

## **BUILDING COMMUNITY IN DIVERSITY**

The SCNC strategic planning priority “Building Community In Diversity” emerged after a process of considerable discussion and thorough vetting of a long list of issues and concerns for our Yr 2000 Plan for Mission. This is a plan that has guided our mission and the use of our financial resources ever since and we have sought to remain faithful to its vision. At Conference settings we experience the most visible diversity of culture and race but unfortunately it is still rather superficial. While we have worked diligently at creating inclusive and diverse decision making committees and boards, we still lack a broad participation and true ownership of God’s gift of diversity among us. Why?

It takes work. Like anything else in life that you are seeking to perfect it takes constant practice and hard work. It requires discipline and patience and is very relational. We need a vision of what genuine community is and what it means to live out Jesus understanding of forgiveness and acceptance. I believe this Conference family has the unprecedented opportunity to build a faithful and loving community composed of diverse races, cultures and ethnicities, to live in the midst of a broad theological spectrum and be courageous and bold in witnessing for peace and justice. I believe we all share Jesus commitment to a world of peace and justice. My experience with the various groups that represent this diversity among us has enabled me to grow and feel a sense of fulfillment in the midst of the tensions that building such a community create within and among us. Just a few suggestions in these final hours as your Conference Minister:

- 1) Get rid of stereotypes...they are not helpful in achieving our goal of community.
- 2) Seek out or create your own opportunities for sharing life with those who are different. Don’t wait for others to do it for you. Reach out to each other. One of the greater disappointments in my own leadership has been the inability to provide or model more settings that create safe places for genuine sharing and for new relationships to emerge.
- 3) Sharing or testifying to what God has done in our lives is easier said than done and we do not easily share personal experiences of transformation. Learn to appreciate those who can and do share their faith lives more openly. Don’t be afraid of it or prejudge those who do share. Let the experiences speak for themselves without overly analyzing or intellectualizing everything.
- 4) Identify and appreciate the diversity that exists within your own congregation. Explore that diversity of language, background, culture, experience, and beliefs...you’ll be surprised how much diversity already exists among you and how rich these interactions can become.
- 5) Believe that being God’s community of diversity actually is a gift from God and that you are agents of articulating and embodying the hope that God promises to those who live out Jesus’ radically inclusive and unconditional love.

I will remain this Conference’s biggest cheerleader and I pray that God will light your way with every effort you make toward building community in diversity.

Dan Romero  
Conference Minister