

Celebrate the Gifts of Women Sunday

Sunday, March 9, 2014

No Longer Strangers

Diverse Sisters in God's Household

BY CARMEN ROSARIO

On Celebrate the Gifts of Women Sunday, March 9, 2014, we will celebrate women who are no longer strangers, but are diverse sisters in God's household. Your congregation or women's group can use this resource on Sunday, March 9, 2014, or on any other occasion.

Ephesians 2:19 reads, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God." We celebrate the experiences of diverse and intercultural women, as well as women who build communities of hope and love benefiting all in the church of Jesus Christ.

One of the greatest pleasures for many of us is going back home. For those who live far away from their homelands, returning at least once a year to the country where they were born can be a source of joy and happiness. This is often because we feel a



Mystical Night, Beth Watkins

sense of belonging, acceptance, love and equality at home, so we look forward to going back home. For many of us, the church is a family; the church is home.

The 220th General Assembly (2012) approved several

recommendations concerning immigrant and refugee communities in the United States. One of those recommendations explores how to be church together with immigrant communities.¹ This recommendation calls for Presbyterians to embrace practices of hospitality and prayer that bring congregations mostly comprised of immigrants together with congregations mostly comprised of U.S. citizens, in order to actively explore the future to which God is calling them.

In 2007, Maria and her husband Luis (the names have been changed to protect their identities), along with their three daughters, arrived in Houston, Texas, from Santiago de

Querétaro, in Querétaro State, Mexico. As an architect in Mexico, Luis was often away from home, so the family decided to immigrate to the United States, seeking opportunities to be together as a family. Upon arriving in Houston, they knew no one. This is where we begin this story of the ups and downs of this immigrant family. Maria says she and her family rented an apartment with their savings, but one week after settling into their new home, they were robbed. Maria did not speak English. When she went to school to register her daughters, she did not receive a cordial welcome. Though frustrated and distressed, Maria had the pleasant experience of meeting a Hispanic/Latina woman who was bilingual and who offered to help her. This woman invited Maria to her church, the Fuente de Esperanza (Fountain of Hope) worshiping community, located on the campus of Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church. The church offered to help Maria and her family. At first, Maria's husband refused to go, but later he accepted the invitation.

Maria gets emotional as she remembers the generous welcome church members gave her family when they visited for the first time. It was as if they were already members of the church family. Rev. Mauricio Chacón personally welcomed them. They were given an orientation to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and eventually became members. After six months, Luis was still unable to find work. The church provided assistance, but Luis wanted to find employment. On December 31, 2007, the Spanish-language worship service was held in the "big sanctuary," along with the English-speaking congregation. Rev. Chacón preached that day about the immigrant community. At the end of the service, a member of the English-speaking congregation offered Luis a job in his field, and Luis works there to this day. Seven years later, all three of Luis and Maria's daughters are enrolled in college. Two of them took advantage of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program

announced by President Barack Obama on June 15, 2012. Now Maria helps other women who are struggling with the same issues that she faced seven years ago. Joining the church and being welcomed as family has made all the difference in the world for Maria, Luis and their family.

As we celebrate the gifts of women, we celebrate that in Christ we are no longer strangers, nor aliens, nor immigrants, nor exiles, but citizens with the saints. We are part of God's family. Let us come together as the church!

A Service of Worship to God

Call to Worship

(based on Ephesians 2:11–22)

Leader: In Christ, we have access to a new community.

People: Those who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Leader: Because Christ has broken down the dividing walls, we are one.

People: Christ is our peace.

Leader: Through Christ, we have access to God by the Spirit.

People: Therefore, we are no longer strangers, but citizens and part of God's family.

Leader: Together, let us rejoice!
Let us worship God!

Prayer of Confession

(In unison)

O God, universal architect, you created the church to be a community, a family with many members, working in unity under the control of its head, Jesus Christ. Forgive us if we have treated other persons as if they did not matter. Forgive us for discriminating against others and giving some persons higher recognition, while rejecting others from your community, from the family. We have

held back, not sharing our resources and gifts with those whom we consider different. Forgive us, we pray, through Jesus Christ, who receives all persons and has made us citizens and also members of God's family, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon (based on Galatians 6:10)

Leader: Sisters and brothers, let us work for the good of all and for those in the family of faith.

Believe the good news
of the Gospel.

People: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Scripture Reading

Ephesians 2:11–22

Suggested Hymns²

382 "Heaven Is Singing for Joy"
(*"El cielo canta alegría"*)

768 "*Somos el cuerpo de Cristo*"
(*"We Are the Body of Christ"*)

300 "We Are One in the Spirit" ("They'll
Know We Are Christians By Our
Love")

322 "We Are One in Christ Jesus"
(*"Somos uno en Cristo"*)

742 "We Will Walk with God"
(*"Sizohamba naye"*)

74 "When God Restored Our
Common Life"

769 "For Everyone Born"

761 "Called as Partners in Christ's Service"

Litany of Thanksgiving³

Leader: Because we saw you on the street, accompanying children who crossed between cars and traffic lights as they were doing their work, cleaning windshields, extending their hands in the city and in so many places across America,

People: we bless you, we worship you and we acknowledge your presence among your people today. Thank you for reminding us of your command: "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them."

Leader: Because we saw you traveling with folks around the globe who seek a parcel of land to live on, a roof under which to take refuge, a job by which to feel worthy of daily bread,

People: we bless you, we worship you and we acknowledge your presence among your people today. Thank you for reminding us one more time of your invitation: "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

Leader: Because we saw you walking with women on their way to work, carrying their children on their backs, struggling to make sure there is enough daily bread, in their pursuits to defend their coworkers' jobs, and seeking truth and justice, often denied them in so many places in the world,

People: we bless you, we worship you and we acknowledge your presence among your people today. Thank you, for just as you did with the Syrophenician woman, you continue to listen to the voices of women, who are striving to overcome their challenges and anguish.

Leader: Because we saw you in the midst of hatred and violence, in the midst of oppression and destruction, saying: No. . . . Stop. . . . Don't kill each other. . . . Don't devour each other. . . . Don't kill yourselves!

People: we bless you, we worship you and we acknowledge your presence

among your people today. Thank you, for we can once again hear your words: "My peace I leave you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives."

Leader: Because we also saw you among people who are marginalized simply because of the color of their skin, their gender or their social status,

People: we bless you, we worship you and we acknowledge your presence among your people today. Thank you, because we can once again hear the words: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Leader: Because today we affirm that we are no longer strangers nor aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's family, we give you thanks, O God.

People: Amen.

Charge and Benediction

(Based on Leviticus 19:34; Ephesians 2:19–22, 6:23–24)

Leader: The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love "the alien as yourself." As we leave this place, we are no longer strangers or aliens, but we are all citizens and members of the household of God. Let us go forth, then, to serve with joy. And now, may the peace and love of God and of Jesus Christ be with all sisters and brothers, and may grace be with all who have an undying love for Jesus Christ.

All: Amen.

Program Suggestions

Family Stories

In your congregation, presbytery or synod, gather women from diverse racial ethnic groups and of different ages, then let each present their family histories. Stories should include ethnic origin, the first family member who immigrated to the United States, if known, and the reason (s)he immigrated. Also, include challenges, achievements, the role the church played in the family's life, and where the family is now. Women of diverse origins will share together their family's struggles and successes and how they became part of their communities, even and especially if they do not yet feel that they belong.

Visits

If there is a detention center for undocumented immigrants in your area, find out whether you can visit. Seek ways to help the families of persons in detention.

Resources

In addition to those cited and referenced, resources are also available from the Office of Immigration Issues in the Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Notes

1. "On Beginning Active Exploration in Communities to Seek Answers on How to Be Church Together with Immigrant Communities"; see <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4057>. A brief summary of immigration-related resolutions adopted by the 220th General Assembly (2012) may be found on the Office of Immigration Issues' website at www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/ga220-immigration-compilation.pdf.
2. All suggested hymns are found in *Glory to God*, the PC(USA)'s new hymnal (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013). Go to www.presbyterianhymnal.org for more information, or order through Presbyterian Distribution Service, 800/524-2612 or www.pcusa.org/store.
3. Adapted from an "Antiphonal Invocation" by Juan Gattinoni, CLAI's Liturgy Network, Latin American Council of Churches. Used at Encuentro VII by Hispanic Latina Presbyterian Women.

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