

MY STORY: UNITY IN A MULTICULTURAL/DIVERSITY FRATERNITY

by Willie Guadalupe, OFS

I got involved in Multicultural and Diversity on November 3, 2012, when I was an REC councilor in my region. Our Regional Spiritual Assistant at that time asked whether I could assist with a newly forming bi-lingual group by helping with the formation for the Hispanic members. I knew that it was going to be a challenge, but not *how* challenging it was going to be.

Over the course of a year, I began observing a pattern. Each member stayed within their own social group and without conscious intent, self-segregated. The English speaking sat on one side of the group and the Spanish speaking on the other side. During the gathering's social time there was always a pleasant exchange of, "Hello, Hola" from each side. It became quite evident that the language barrier was preventing kindhearted, compassionate members from bonding in this group.

In one of our gatherings an orientee told the English-speaking leader she would no longer be able to attend formation because she had been diagnosed with cancer. I was out of the room and when I got back, I noticed that the English-speaking group was in a circle surrounding the member getting ready to pray over her and the Spanish group was just sitting at their table. When I approach them, I asked, "why are you sitting there?" and they replied "Oh Señora Guadalupe, you know we cannot speak English," and I responded "please get up and let us go and pray over her in Spanish. God understands all languages." As we prayed together and were united in prayer as brothers and sisters, it was a God moment. It was not just for one group or the other, because at that moment, everyone in that room felt the power of the Holy Spirit while being surrounded by prayers in different languages in unity as a Franciscan community.

At the next gathering, I was not sure what to expect after such a powerful spiritual encounter the previous month. As I entered the room, I immediately noticed the atmosphere was different—it was no longer "Hello and Hola." The power of prayer had bonded the separate groups right before my eyes. Through prayer, they were able to establish trust and love for one another. Unity was underway, and the language barrier was no match for God's divine mercy.

I am blessed and thankful to have experienced this profound God moment. However, it is important to note that this is not just my story—this is all our stories. At some point in all our spiritual journeys and our various walks of life, we either have or will experience the power of God's love and unity.

I would like to leave you with this reflection to keep the bond of unity in your diverse communities.

- ◆ **Recognize** the abundant diversity of cultures.
- ◆ **Respect** the differences.
- ◆ **Acknowledge** the validity of different cultural expressions and contributions.
- ◆ **Value** what other cultures offer.
- ◆ **Encourage** the contribution of diverse groups.
- ◆ **Empower** people to strengthen themselves and others to achieve their maximum potential

by being critical of their own biases.

◆ **Celebrate** rather than just tolerating the differences to bring about "Unity" through diversity. Be proactive in listening, accepting, and welcoming people and ideas that are different from your own.

Paz y bien!



We need to be bridge builders and turn those challenges into opportunities.