

# ENGAGING OUR DIVERSITY

*Interculturality and  
Consecrated Life Today*

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## *Introduction*

North America, along with every other part of the world, is growing in terms of its diversity of cultures, races, nationalities, and religions. We know that this brings both opportunities and challenges. At a minimum we can hope for civil tolerance in the midst of differences. This would already be a gift in many areas. However, Christians—particularly those in consecrated life—hope for much more. Going beyond surface-level coexistence, we strive for living and working interculturally, that is, *building and maintaining mutually enriching and challenging relationships among all peoples*. Why? For the sake of acknowledging and participating in the already-and-not-yet essential component of the reign of God—all people gathered around and sharing at the one table of plenty in the spirit of love, mercy, respect, and justice. Such a commitment to intercultural living and ministry is a prophetic voice today.

In response to this vision the Center for the Study of Consecrated Life (CSCL) at Catholic Theological Union (CTU) in Chicago sponsored a three-year program (2017–20) in which twenty core teams of men’s and women’s congregations/institutes served as catalysts and resources for fostering and developing intercultural projects for their own religious communities and others. The entire process for the congregational core teams included developing case studies, using sociological tools and questionnaires; developing action plans and submitting progress reports; attending three programs at CTU; and interacting with members of other teams. In November 2017 and 2018 the CSCL sponsored interculturality conferences with plenary input, break-out workshops, small-group processing, participant exercises, intercultural prayer/liturgies, and core team work sessions.

This book is being published in order to share the rich resources of the plenary and break-out presentations by the multicultural and international group of experts with the congregations who

participated in the CSCL multi-year program and with the broader circle of women and men religious and others who are interested in and dedicated to intercultural living and ministry. In terms of diversity the seven 2017 conference presenters were born in seven different countries, three of the chapters were co-written by men and women of different cultural/racial backgrounds, and the multiculturalism of North America well represented.

The book is divided into three sections. The opening four chapters of Part One provide the context and landscape for the opportunities and challenges of interculturality within religious congregations. Slovenian American Maria Cimperman, RSCJ, poses the critical questions for addressing this absolutely urgent issue. Anthony Gittins, CSSp, Teresa Maya, CCVI, and Tony Pernia, SVD—from their British, Mexican, and Filipino perspectives, respectively, and their expansive multicultural experiences—lay out the blueprint for engaging this issue. To continue with this architectural imagery, Part Two, the next four chapters, lays the necessary foundations. Adriana Milmanda, SSpS, of Argentina and Korean-born Sophia Park, SNJM, provide a nuanced biblical basis for understanding the intercultural journeys of Jesus and the early church in relation to our situation today. US-born Robert Schreiter, CPPS, provides a theoretical framework for reconciliation and interculturality. And Sia Temu, MM, develops the practical implications and applications on this theme from her experience in East Africa.

The eight chapters in Part Three focus on some particular and practical aspects of interculturality and consecrated life—concrete building blocks. Tim Norton, SVD, of Australia describes twelve skills for building intercultural competency. Vietnamese-born Maria Nguyen, OSB, and German American Roger Schroeder, SVD, offer a joint presentation on socio-centric and individual-centric societies and include three case studies. African American LaReine-Marie Mosely, SND, explores the important issue of race and gender from an intercultural perspective. Another joint chapter on the topic of personality and culture was written by two licensed psychologists—Kevin McClone and Crystal Taylor-Dietz—coming from different racial intercultural backgrounds. Chapters 13–15 treat three key areas within consecrated life itself that need to be addressed through the lens of interculturality. Tony Pernia, SVD,

and Judette Gallares, RC—both from the Philippines—discuss leadership and formation, respectively. German-born Birgit Oberhofer of the lay Focolare movement of consecrated life provides some concrete suggestions for spirituality and intercultural living. The final chapter, written jointly by Lebanese-born Michel Andraos and Japanese American Joanne Doi, MM, addresses the intercultural topics of decoloniality and pilgrimage.



We would like to thank a number of people for their help with this volume. First of all, the multi-year CSCL interculturality program itself and the publication of this volume would not have been possible without the generous financial support and other assistance from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. The Catholic Sisters Initiative has been a wonderful partner, supporting our efforts and assisting us as we developed tools for evaluation and learning. We hope our joint efforts continue to build opportunities for women religious to thrive and serve the entire people of God, locally and globally. Second, we want to thank our editor, Jill Brennan O'Brien, Editor-in-Chief Robert Ellsberg, and other Orbis Books staff for their interest, support, and varied levels of assistance in making this book a reality. Third, we wish to thank the authors, who committed their time and expertise to offering their presentations in person for the two CSCL conferences in Chicago and prepared their talks for publication. We want to acknowledge the contributions of Maria Nguyen, OSB, and Joanne Doi, MM, who joined the two of us on the organizing team for this CTU program. We are immensely grateful to our colleagues on the staff, administration, and faculty at CTU for their support and assistance in a myriad of ways during the three-year interculturality program. A special thank you to Peter Cunningham for his invaluable services behind the scenes as the CSCL administrative assistant and assistant program coordinator. Last, but not least, we are exceedingly grateful to the participants of this Engaging Our Diversity program for their openness, commitment, and creativity.

On a personal level, I (Maria) want to say that the importance of building intercultural communities has never felt more crucial

in religious life, in the church, and in the world. Every area of consecrated life is influenced by our openness toward becoming and being transformed into intercultural communities. This work is transforming me, and for this I am deeply grateful. For me (Roger), living and working for fuller mutual interculturality have become a passion driving my being and doing. The publication of this volume reflects both the rich possibilities and the realistic means and spiritual motivation for overcoming the parallel challenges.

Our work together over the past three years has been a wonderful opportunity for intercultural collaboration across congregations, disciplines, genders, generations, and personal styles. We ourselves and the program itself have benefited and been enriched by our work together.

May the vision and practice of interculturality continue to harvest the fruit of God's reign!