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practical tips for healthy life and ministry

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Understanding cultural differences

When Capuchin Father David Songy arrived in Papua New Guinea as a missionary in 1987, he encountered not just one new culture but hundreds of them.

“Every time you have a new language there, you have a new culture,” said Fr. Songy, a psychologist and the new president of Saint Luke Institute. “There are more than 800 languages there. It’s very diverse.”

Fr. Songy’s missionary experience sparked his interest in cross-cultural psychology. His varied assignments throughout his priestly ministry – from islands in Oceania to classrooms in Italy to seminaries in Colorado – have confirmed for him the essential unity among peoples.

“People have a particular nature created in the image of God that really does cross cultures,” he said. “We’re all sinful but we’re all capable of redemption.”

Human beings and their cultures are not homogenous, however.

“The basic needs of people are consistent across cultures, but the difference is how they’re expressed,” Fr. Songy said. “How do I come to understand how they express themselves in another person?”

His work conducting vocational assessments of international candidates was directed toward answering that question. He learned that the way cul-

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Supporting successful ministry for international priests and religious in the United States

International priests and religious who come to serve in the United States need a strong community to help smooth their transition to American life and ministry, according to Suzanne Hollman, Psy.D.

The Church in the United States increasingly relies upon these men and women. About one out of every six priests in the U.S. has come from abroad, and 31 percent of the ordination class of 2014 was born in another country, according to the United States

Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

The fruitfulness of their efforts depends in part on how comfortable they become with American life, said Dr. Hollman. Priests or religious who struggle with acculturation - adaptation to a new culture - may be at risk for depression and anxiety.

“Acculturative stress sets in when

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An international priest's perspective

Rev. Agustin Mateo-Ayala

On arriving in the United States:
The diocese provides for your needs. The difficulty comes from within yourself. I was encouraged by the diocese, but you have your own limitations. You are learning how people live in the United States. Even the air smells different. The faucets open differently.

On ministry to immigrants:
It's very humbling if you are serving other immigrants like yourself. You immediately know how they feel. It is a true blessing to minister to those who are far from their countries and their family.

On the welcome from Americans:

For the most part people show a great mercy to foreign priests. They will take anything you give them. That creates a beautiful relationship with the community receiving you.

On adapting to a new life:

There is a lot of suffering in the process. It's really shocking. It's a process like anything else, but it's a privilege. I thank God that He picked me.

Fr. Mateo was ordained in Spain in 1990. He came to the United States 18 years ago and is now an American citizen. He serves as pastor of St. Rose of Lima Parish in Gaithersburg, Md.

Relationships and communication can differ

Cultures, *continued from page 1*

tures interpret reality can vary, as when he encountered a candidate who, when asked to draw a person, drew the body, arms and legs as a series of rectangles. It gave him pause, until he saw another candidate from the same region do the same thing.

Cultural differences must be acknowledged and addressed in order for ministry to be successful.

One key distinction among cultures, Fr. Songy observed, is the way relationships work – is the culture patriarchal or matriarchal, how are elders treated, what is the strength of family ties?

Differing approaches to communication can also be stumbling blocks.

Westerners tend to be more comfortable discussing difficult subjects and do not often have the same sense of reserve or deference as those from other

countries.

“Many cultures have a much greater need for politeness than typical American or European cultures,” he said.

Ministry to diverse communities involves attention to these cultural differences. A special challenge can be parishes that are home to many different ethnic communities.

“What happens over time usually depends on where the demographics go,” Fr. Songy said.

It is important for pastors to promote unity among their parishioners, but also to do so without glossing over or minimizing the differences that make each community unique.

“Americans have a need for everyone to do everything together,” Fr. Songy said. “I'd rather approach this from a more basically Christian perspective: We're in the same communion of saints, each with particular gifts.”



A struggle for parish unity amid cultural diversity

It is critical that “shared” parishes approach integration slowly and deliberately, said Mar Muñoz-Visoso, the executive director of the Secretariat for Cultural Diversity at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The Conference reported that in 2010, one-third of American parishes were home to two or more languages or cultural communities.

“Don’t rush things,” she said. “In order to build community you really need to avoid imposing preconceived ideas of what everyone should be doing.”

When Father Bob Ray arrived at St. John Vianney Parish in Louisville 20 years ago, he discovered that, in some ways, his new assignment was like pastoring several parishes.

St. John Vianney was established in the 1950s as a mostly white, working class parish. The 1970s brought a wave

of Vietnamese refugees to the area. By the 1990s, a growing community of African immigrants had joined, along with a small Hispanic community.

“What I hoped for was some kind of comfortable integration of all the different groups into a kind of unity in the parish,” said Fr. Ray, who is now a member of the spiritual formation staff at Saint Luke Center in Louisville. “It didn’t quite turn out that way.”

The archdiocese eventually turned leadership of the parish over to the parish’s vibrant Vietnamese community. It thrives as a Vietnamese-American parish today.

Fr. Ray admits sadness that greater integration was elusive.

“The communication difficulties were not only the languages,” Fr. Ray said. “There were three entirely different ways of being in the Church.”

Practical assistance and social support are key

International, *continued from page 1*

acculturation doesn’t happen seamlessly,” Hollman said.

Priests and religious often find the challenge of living in a new country exciting at first. But growing comfortable with the language, food, climate, political systems and social norms of the United States can be daunting.

“They have the stresses of ministry on top of the stresses of acculturation,” she said. “That’s a double whammy.”

Dioceses can help ensure a more successful transition through a dedicated orientation program to assist them in their transition, Hollman said.

She cited the Church in Australia

as having a good model. It includes introductions to key leaders and peers, as well as efforts to familiarize international priests with the culture of the local community. Importantly, it includes regular follow up.

It is also necessary to provide practical assistance like language assessment and legal guidance. International priests may need to learn everything from how to drive to how to order in a restaurant.

It is important that international priests know who to ask for help when challenges arise, and that they feel comfortable asking for assistance.

“Social support is protective against acculturative stress,” Hollman said. “The church community needs to be a net.”

Helping shared parishes succeed

- Meet people where they are. Work to understand the needs and traditions of all those who call a parish home.
- Make people feel welcome. Allow various communities to grow on their own. Parallel groups give each community a sense of identity.
- Build bridges. Find common opportunities for formation and to develop dialogue.
- Recognize that multilingual liturgies may be appropriate on special occasions, but all communities may feel unprepared if they are held too early or too often.
- Access *Best Practices for Shared Parishes: That All May Be One*, a guide from the USCCB (<http://store.usccb.org>).

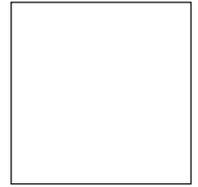
For more resources, visit www.usccb.org and click on “Cultural Diversity in the Church.”

*Source: Mar Muñoz-Visoso
Executive Director, Secretariat for
Cultural Diversity, USCCB*



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CONNECTIONS

for healthy life and ministry

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Contributions to support Saint Luke Institute's ministry may be made online at www.sli.org or in your estate plan. Please contact Rich Landfield at 301-422-5406 or richl@sli.org.

Upcoming Events at SLIconnect.org

SLIconnect Webinars

One-hour, online presentations offering practical information for healthy life and ministry. Webinars are available online as a recording after the initial air date. Details at SLIconnect.org.

Integrating the Psychological with the Spiritual

Thursday, May 21, 2015, 1:00 p.m. EDT

Facilitator: Fr. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, Ph.D.

Intercultural Communication and Empathy

Thursday, June 18, 2015, 1:00 p.m. EDT

Facilitator: Suzanne Hollman, Psy.D.

From Intervention to Healing: Ministering to those in Treatment

Thursday, July 23, 2015, 1:00 p.m. EDT

Facilitator: Nancy Kluge, Ph.D., LCPC

Conference

Practical Models for Celibacy Formation

December 6-9, 2015 in St. Meinrad, IN

Sponsors: Saint Luke Institute and St. Meinrad Archabbey, Seminary and School of Theology