Changing Faces: Multi-Cultural Ministry
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Times change and we with times. But the question is: how are we changing? Is it for better or worse? Are we progressing or regressing? Are we changing the message or the method? Are the changes natural or artificial? Are the changes made to improve or to disprove? We could go on all sorts of tangents, but we have one focus to discuss. It is a natural change that is and should be occurring as the gospel of salvation reaches the hearts and lives of all people on this earth. But as that happens we should be well aware of the fact that sometimes there are going to be problems that arise, simply because different cultures are involved. Tensions between different cultures will never be entirely eliminated as long as this earth remains. Nevertheless, the tension can be lessened by learning to *understand and appreciate* other ethnic groups. Faces are changing in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod churches, elementary schools and high schools. No longer are teachers and professors looking only at the faces of White Anglo-Americans or Euro-Americans, but they are seeing the faces of African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Spanish-Americans on a more regular basis and in greater number than ever before.

How are we as a church body handling the changing faces? Are we changing with those faces or trying to change those faces to fit what we think they should look like? When I talk about faces here, I am talking about what makes an individual or a race or a culture who he or she is and what an individual's culture is. I will be speaking to you based on my experience as one of the faces that has changed the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, as one who has crossed cultures and who keeps on crossing cultures.

I think a little bit of my history will be helpful in explaining what I mean. I was born in a small town in Ohio. There I attended an all African-American Head Start and kindergarten. My family moved to Milwaukee, where I attended a 99.99 % African-American public grade school through the second grade. Next, I attended a WELS grade school, Jerusalem, where our family was the third African-American family in school. My six years there saw a constant changing of faces as more African-Americans began to attend. Today that same school is the total opposite in ethnic make-up from when I attended. I then moved on to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, which was 90-95 % White Anglo-Americans, about 5 % were African-Americans, 58 out of 1000 students. From there I went on to Northwestern College, where I was the second African-American in a student body of over 200. Finally, at the Seminary, I was the only African-American student. I experienced all this cross-culture while living in the Inner City of Milwaukee all my life.

So, when I talk cross-cultural or multi-cultural ministry, I will be speaking from my personal experiences and from my vantage point. However, the same experiences can be echoed by those who are Spanish-Americans or Asian-Americans. They, too, are numerical minorities in our Christian grade schools, high schools and colleges.

You know where I'll be coming from, but what about some of the terms I'll be using? We need to define the terms that will be used once, twice or several times throughout this paper. Understanding what is meant by terms is what turns ignorance into knowledge. There will be terms that you may have heard before or some that you may have never heard. Why not begin with the word that is the root of many of the other words we will be using, *culture*. The term "culture" refers to all the things that mankind has made, developed or thought of in the attempt to live better and happier lives. People, living in groups or societies, have unique lifestyles which suit them and which they themselves have developed over the years. These ways of doing and thinking are handed down from generation to generation and are called culture.

Out of culture, *cultural and social values* are developed. Cultural values are all of those things considered worthy of achieving by members of a culture. Social values are all of those things considered worthy of achieving by members of society. For example, in America, education is a strong social value, for it is felt that education is the key to success in life.

Continuing with the word *culture* as the root word, we come across words like *acculturation*, *cross-cultural*, *deculturalization*, *multi-cultural*, and *sub-cultures*. Acculturation is simply the process of conditioning a child to the patterns or customs of a culture, becoming adapted to a new or different culture. This goes hand in hand with assimilation. Cross-cultural is relating to a different culture. Multi-cultural is relating to or dealing with a number of different cultures. The term sub-culture refers to the small interest groups in modern societies. These groups have their own clusters of beliefs, values and norms apart from the larger enveloping culture. For example, teenagers create youth sub-cultures because of their special interests. Political groups, religious groups, wannabes, those interested in a particular kind of music and so on. Next, we come to deculturalization. Broadly conceived, deculturalization is a process by which the individual is deprived of his or her culture and then conditioned to other cultural values. It is important to note that deculturalization does not mean a loss of a group's culture, but rather failure to acknowledge the existence of their culture and the role it plays in their behavior (Lomotey, p.73).

Ethnocentrism is another term that has been used and will continue to be used quite often in the discussion of multi-cultural work. When there is the attitude and the tendency to evaluate and measure other cultures in light of what one's own culture has taught as "right and proper and desirable and natural," and this is accompanied by a feeling of contempt and seeks to change the other culture, you have ethnocentrism. This is one thing that has been seen throughout American history. And it continues to this day.

Another major term in this whole discussion is *stereotyping*. This is attributing a fixed and usually unfavorable or inaccurate conception on a category of people. It is basically a matter of attitude, affecting and affected by discriminatory behavior, differential treatment. It contains some truth, but is exaggerated, distorted or somehow taken out of context and individual differences are ignored.

Another phrase which will be used at different times in this paper will be *people of color*. People of color will refer to any and all ethnic groups other than White. This will include Asian-American, Native-American, Spanish-American, and African-American. This phrase points to the diversity of America itself and the diversity which has also become a part of the WELS.

Now, let's get into what the paper is all about, changing faces and multi-cultural ministry. We'll be taking a look at where others were, are, and are going. And more importantly, where we were, are, and are going. But as we do so, there is one very important thing to remember. We are talking about Christians; people who know what their relationship is to their heavenly Father who sent his Son to buy them back from the power of sin and who has prepared a place for them in heaven.

The fact that we will be talking about Christians is an advantage that will help us to understand the concerns and needs for this discussion and paper. "The relationship of Christianity to culture is complex. Christianity is always contra-cultural; it condemns some features of every human culture…. Christianity is also multi-cultural; it is intended for people of every race, language, nation, and tribe. When people become Christian, *they remain members of their own ethnic group and wish to express their Christianity in ways which are natural to their own culture*. However, Christianity is also uni-cultural. It breaks down barriers that separate peoples and unites them in one church" (Brug, 1993, p.10). It is with this understanding that we will discuss changing faces: multi-cultural ministry.

Multi-cultural ministry (service) means becoming all things to all people. Becoming all things to all people means, then, that one is willing to adapt himself in every way in every situation to every kind of people in order to avoid anything which might get in the way of sharing the Gospel – as long as this adapting does not require any compromise of the truths of God's Word – this means learning another culture (Kuske, 1990, p.2). Becoming means changing, not making all men like us, but it is a learning process on your part.

Multi-cultural education is not a phenomenon unique to the 1990s. In fact, the basic concept has existed since the 1920s, when educators started writing about intercultural education and ethnic studies. A number of college textbooks during this period reflected this international focus. The objective was to orient the populace to the newly arrived immigrants. The concern for ethnic awareness continued into the 1930s with the Service Bureau for Intercultural Education efforts at in-service programs for minority children.

Although the multi-cultural climate dissipated somewhat from the mid-1940s to the early 1960s, educators still continued to write about the issue in the academic environment. Using slightly different terminology to explain the same basic concepts, these proponents of multi-culturalism sought to keep the topic alive. Inter-cultural, multi-ethnic, and inter-group communication were all used to explain what we now term "multi-culturalism." This later phrase did not make its entry into the literature until the mid to late 1970s.

The pivotal time in the recent multi-cultural movement undoubtedly occurred during the civil rights era of the 1960s. A resurgence of concern for inter-group relations and discrimination focused attention on ethnic studies. The emphasis was primarily on the Black community and the establishment of equality in jobs and education, but the movement dramatically affected other minority groups.

It is not surprising that the push for multi-cultural education and minority recognition had its roots in the African-American community. Blacks' history in America, including attempts at assimilation into the mainstream, has been the most complicated of all the minority cultures. No other single group of ethnic Americans has pursued acculturation and assimilation with more determination over such a long period of time, only to experience recurring rejection and frustration (Buenker, John D., 1992, p.12).

This section from the *Multicultural Review* makes us aware that some things have been in the process of changing for years on end and it has finally reached our own backyard. It is something which needs every ounce of our attention right now. I am not talking about jumping on a multi-cultural band wagon, but you need to open your eyes to the way it really is and start doing some homework on your own and laying some groundwork for the future. This ground-work will be asking questions and maybe sounding or looking stupid at times. This ground-work will be learning about and teaching about other cultures. But as you do that, keep in mind the following words:

> The comparatively poor performance of African-American children in the public school system has been attributed to a variety of factors. One of the most injurious, and the one that seems to have the most damaging impact, is the continuous deculturalization of the African-American child and the neglect of African-American cultural values in the curriculum (McAdoo and McAdoo, 1985, p.73).

Culture provides the blueprint that determines the way an individual thinks, feels, and behaves in society. To deculturalize African-American children is, therefore, to deprive them of that which determines the way they think, feel, and behave. I would refer you to the definition of deculturalization as I presented it earlier in the paper. And for an example: when a French child speaks English with a French accent and says "ze man" instead of "the man," it is accepted that the child is influenced by the French cultural background. However, if an African-American child says "de man" instead of "the man," the child is accused of speaking a substandard version of English. Some teachers would go to the extent of complaining that that manner of speaking is in itself an obstacle to learning. No acknowledgment is given to the fact that West African languages do not have the "th" sound and that the children's African background, according to scholars of Ebonics, exerts influence on the way they speak the English language (Stoller, 1975).

In other words, unlike the French child, there is a complete denial of the existence of any culture for the African-American child. Think of the Japanese culture which also has problems in producing some English sounds. Or go back to Scripture in Judges 12:5-6 – *The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim, and whenever a survivor of Ephraim said, "Let us cross over, " the men of Gilead asked him, "Are you an Ephramite?" If he replied, "No," they said, "All right, say 'Shibboleth.' If he said, "Sibboleth," because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephramites were killed at that time.*

Deculturalization has some definite effects as McDavid states:

> More than three decades after the 1954 Brown vs. Topeka, Kansas Board of Education, there are still well-intentioned, hardworking individuals who are locked into a school structure that

operates under the assumption that cultural differences among children cannot be accommodated within a single school curriculum. These individuals are made to believe that the first step in education is to convert all first graders to replicas of white, middle-class suburban children. A Euro-American-centered consciousness has therefore remained the basis of curriculum development and instruction in the public system.

In the published proceedings of six Head Start Research Seminars (1969) held under the auspices of the United States Office of Economic Opportunity, McDavid states:

Our society is a diverse and heterogeneous one, in which we embrace a variety of subcultures delineated by ethnic, linguistic, racial, geographic, educational, and socioeconomic earmarks. Within each of these subcultures, social standards vary, and corresponding socialization practices vary. Yet we plan public education as a single, massive, uniform Procrustean Institutionalized system of values, beliefs, and habits defined according to some stereotype rising magically out of the middle-class pillars of society…. This, then, is the stereotypical target toward which our institutionalized educational system tends to socialize all of its participants, regardless of the adult subculture to which they are bound and regardless of the relevancy or irrelevancy of these values and habits to each one's own real world (McDavid, 1969, pp.5-6).

For the African-American who has mastered the English language and has been deculturalized to that degree, he or she is sometimes mocked by other African-Americans as "talking like he or she is white. " This mocking comes about because in the view of other African-Americans, this individual has succumbed to ethnocentrism and has been deculturalized. This is only one of the dangers in ethnocentrism.

Persons who build up strong feelings of prejudice and hate against other nationalities and cultures, because of their lifestyles, are in most cases ignorant of how cultures are developed. With acquisition of more knowledge about societies and how they develop their cultures, we will come to know that our (Euro-American) traditional evaluations are entirely wrong in a global context.

An ethnocentric attitude is dangerous and inhuman because it causes misunderstandings among nations and results in much human suffering and unnecessary conflicts. Ethnocentric societies who measure other countries by their own standards and would like to shape others in accordance with their own norms will cause international conflicts (Bellegarde, 1980, p.16).

Ethnocentrism is alive and well in the WELS, also. And now that I have laid out the thoughts of some in the public school systems and how they view the broad picture of multi-cultural work, it is time to discuss how we are going to deal with the same situation in our system. What are some suggestions and plans for handling the present situation of changing faces in the WELS grade schools, high schools and colleges?

It is imperative that we understand that American culture has been assembled by contributions from diverse cultural groups. This diversity has certainly strengthened our country in many respects, and America is admired by other countries throughout the world. Second, the inability to deal effectively with multiculturalism has existed throughout history. Though we may have fallen short of perfection in practicing equal opportunity, it should be an ideal that we constantly strive to achieve.

The educational system must be the forum for providing an opportunity to value diversity. If our democratic society is to survive, educators and administrators must undertake collective leadership to develop an atmosphere conducive to multi-cultural education. This is not to say that we must accept and live the cultural beliefs of other people. It is only to suggest that teachers provide instruction about diverse customs and values (Buenker, 1992, p.14).

Promoting the academic achievement of African-American children is no longer an issue for only African-American people. Considering recent evidence from demographic forecasts which shows that one out

of every three school children will be nonwhite by year 2000, the poor academic performance of African-American children should have serious implications not only for the future of African-American people but also for the intellectual, social, and economic health of the entire nation (American Council of Education, 1988).

This statement had better open our eyes as educators. It is clear that the education and experiences of teachers must be broadened to deal with and cover cross-cultural or multi-cultural learning and teaching. Neglecting the experiences of African-American people in the curriculum is not only detrimental to African-Americans; it is also a great source of the miseducation of other children who continue to be poorly prepared for a multi-cultural world. Most educators now agree that society can no longer afford to perpetuate the Euro-American perspective in the school curriculum. Educators are awakening to the need to offer their students an educational experience that will prepare them for the realities of a culturally diverse society.

Considering the importance of addressing the inequalities in the curriculum and of preparing all children effectively for a multi-cultural society, restructuring classroom instruction to reflect the diversity of the society seems to be a viable alternative…. Unlike the Euro-American-centered curriculum, multi-cultural curriculum and instruction are inclusive – not exclusive. It gives all children the opportunity to see themselves as being members of the human society.

There are some places in our very own state, in our very own synod, with people who have never had contact with a person of color or who have stereotypical concepts which show themselves in statements or in actions reflecting limited knowledge. I had a classmate at the Seminary who made a statement which reflected limited knowledge when it came to my cultural background. He was from the northern part of our state. The statement was made in such a way that I saw a great need to sit down with him and share my culture with him through intense questioning and answering and discussion. He said that he had gained valuable insight, as to why I was the way I was and why I did the things I did. That was a cross-cultural education. In another instance, I made a journey to one of our small country churches here in Wisconsin to preach for a schoolmate who was on vacation. It was obvious that most of the members of this congregation had never seen a person of color, an African-American. Their stares gave them away. The quickness of their handshakes gave them away. It seemed that their education concerning cultures and peoples, other than Euro-Americans was definitely lacking. My visit was a cross-cultural education for them.

It is clear that multi-cultural instruction needs to be pervasive rather than supplementary. It is a mode of experience and learning that should be infused and integrated throughout the curriculum and through the school program. For example, one does not set aside one hour during the school day to teach about the African-American experience. Since there is a long-standing assumption that only that which is Euro-American is American, a Euro-centric curriculum cannot be changed by simply adding lessons here and there about African-Americans, Asian-Americans or Spanish-Americans. American history, literature, art, music, and culture should be taught from diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives rather than from only the Euro-American perspective. Multi-cultural education experts recommend using the conceptual approach in reaching this goal (Banks, 1981).

Just think about the history textbooks that are used in many of our schools and that are on the shelves in the library. I picked up a book on American History and looked at the table of contents and found one chapter entitled: IMMIGRATION – THE NEGRO. As I paged through trying to find information on what the title said, I arrived at the last two pages of a 25-page chapter that talked about the Negro. The rest of the chapter did not even deal with background, but everything else under the sun. Or think about the pictures in the textbooks we use – a biology textbook that uses only the white figure for the study of the human body. If studies are correct concerning the density of muscle tissue, would not the anatomy of an African-American be better suited for the study in this area? Or how about the fact that Jesus was a Jew? Yet, in most representations of him, he has brown hair (sometimes blond), blue eyes and the facial features of a European. Depict him as he is described, as a man of Jewish descent, a man of some color. But when someone does depict him as having the features of a man of color, people get hot under the collar and call it sacrilege. These are just examples of some biases that cannot be overlooked when talking about cultural perspectives and the conceptual approach.

In the conceptual curriculum, the understanding of such concepts as racism, acculturation, and assimilation is paramount; the cultural group selected to illustrate the concepts becomes a secondary issue. The teacher decides which cultural group can provide the best illustration for the concept being taught. However, since examples have traditionally been drawn from the Euro-American culture, there is need to strive for a balance by selecting content from other cultures and ethnic groups. In teaching about the westward movement, migration, civil war, etc., the participation of African-Americans and other groups should be presented at the same time. This is an effective way of showing that African-American, Euro-Americans, and other groups have always shared a common humanity and that things have been handled differently because of differing historical and social experiences (Lomotey, 1990, p.78).

Such a program or curriculum may not be received with enthusiasm, because the orientation is so Euro-centric that white students take their identity for granted and African-American students are deculturalized. To circumvent such a problem, teachers are advised to begin multi-cultural instruction with emphasis on self-awareness of one's own culture.

There are schools that have "integrated" the African-American experience into the curriculum. It is a start. However, in some of these schools, the only time the African-American experience is introduced is during Black History Month. This "add-on" tactic still isolates the experience of the African-American child as being "something other than" the human experience which is presented in the curriculum throughout the school year. The "people of color" experience needs to be integrated into all subjects, wherever possible, all year round for it to mean anything to these cultures and the white children in class. Society is multi-cultural, and it is important that textbooks and other instructional materials reflect that diversity.

Probably the most important message that African-American and other children of color can receive from a multi-cultural education program is that the school is not alien to their world and that somehow it can and does serve their needs. So, how are you to carry this out? What exactly do you want to accomplish in multi-cultural education? Here are a few goals that have been suggested:

The major goals of multi-cultural education are to help all students and teachers:
1.   Reach their potential by drawing on their cultural experiences and by helping them to view events from diverse cultural perspectives
2.   Overcome their fear of diversity that leads to cultural misunderstanding and cultural encapsulation
3.   View cultural differences in an egalitarian mode rather than in an inferior-superior mode
4.   Expand their conception of what it means to be human in a culturally diverse world and to develop cross-cultural competency – the ability to function within a range of cultures.

The idea has been circulating in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to varying degrees. The awareness was made clear by Professor David Kuske of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He says on pages 4-5:

The mobility of people in the U.S., immigration trends, and the expansion of WELS into 50 states means our ministers are serving and reaching out to more and more people whose cultural background is not northern European (Afro-American, Spanish-American, Asian-American, Muslim, etc.).

The Implications
We need to train students so they are able to adapt to cultures other than their own. It would be best if they were given a general background of cultural differences rather than an intensive study of one language or culture (generalist).

Specific Suggestions

        Make sociology a required course on the high school level (with emphasis in at least part of this course on how people of different cultures can relate to one another in a constructive way within the same society).

There is one area I would tend to disagree with Professor Kuske in the implications. There should be an intensive study of one culture. A general background would simply leave too many questions unanswered and too much room for misunderstanding. Here, I might apply the adage, "a little knowledge can be dangerous." By having an intensive course of study in one culture, the student will learn how to dig even deeper to find answers to questions that are left unanswered. It will also permit the student to become comfortable in one other setting, rather than semi-comfortable in many cultures.

Some churches and grade schools have made strides of combining the cultural diversity of the African-American with the Euro-American. I am referring to some of the Inner City churches and schools of Milwaukee. They have begun study in the African-American history and have incorporated it into their grade school curriculum in one case and into their worship service in another. There are celebrations of Black History Month, Juneteenth Day, gospel choirs, gospel hymns in worship, the use of African-American literary and historical figures in the educational process. This is what needs to be done by all involved in education.

Where are you, we, to go from here? For you to change with the times and for the furthering of education, multi-cultural education has to permeate every possible avenue in teaching; history, literature, art, music, and whatever other areas you can think of. We need to celebrate diversity and the wealth of knowledge in other cultures. We do so by making use of books that give a historical and accurate picture of the different cultures. We do so as we make use of novels and short stories written by authors of different ethnic backgrounds and about different cultures. Study the music and instruments of different cultures and put them to use. The bottom line is experience a culture that is not your own. I guarantee that you will come away with a wealth of knowledge.

For us to become all things to all students, we need to know what and who they are. The only way for us to do that is to take an active role in finding out and experiencing it. We may at times feel and even look stupid in asking simple questions, but as we all tell our students, "there is no dumb question."

My dear colleagues, God has made each and everyone of us different in the way we look, act, feel, deal with things, the way we do things, the things we enjoy, the things we dislike, and so on. This is diversity. That very same God has made some to be African-Americans, some to be Euro-Americans, some to be Spanish-Americans, and others to be Asian-Americans. This is diversity. You can draw the conclusion.

Yet, we are all the same. We are all sinners who have been redeemed by a loving God through the perfect life and innocent death of his Son. So, as we discuss multi-cultural ministry, keep in mind that our interest is in the education of blood-bought souls that will educate other blood-bought souls in one way or another. Whatever we can do to assist them in understanding the culture of another, so that they may not hinder the message of the gospel, we are to do. Even if we need to go back to school.

Faces have changed and will continue to change. The question still remains, are you ready and willing to change with them? My prayer is that we all strive to become all things to all people.

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