. Not only do we need to be the bridge, but we also

need to break down the barriers that create walls.

As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the firstborn of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.

A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ. OFS Rule Art. 13

Francis faced some of these same issues head on. Two Franciscan stories that resonate with me are the encounters of Francis and the Sultan and Francis and the Leper. Both were encounters with "the other." Both experiences resulted in conversion of heart, due to Francis's trust in the Lord. As Franciscans, we are called to be the face of God to others as Francis was.

Within our fraternities we have done a lot, but there is still much more to be done. Recently, as I was preparing to conduct a workshop for our Spanish speaking fraternities, I decided to check their entries in the database for any updates or changes. I was disappointed to find many discrepancies, which indicated to me that these fraternities are not being supported enough by their Regions. I have heard from several ministers of Spanish-speaking fraternities that they feel abandoned and isolated. My dear brothers and sisters, this should not be. I encourage each Region, if you have not done so already, to appoint a Multicultural and Diversity Commission Team so that any issues with these fraternities are brought to the attention of the Regional Council. The Council can then contact the fraternity to ensure that their needs are being met. As Secular Franciscans we have committed ourselves to accompany and take care of one another on our journey to the Father.

*The Heart of our vocation
is Jesus Christ
and around that heart
is Fraternity!*



Making sandwiches for the Homeless
*St Francis of Assisi- Espejo de Cristo Fraternidad
Five Franciscan Martyrs Region*

¹ <https://www.differencebetween.com/difference-between-diversity-and-multiculturalism/>

DIVERSITY — IS A GIFT TO US FROM GOD!

Cherryle Fruge, OFS
St. Joan of Arc Regional Minister

There were so many good titles to choose for this article, but I felt compelled to choose this one. It came from Tom Ha, OFS, our Korean brother from Saint Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity in Houston, Texas. This message has resonated with me so many times this past year. It is so true that **Diversity is a Gift** to us from God, and what we do with that Gift is especially important.

Our Region was inspired to start a Diversity Team in response to the many violent incidents that occurred in 2020. And so it began on Friday, July 24, 2020, with the purpose of getting to know each other and working on developing a vision/mission statement. Early on in our sessions, it was evident that our mission statement should be **“Go and Rebuild My Church.”** We agreed that the purpose of the team is based on Article 19 of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: *“Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.”*

We came together not only to discuss racist violence, but all types of violence, and to ask the questions: “Why is there violence?” and “As a Secular Franciscan, what does God want me to do?”

As the Holy Spirit developed the Diversity Team, one word describes what we are called to do, and that word is **dialogue**. For our purpose, the role of dialogue cannot be overemphasized. It is crucial. The Team is learning how to conduct a dialogue to keep relationships alive and to build a community of love according to the teachings of the Rule and the Catholic Church.

We agreed that we could learn to dialogue by participating in dialogue. And so we did. We shared from our hearts and really tried to listen to each other. It was helpful to have the support of each other in our efforts, especially when strong feelings on difficult topics arose. We all understood that we were learning together, and we were determined to be a supportive community to each other. Now, when someone shares from their heart, the others listen. We do not judge, or jump to conclusions; we ask questions first and go from there.



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St. Joan of Arc Regional Fraternity **DIVERSITY TEAM**



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We feel we have experienced much growth in our ability to dialogue. As Franciscans, we are now motivated to take the initiative and encourage dialogue in every situation. With a clear view of our identity as bridge builders, we are now making persistent efforts to build fraternal relationship with others in our communities, in our fraternities, in our parishes, in our nation, and in our world. We are called every day to rebuild our Church; we are doing this by reconciling with each other.

St. Joan of Arc Region's Diversity team participants are from Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi and from various ethnic backgrounds including Asian, African, Filipino, Cuban, and European. As we come together as representatives from throughout the Region, we reflect the diversity of our Order. We will continue to work toward ways of strengthening the call of our Franciscan vocation by "seeking out ways of unity and fraternal dialogue."

Some of the resources we use include the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Church documents on Social Justice, the example of Servant of God, Julia Greeley, OFS, *Fratelli Tutti*, the Region's Resource Kit, and *What It Takes* by Fr. Lester Bach, OFM.

Some of the thoughts shared by the Diversity Team members include:

- ◆ It is important to share our personal experiences of racism.
- ◆ We must have respect for the human person, recognizing our equality while appreciating our differences. Human solidarity should be acknowledged and understood.
- ◆ Actions for social justice should be taken according to the Rule.
- ◆ *Fratelli Tutti* teaches us to understand the concept of fraternity, to build bridges, and to make efforts for peacemaking and reconciliation.
- ◆ To build a community of love in the world, as well as in our fraternity, relationships need to be formed and kept alive.
- ◆ *Why is there violence?* There is violence because I do not yet understand the other part of me – the other "self" of me.
- ◆ Bias happens among all social backgrounds and social status. We must recognize this.

- ◆ Being comfortable with our own identity is important. If we are not comfortable with our own identity, then it can cause problems when we deal with people around us.
- ◆ As Franciscans, we need patience as we try to establish relationships and connect with each other.
- ◆ It is okay for us to be ourselves. If people do not accept us as we are, we still respect them, but we do not take their judgment personally.

As I assessed this journey with the Diversity Team, I must share that it has been an eye-opening experience. We were challenged to get out of our comfort zone, but find we are now much more grounded in our relationships with each other. I see such beauty and the fruits of an authentic love. This process has also shown me how the building of relationships is a powerful way to discover and mentor new servant leaders.

We have learned so much, and we highly recommend that other regional fraternities give this a try. We would be happy to help you to start a Diversity Team in your Region. Feel free to contact me about this. You might consider the topic of diversity for a retreat with newly elected councils, or during an ongoing formation session. Exploring this topic will result in developing a rich and vibrant fraternity.

Through our diversity team efforts, we see how the Holy Spirit has led us to discover the value of our own identity while also valuing the identity of our neighbor. Our identity is tied to theirs. We see our neighbors as *a part of ourselves* - brothers and sisters "*within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore 'those who are a part of me'.*" (Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43.) As we seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony let us contemplate our identity as well as *our other self -- this other part of me that I don't yet understand.*

Truly, the diversity within the body of humanity is God's gift to the world. What we do with it and how we treat others is our gift back to God. Please pray for us to continue to be open to the direction and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. May Holy God Bless you abundantly and give you Peace.