Celebrating Cultural Diversity in Parish

Picture a parish that is a family which is a gathering of many nations. It is a place where all enjoy each other’s company and are accepted for who they are; where there is no distinction between race, colour, language or heritage. Is such a place a fantasy? Despite the vast mixture of ethnic backgrounds among leaders and people, people are accepted for the contribution they made to the task, not where they came from or what group they represented.

Here are a few suggestions to consider

- Conduct a census to shed light on the cultural groups who form your local church, including demographic as well as sacramental data, as a tool for reaching out to the various groups.
- Invite people to bring forward the names of family member who have emigrated and invite new members of your parish to bring forward the names of family members they have left behind in their home country. Leave these names in the sanctuary area and include them in prayers for mass.
- Have a map of the world in the church and invite people to stick a pin with a name flag on the spot where their loved one is or where they have come from. You could create a virtual version of this for your website!
- Have Welcome packs or cards where newcomers can leave their details – make sure you follow these up pretty soon afterwards – (Some parishes host a Coffee with Padre and introduce newcomers to this)
- Celebrate, organise and respond to Migrant & Refugee Sunday
- Organise a migrant coffee morning where families affected by emigration can come together with families who have moved into your parish to share a cup of tea and exchange experiences.
- Celebrate cultural diversity of our communities - for example through using hymns and prayers from the languages of your congregation to celebrate national feast days throughout the year e.g. Independence Day, Poland (11 November 2016) or St. Patrick’s Day (17 March 2016), etc.
- Having hymnbooks, service sheets, and bibles available in the languages common to your target groups indicate that a church has gone to some trouble to appreciate the needs of other culture or language groups.
- Consider introducing room within different parts of the liturgy space for prayers to be recited in various languages.
- Parish communities can design & initiate ‘welcoming’ and ‘outreach’ programs to give newly arrived permanent immigrants and also temporary migrants (all newcomers) a sense of belonging and acceptance of their faith tradition and culture.
- Host a concert/social event after Mass (Pentecost good for this) invite each culture represented in your parish to set up a table and bring ‘food from their own culture’ to share. Ask a few groups to entertain while this is happening with national dance, music, song, etc.
- Pray for peace - a long lasting solution to people fleeing their homeland due to conflict or economic reason will only be achieved by solutions that address underlying causes.
- Learning key phrases in the language of an ethnic group represented in the congregation is very useful. People appreciate a simple welcome in their own language
- Acknowledge refugee or migrant backgrounds of parishioners: for example, by asking a member of your parish to talk about their journey to live in Ireland. Maybe have a reading at 1 mass each week read in a different language!
- Consider developing teams of readers and collectors who represent the cultural and age mix of your congregation; readings can be given in a selection of relevant languages.
- Work with our ecumenical/interfaith partners on social justice issues
- Establish faith-based reflection and study groups in the parish with the goal of a better understanding of the blessings that flow from the encounter of cultures with each other and the Gospel.
- Encourage & initiate working groups made of immigrant communities to conduct meeting in their own language and allow for representation on the parish council, so their voices can be heard and also, their participation and contribution in the parish life is facilitated
- Joint outings to Irish historic or cultural sites promote relationships but also create a context in which different cultural groups can get to know something of Irish culture and share something of their own history
Ten Key Integration Guidelines for Parishes

1. Carefully analyse your local circumstances, in order to be able to provide a meaningful welcome to newcomers.
2. The welcoming process should involve everybody, not just the clergy and parish/church council.
3. Make sure that the outside image of your church looks appealing to newcomers of various ethnic backgrounds. Attractive notice boards and information relevant languages are helpful.
4. Symbols and messages of welcome are important. Stress the universal dimension of welcome and emphasize your church as a church for all nations.
5. Nominate people to welcome newcomers, giving careful consideration to ensure their suitability for greeting people on arrival and helping them feel at home in church. Learn people’s names correctly.
6. Use plain English language in services as it helps those with limited language skills to participate better. Incorporate elements into worship from the countries represented in the congregation.
7. Music and praise groups should seek to learn and incorporate hymns or praise songs in languages representing the diversity of the congregation.
8. Occasional shared meals where everyone contributes food can create a focus for working together and sharing cultural heritage. Celebrate national festivals.
9. Use Bible Studies or other such meetings to develop relationships and promote understanding of different perspectives.
10. Promote the participation of newcomers in leadership, project teams, etc. Promote a sense of belonging and being understood and appreciated.

Pastoral Principles for Ministry in Culturally Diverse Parishes

Articulate a vision of catechetical ministry based on ecclesial integration

- Be willing to listen to the stories, perspectives and preferences of people from the different cultures and ethnicities present in your parish.
- Recognize and affirm cultural, linguistic and racial differences as a gift from God not as a problem to be solved.
- Promote the right of each Catholic cultural/ethnic group to have their own space to live and practice their faith in the context of the one parish community.
- Avoid the temptation to expect others to assimilate into a one-size-fits-all group, program or activity.
- Commit to achieve unity in diversity, not uniformity.

Foster the enculturation of the Gospel in all cultures

- Be aware of your own cultural heritage and relate to people from other cultures with respect and appreciation of differences and commonalities.
- Use the concept of enculturation of the Gospel as a point of reference in all ministry efforts.
- Be willing to be a bridge builder between people from cultures rather than a gatekeeper of your own culture.
- Avoid the tendency to see your culture as better or more valuable than the cultures of others, also avoid the use of we/they language.
- Commit to the spirit of mission of the New Evangelisation and its ongoing transformation of all cultures by the Gospel values.

Plan with people, not for people

- First listen and welcome the unique perspectives of the different cultural/ethnic communities you are trying to reach.
• Include them, from the beginning, in the development of plans, programs and activities
• Use the language of ministry To, With and For people from the unique cultures and ethnicities present in your parish.
• Avoid planning for others and judging them when they don’t show up to your activity.
• Build community in everything you do within each cultural/ethnic group and between all of them as one body of Christ.

Broader your understanding of catechetical ministry groups, programs and structures, and cast a bigger net
• Recognize the uniquely lived experiences, needs and aspirations of people from each cultural ethnic community your parish.
• Understand the existence of more than one program or grouping in your parish as a blessing, and as the first step towards ecclesial integration among all of them.
• Promote the formation of culturally specific groups and apostolic movements for Catholics of all ages as effective means of evangelisation and community building.
• Avoid the perception that allowing the formation of culturally specific groups creates division or separation.
• Commit to creating welcoming spaces for all Catholics living in your parish.

Empower people from the different cultures/ethnicities into leadership positions
• Understand the way in which different groups view leadership, organize themselves and make decisions.
• Identify catechetical leaders and mentor them into ministry within their own cultural community and in the parish as a whole.
• Advocate for inclusion of people and their families in leadership positions within catechetical ministries in the parish.
• Avoid a mentality of scarcity when growth in ministry generates demands for more resources.
• Commit to the awesome mission of weaving a new diverse parish community by helping shape the leadership of Catholic catechetical leaders today

A Prayer for a Diverse Community

Creator of all races, cultures and ethnicities, help us see that a diverse community is the way to deepen our lives and to know you more deeply.

Guide us to see that entering into a vital and just relationship with others who are different from us is the way to make ourselves whole.

Guard us from fear of the other, from the fear that our own security is threatened if we become truly willing to make a place at the table for all.

Open us to live out what we profess to believe:
That our true security is in You and in your call to justice and peace,
    That we are a part of your global family,
That, because of your Incarnation, the human dignity of everyone is sacred,
And that we are constantly called to conversion and inclusive community.

We pray that you help us recognize any forms of exclusion in our hearts,
    And in our legal systems and social structures.
Forgive us when we have been unwelcome.
    Heal our souls and spirits.
Ground us in compassion for all through your grace.

Help us take the steps you call us to take to build a more just community,
Where difference is respected and where we can all join hands and celebrate in the common good.

Through the mercy of God, we pray. Amen