

Diversity and Inclusion

When I was about four years old (1963), my father felt the calling into the ministry. He chose to attend a seminary in the San Francisco bay area, so we moved from The Antelope Valley to Walnut Creek, California. The bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of California assigned my dad to Saint David, a parish in Pittsburgh. We were there for three years, being involved with the social paradigm of the parish with regular weekly services as well as a variety of volunteer activities.

My younger sister, Jennifer, was born while we were there. The details of this event, as well as all the others during this period, are only vague memories. I do recall the “pot luck” dinners where there was always a wide variety of dishes, many that I had never eaten before; there was the Filipino pancit and lumpia, Mexican burritos and tacos, and others I do not recall. I did not know that these families were from “someplace else”; I just knew that they made delicious food. Eventually Dad was finished with his training, ordained, and assigned to Saint Andrews, a small parish in Ojai, California.

A few years later, I was perhaps about nine or ten years old, I was first introduced to the concept of race when I heard someone (an adult relative) speak of another using a racist epithet. I had no idea what it meant, so I asked what the meaning was. At this point it still did not occur to me that my little sister’s Godparents were African Americans. But I realized that Mr. and Mrs. Allen were the very type of people he was talking about. At that time, the acceptable term used was “negro” or “black”. But I had no recollection of ever hearing my parents, or any other members of the Saint David parish use any such language.

Growing up in Ojai, California in the 1960s and 1970s, I saw none of the social unrest associated with the Civil Rights movement. The Ojai Valley, at the time, had mostly Anglo-Caucasian, Hispanic and local tribal (Chumash) members. We were so white that when a black girl showed up in seventh grade it was almost a novelty. She was accepted in the community and became actively involved in the class of ’77 and campus events. There was no tension between any of the groups that I was aware of.

It was not until I was in the US Navy that I began to learn about oppressed minorities. The Navy’s equal opportunities program was my main source of information. When the Internet began to mature, I was able to access a greater amount and better value of information. The sources extant tell a sad story of humanity behaving in an inhumane manner.

Thirty years working in US DOD contractors has allowed me to observe a positive trajectory for diversity and inclusion. Each corporation I have worked for has been actively involved with minority recruiting and promotion. I have had the pleasure of working for and with those who do not look anything like me and have a mother tongue and culture that are other than English and American.

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Personally, my wife is a Filipina; to understand her genius, one must see that she grew up speaking a tribal dialect (Kankanaey) and practicing the tribal religion (Kabunyan). She also had to learn another tribal dialect (Kalanguya) to communicate with other family members who did not speak Kankanaey. Eventually she would learn Ilocano and Tagalog as well as English. At a young age she became acquainted with Christianity, believed in and became a follower of Jesus.

Having grown up as a member of a family that were subsistence farmers in one of the most impoverished parts of the Philippines, she had learned to live with little or nothing. This is where she expresses the old saying of “necessity is the mother of invention” with simple genius. An almost meaningless example of this is a situation where I was having issues with my vitamins rolling off the kitchen table. She picked up the napkin, crumpled it up and then the vitamins no longer would roll off.

The diversity and inclusion of our home is a microcosm of what the world needs. To even go beyond the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. That is, to have no preconceived notions of what anybody would be like or about until you know them well. Otherwise it is best to show courtesy to all as if they were a family member (and everybody is) or a close friend.

As I have often said (perhaps borrowed from somebody else), if you see somebody or something different or distant, build a bridge, not a wall. The reality is that there is no “other” or “them”; it is only us. For the survival of the species we must mix, both our DNA and culture until there is no difference but the memory of what we were.

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