

**BRIDGING CULTURES FOR CHRIST**  
**FALL CHAPEL SERVICE**  
**September 17, 2003**  
**Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 8:25-32; I Timothy 2:5**

Introduction

1. In January 2003 I appointed a Task Force on Diversity. I asked them to present a report to me by early summer.

- An outstanding report was presented and received by me in August.
- A standing committee is in the process of being appointed to implement the recommendations. You can read the full report in the Library. E-mail my office, and we will send you an e-mail attachment of the narrative of the report.

2. Our focus on Diversity has brought back memories of our years in Manila, The Philippines.

- Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary (APNTS) is a
  - Regional graduate school with students from:
    - economically affluent countries – Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and,
    - economically depressed countries – Philippines, Indonesia, India.
  - **The Motto of the Seminary is:** “Bridging Cultures for Christ.” The key passage of the school is I Timothy 2:5 “There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the person – Christ Jesus.”
  - This passage is critical when you consider the region where the seminary is located:
    - Indonesia is 90% Islamic,
    - India is 84% Hindu,
    - China, 1/5 of world’s population, is predominately Taoism & Confucianism,
    - Thailand is 95% Buddhist,
    - In all of the Asia Pacific Region only 3% are Christians (Protestant and Roman Catholic).

3. Ann, Stephen and I have great experiences and memories in Manila.
  - o I remember my first night in Manila – “Did I make a mistake?”
    - The traffic/poverty were horrific.
    - The annual capita income per family was \$700.00.
  - o The answer soon came. No, I did not make a mistake.
    - I soon realized that perhaps I could contribute to them,
    - I immediately recognized that they definitely had a contribution to me!
  - o For instance, Anne befriended a female Filipino physician. She told Anne:
    - “Focus on the few you can help – not on the masses you can’t help.”
    - Anne assisted students and poor Filipinos with:
      - Glasses, teeth, clothes, and cosmetology school enrollment.
      - At a cosmetology graduation, the mayor of the small community said to Anne “You are the first alien to attend our graduation services.”
  - o Koreans are well known for their early morning prayer meetings. They meet at 6:00 a.m. for prayer in an outdoor chapel in the center of campus.
    - They prayed loudly!
    - And for all of us! By name and sometimes by problem or conflict!
  - o Anne, one evening with a baby doll and mothers of young children, asked: “how do you put a diaper on your child in your home country?”
    - very different!
    - right or wrong? No - just different!
    - rice cooked in dining commons – “different,” yes, -- but not necessarily the only way!
    - Isn’t it our tendency to think, “Our way is the right way?”
  - o I learned to deal with conflict differently with the different cultures:
    - One culture would be in your face, loud and demonstrative.
    - Another group on campus, from another country, by cultural tradition, required that I go through a third party to discipline a person.
    - Saving face was so important to them.

- o Perhaps you better understand why the theme at APNTS was “BRIDGING CULTURES FOR CHRIST.”
  - The thrust was not to merge cultures, or change cultures, but to bridge cultures . . . for Christ and His Kingdom.

I often asked the question in Manila: “HOW CAN WE LIVE TOGETHER AS CHRISTIANS SO THAT OUR RELATIONSHIPS ARE REDEMPTIVE AND A WITNESS TO UNBELIEVERS OF THE RECONCILING WORK OF GOD IN CHRIST?”

4. This question first came to my mind in 1978 during my first year as dean at the European Nazarene College – Located on the Swiss-German border located near Schaffhausen, Switzerland.

- EuNC is a regional, undergraduate theological institution serving students from:
  - Northern Europe, – who tend to be formal and distant, and from
  - Southern Europe, who tend to be informal and close.
- o I remember our first evening in the small German village. The transformer in our apartment blew. I needed help and could not find the lights or doorbell on neighbor’s porches where I was told to go for help.
- o We could not find the blinds to cover the window. No cords!
- o Our first full day was spent by shopping – by ourselves – in a German grocery store! We cried. We did not understand the language nor could we read German at that time.

With all the complexities on campus arising from the different cultures, I asked the question in my first year at EuNC: “HOW CAN WE LIVE TOGETHER AS CHRISTIANS SO THAT OUR RELATIONSHIPS ARE REDEMPTIVE AND A WITNESS TO UNBELIEVERS OF THE RECONCILING LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST?”

5. This question was on my mind when I received a call very early in morning on July 28, 1989 informing me of my election as MVNU President.

- o “How can I relate my experience and training in multicultural education institutions in World Mission areas to a regional undergraduate college in the US?” “Will you pray about it, was the question asked of me.” “Yes,” I responded.
  - I received what I believed by faith was a confirming word from the Lord. I accepted the election of the Board without understanding all the implications.
  - In a telephone interview with me the day after I accepted, Jan Hendrix, then MVNU Communications Director, asked me what I thought I would bring to MVNU? I responded: An emphasis on “living more simply, loving more deeply, giving more generously, and thinking more globally.”
- o It did not take long for me to recognize the cultural diversity within this educational region – Ohio (N/S, E/W) (W. Virginia and Kentucky.)

And on this campus, I began to ask the question – “HOW CAN WE LIVE TOGETHER AS CHRISTIANS SO THAT OUR RELATIONSHIPS ARE REDEMPTIVE AND A WITNESS TO UNBELIEVERS OF THE RECONCILING WORD OF GOD IN CHRIST?”

6. Answers to this probing question came from several sources:

- o From scripture:
  - Especially Ephesians 4:25 – “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor for we are members of one body.”
  - Regardless of color, “red, yellow, black, or white,” socio-economic background, theological tradition, IQ or EQ:
    - Convictionally, we, by grace, believe “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:26-29)
    - Regardless of the level of maturity or immaturity, loud or silent, we believe that the other person, on the basis of his or her testimony of faith in Jesus Christ, is my brother and sister in Christ.
  - Remember I Timothy 2:5 “For there is only one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”
    - o Christ is the Center – around which we view our cultural differences!

- o Christ at the center can transform our biases, our prejudices and very narrow cultural perspectives.
- o From Christian writers: especially theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In his book, Life Together, Bonhoeffer talked about seven expressions of ministry by which a Christian must be judged.
  - 1) **The Ministry of Holding Ones Tongue** – “He who holds his tongue in check controls both mind and body,” James tells us.
  - 2) **The Ministry of Meekness** –He who serves must learn to think first of others.
  - 3) **The Ministry of Listening** – The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening. Listening can be a greater service to people than speaking.
  - 4) **The Ministry of Active Helpfulness** – Simply assist others within the Christian community in external matters, big and small.
  - 5) **The Ministry of Bearing (Supporting)** – “Carry each other’s burden” is the challenge of Galatians 6:2
  - 6) **The Ministry of Proclaiming** –Bonhoeffer does not mean the message of Scripture proclaimed in a formal setting such as in the worship service. He is referring to the free communication of the word of God from person to person.
  - 7) **The Ministry of Authority (Leadership)** – This is the paradox of ministry. Jesus made authority in the fellowship dependent upon brotherly service.
- o From hymns: – Especially the APNTS favorite– “In Christ there is no east or west . . .”

7. I learned VALUABLE LESSONS from experiencing the cultural differences, especially people differences, and seeing biblical and theological answers to these differences.

**Lesson 1** - People who are different from me are loved by God just as much as I am loved by God.

**Lesson 2** - These individuals can enrich my life, broadening my understanding, and enlarge my vision of God, others, self, life and the world God created.

**Lesson 3** - If I am going to be a global Christian, I must learn to think globally.

**Lesson 4** - On the basis of the testimony of the redeemed children of God, we must learn how to live together as God's family on earth, in preparation for our life together in heaven.

**Lesson 5** – God grieves (Eph. 4:30) when his children – brothers and sisters in Christ - relate to each other in ways that are no different from unbelievers.

8. At the beginning of this sermon, I referred to the President's Task Force on Diversity. I told the Task Force that within four years I wanted MVNU to receive the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) annual award for RACIAL HARMONY. This award is given to the institution making the most progress in a given year in the areas of RACIAL HARMONY, DIVERSITY and RECONCILIATION. This year's recipient was Spring Arbor University, a Free Methodist university in Spring Arbor, Michigan.

- For several reasons, we need to collectively embrace this goal.

### In conclusion

- 1) "I believe MVNU can become a "dynamic laboratory of learning how to live together as the family of God."
  - We can grow in our understanding, by God's grace, in how to live together redemptively at MVNU.
  - In the midst of differences of culture, various theological traditions, conflicting expectations, explosive personalities, differing levels of spiritual maturity, in the midst of all of these differences of opinion and perspectives we can discover, by God's grace, how to live together in such a way that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers among us of the reconciling work of God in Christ.
  - Our school will be stronger; cultural differences will be affirmed. Christ will be honored.
  - We are talking about a deeply theological issue. God grieves when we live together in ways that do not reflect the Christian community – a faith community - he desires for us.
- 2) Each of us must be proactive in moving outside our comfort zone to participate in cultural settings very different from our own.
  - *Example* – Cleveland Arabic Church – Pastor Fawzi Khawaja
  - Cleveland Nueva Luz Church – Pastor Max Rodas
  - Columbus Fountain of Hope – Rev Josephus Foster

- Cincinnati Higher Ground – (in pastoral transition)
  - Mount Vernon Jubilee Church of the Nazarene – Pastor Kevin Peterson
- 3) Consider study abroad and work and witness programs
- MVNU Work and Witness trips – (at home and abroad) – talk to Joe Noonan
    - \* Spring breaks,
    - \* Summer trips,
    - \* J-term trips
  - Semester abroad programs – Italy, Costa Rica, Moscow, Oxford, Cairo, Romania, Hungary, Shanghai, China and other major global cities and countries. – (talk to Dr. Paul Mahle)
- 4) Take initiative on our campus:
- Join the multi-cultural or cross-cultural club – see Ramon McGee, Director of Multicultural Affairs and Student Recruitment.
  - Invite minority students, international students, missionary kids (MK’s) to your homes on weekends, on holidays, and other special days. The long holiday weekends and school breaks are especially difficult for these individuals.
  - Take the initiative to get acquainted with these students:
    - \* in the dining commons;
    - \* the resident halls,
    - \* classes, and
    - \* across campus.
  - Embrace them as your brother or sister in Christ – “Because they are . . .”
- 5) “Bridging Cultures for Christ,” using Ephesians chapter four as a text and the song “In Christ There Is No East Or West” as our theological conviction, we can grow and mature together during the next few years as we seek to increase in RACIAL HARMONY, DIVERSITY AND RECONCILIATION at MVNU.
- 6) In a few moments, I want the following groups to stand together (students, faculty, staff):
- Persons of color at MVNU – individuals from countries other than the United States, or MK’s (Missionary Kids),
  - If you are from the Appalachian counties in Ohio, West Virginia or Kentucky.
  - Students, faculty and staff from denominations other than the Church of the Nazarene,
  - Individuals who would like to travel beyond the borders of this region to learn more about the diversity of God’s creation,

- IF I INCLUDED YOU IN ONE OR MORE OF THESE GROUPS, WOULD YOU PLEASE STAND ( OR IF YOU ARE PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED, PLEASE RAISE YOUR HAND).
  - *A lot of people standing.* Look around! I'm sure there are people standing you don't know. Will everyone please rise?
9. I challenge each of you – every faculty, staff and student – to find at least one person who is different from you – in color, language, economic status, physical ability or academic ability.
- Get acquainted with the person, their history, family, strengths, background.
  - Eat their food. Enjoy their music. Explore their background. Experience their traditions. Examine their culture. Learn about their family and celebrate their faith journey.
  - Learn about the person and benefit from their friendship. Both of you are members of God's family. God desires for us to live together in community in such that reflects our relationship to God and our identity through Christ with each other.

You may contribute something to others. I'm sure you will. But you will definitely be enriched by moving out of your comfort zone to “embrace” a brother or sister in Christ who is different from you. And the Body of Christ will be strengthened. . . when we “live together in such a way that, by God's amazing grace, our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling work of God in Christ.”

10. Closing Prayer – Rev. Josephus Foster