



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE FROM OTHER CULTURES

by Willie Guadalupe, OFS

As I traveled around the country either presiding at an election or conducting a visitation, my observations were almost always the same. In most regions I visited, I noticed the lack of other ethnic cultures present at the local fraternity level. It is important that we, as Franciscans, reach out to our brothers and sisters from other cultures. Many are being called to our Order, but because they are not invited, or no one is reaching out to them, they fall through the cracks. There are many ways people can learn about other people's cultures and build relationships at the same time. Make a conscious decision to establish friendships with those of other cultures. Put yourself in situations where you will meet people of other cultures. Take the pulse of the local parishes in your area – conduct a bilingual “Come and See.”

Once you have decided to associate with people from a different culture, you can make friends with them in much the same way as you would with anyone else. You may need to take more time, and you may need to be more persistent. You may need to reach out and take the initiative more than you have previously done. People who have been mistreated by society may take more time to trust you than people who haven't. Don't let people discourage you. There are good reasons people have built up defenses, but it is not impossible to overcome them and make a connection. It is called the language of LOVE!

One of the first and most important steps is to show up in places where you will meet people

of cultures other than your own. Go to meetings and celebrations of groups whose members you want to get to know. Visit restaurants and other gathering places that different cultural groups frequent. You may feel embarrassed or shy at first, but your efforts will pay off. People of a cultural group will notice if you take the risk of coming to one of their events. If it is difficult for you to be the only person like yourself attending, you can bring a buddy with you and support each other in making friends.

Friendship is powerful! It is our connection to each other that gives meaning to our lives. Our caring for each other is often what motivates us to make change. Establishing connections with people from diverse backgrounds can be a key to making significant changes in our communities and fraternities.

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. Finally, celebrate rather than just tolerate differences to bring about unity through diversity. Be proactive in listening, accepting, and welcoming people and ideas that are different from your own.

