National Hispanic Heritage Month:
September 15 - October 15

Prayer to Celebrate Diversity

Almighty God, through your Holy Spirit you created unity in the midst of diversity; we acknowledge that human diversity is an expression of your manifold love for your creation; we confess that in our brokenness as human beings we turn diversity into a source of alienation, injustice, oppression and wounding. Empower us to recognize and celebrate differences as your great gift to the human family. Enable us to be the architects of understanding, of respect and love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, the ground of all unity, we pray.

Amén

Reflection and Discussion Questions: Celebrating Difference

Time and time again, Pope John Paul II has echoed the teachings of his predecessors and of the Second Vatican Council that “it is one of the properties of the human person that he can achieve true and full humanity only by means of culture” (Gaudium et Spes, #53) and that to take away a person’s culture is therefore to damage human dignity grievously. Communion does not abolish differences but brings together one family, diverse and united, in the one Lord.

The Holy Spirit made manifest at Pentecost enabled people of diverse languages and cultures to understand the one message of salvation. The new evangelization means openness to the gifts of the Spirit wherever they might appear. Our response to the new immigration thus is informed by a renewed vision of what it is to be Church, and by a new spirituality, informed by the Spirit of Pentecost present in the sacrament of confirmation, which gives the power to discern the one message of the kingdom in the diverse customs and languages of our immigrant brothers and sisters.

Our faith teaches us that unity in diversity comes from the spiritual discipline of inclusion, a discipline rooted in the Scriptures. Inclusion challenges us to open ourselves in a fully authentic way to all our brothers and sisters. The process of inclusion enriches U.S. culture with the blessings of other cultures, moving us beyond tolerance to true understanding and respect.

The 2000 U.S. Census indicates that there are at least 35.3 million Hispanics in the U.S., which is 12.5% of our total population. *Hispanics are the largest and fastest growing minority group in the U.S. In what ways have we, as individuals, as faith-based groups, and as a country, rejected, and/or tolerated, and/or included Hispanic people in our lives, our churches, and our local and national community?

What are some ways to recognize and celebrate Hispanic culture and the gifts that Hispanic Catholics have brought to the United States? What could your class/school/parish/group/organization do to celebrate Hispanic Heritage month?

*Note: Despite the inadequacy of the term “Hispanic,” it is officially used by both the U.S. Census and the Catholic Church. Please see page 3 for more information.
Reflection and Discussion Questions:
Celebrating Difference (continued)

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace published *The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society* in 1988, declaring that a key moral imperative was “Respect for differences.” “Equality does not mean uniformity. It is important to recognize the diversity and complementarity of one another’s cultural riches. Equality of treatment therefore implies a certain recognition of differences which minorities themselves demand in order to develop according to their own specific characteristics, in respect for others and for the common good of society and the world community.”

The poet and writer Audre Lourde has discussed the “real differences between us” in terms of ethnicity, race, etc. “But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them,” she declared. “Too often we use the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or to pretending they do not exist at all. This results in isolation, or false connections. Either way, we do not develop tools for using human difference as a springboard for creative change.”

In the two excerpts above, recognition of difference is seen as a positive thing. Can you name examples of pretending differences do not exist? What happens when we ignore differences and proceed as if they did not exist?

Why has recognition of difference often been a difficult task for us, for others in our community, our nation and our world? How do we grow and develop as persons and as community when we can affirm differences?

In Scripture, naming is a significant event. God called the world into being through the Word, John tells us in his Gospel. “I have called you by name, and You are mine,” God tells his children in Isaiah, 43:1. Naming can be a sacramental act: in Baptism and Confirmation, names are given as part of the ritual. Since Catholic Social Teaching is grounded in the dignity of the human person, what does concern for human dignity demand of us when referring to, or “naming,” an ethnic person or an ethnic group?

In the U.S., many terms are used to designate persons who have descended from immigrants of Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, South America and the Caribbean, or who have themselves immigrated to this country. Why is it important for us as a faith community and as a nation to understand the different terms used to designate different groups from Hispanic/Latino cultures?

Note: The What’s In A Name? Activity on page 3 of this unit helps us to recognize the different terms used to name Americans who are descendents of immigrants from different parts of Latin America or who have immigrated in their own life times.
Activity: What’s in a Name?

First, discuss with all participants in your group or class any experiences when they or members of their family (including former generations) have been “misnamed” in any way or designated by inappropriate terms, and their feelings about such experiences. Then, do the matching activity below: in small groups, match the terms with their explanations, and then check the answer key at the bottom of the page. Next, discuss what participants have learned about the diversity of Hispanic/Latino culture by taking this quiz.

A.) Mexicans  1.) Their country is the oldest colony of the U.S. and although they are U.S. citizens, they cannot vote in federal elections. Almost half of their country’s population immigrated to the mainland U.S. between the 1940s and the 1970s.

B.) Latino  2.) This term is often used to refer collectively to all Spanish-speakers with roots in the Americas. However, it specifically connotes a lineage or cultural heritage related to Spain. As many millions of people who speak Spanish are not of direct Spanish descent (e.g. descendants of Indigenous people and of mixed peoples) and have a culture that differs from the culture of Spain, this widely-used term has been called inaccurate.

C.) Hispano  3.) This term is used to refer to people originating from, or having a heritage related to, Latin America. It is used to designate people from all the countries in Central and South America as well as from Mexico. It derived from the fact that a Latin-based language (Spanish, Portuguese) is the native tongue of the majority of Latin Americans. However, some feel the term does not recognize the Indigenous peoples of this region, who have their own languages.

D.) Mexican-American  4.) This term is commonly used to recognize U.S. citizens who are descendants of Mexicans, following the pattern used to identify the extraction of other ethnic Americans.

E.) Hispanic  5.) The smallest segment of the Hispanic/Latino population, based in south Florida. After they fled from Castro’s government, Congress created resettlement programs for job training, small business loans, educational subsidies, and home purchases. They are the only immigrant group that can claim citizenship after being in the U.S. after one year.

F.) Chicano  6.) Specifically, these are citizens of Mexico. Therefore, the term is used appropriately for Mexican citizens who visit or work in the United States, but it is an inaccurate term to use for citizens of the United States (born in the U.S. or naturalized) of Mexican heritage.

G.) Puerto Ricans  7.) A relatively recent term (from the 1960s) derived from the term “mexicano” (which means “Mexican” but was incorrectly used in naming Mexican-Americans) that has been appropriated by many Mexican descendants in the U.S. as reflective of their unique history and culture in the United States.

H.) Cuban Americans  8.) This term is preferred by a subpopulation, located primarily in the U.S. southwest, who identify with the early Spanish settlers of the area but not with Mexican settlers.

Answers: A-6; B-3; C-8; D-4; E-2; F-7; G-1; H-5