

Things to Do  
*Catechesis in a Multicultural World*

Louis Armstrong sang: “I say to myself, ‘What a wonderful world.’”

The fantasy at several of the Walt Disney theme parks captivates us with, “It’s a small world, after all.”

In their pastoral statement *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, the U.S. Bishops remind us: “The Church of the twenty-first century will be, as it has always been, a Church of many cultures, languages and traditions, yet simultaneously one, as God is one – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – unity in diversity.”

As we are faithful to the Church’s call (likewise the call/responsibility of belonging to the human community) to welcome all cultures, what are some things we can we do within our faith formation gatherings?

- Are we aware of which ethnic groups / what cultures our learners come from? Do we know what traditions, customs and values are important to these cultures?
- Learn to pronounce every person’s full name correctly. No one should need to shorten or change their names to make it easier to pronounce for us or the others in their group.
- Research shows that all of us absorb what we see around us. What decorates your meeting space? Do you have posters/religious art representing all cultures/coming from all cultures?
- Invite visitors/parishioners to join you (as story-tellers, helpers, etc.) who reflect diverse backgrounds.
- Use literature (children/youth/adult) that reflects/introduces learners to various cultures. One resource: Teaching Tolerance ([www.tolerance.org/magazine/archives](http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/archives))
- Lead your learners to wonder, respect, and awe at the diversity which God created in all peoples. Every culture bears the fingerprints of God; we can learn something new about God from each and every person, from each and every culture.
- For many of your projects and activities during a session, invite group work rather than individual projects. If possible, never have a group that is not of mixed race, culture and/or ethnicity.
- Find opportunities to celebrate the feasts and seasons of the various cultures and ethnic groups. Talk with your learners – or their families/parents to find out what to celebrate; involve the families/parents on how to celebrate.
- At the same time, avoid tokenism toward any group. Instead be inclusive on a consistent basis, not just once a year (for instance, celebrating black saints only on Martin Luther King Day).

- Have a pervasive welcoming attitude: use language that is affirming and respectful of all cultures; infuse all prayer with a tone of “unity in diversity,” noting the special place each person has in the Body of Christ.
- Be careful of language.
  - Never let anyone repeat jokes that target people or groups.
  - Be aware of words, images and situations that stereotype people of certain ethnic backgrounds (for instance: “well-dressed Mexican children” suggesting this is an exception).
  - Be aware of the possible negative implications of color symbolic words (e.g. black reputation, yellow coward).
- Incorporate prayers/rituals from other cultures into your prayer.
  - *From Many, One: Praying Our Rich and Diverse Cultural Heritage*. Edward Francis Gabriele. Ave Maria Press.
  - *Just One Year: A Global Treasury of Prayer and Worship*. Timothy Radcliffe, OP. Orbis Books.
  - *Gifts of Many Cultures: Worship Resources for the Global Community*. Maren C. Tirabassi and Kathy Wonson Edy. The Pilgrim Press.
- Continue learning yourself, especially regarding cultural differences with regard to learning and behavior. For instance, Asian children/youth may not look at you while they are speaking. This could easily be frustrating for you, until you realize that in their culture that is a sign of respect for one’s elders.
- Remember there is no “norm.” Sometimes in our sincerity, some (usually Anglo-Europeans) think that in the area of multicultural sensitivity there is a “norm” that strives to be open and sensitive to others who are not the norm. Yet, Scripture tells us there is no norm. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, ...slave nor free, ...” (Gal 3:28). We are all one.

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