

Raising Our Voices in Our Church

Georgie Torres Reyes introduces C.O.R. attendees through means to reach our congregation.



The second C.O.R. event of the year was held at Queen of Peace High School on Saturday, December 2, 2000. In order to continue the year of "Voices That Challenge: Raising Our Voices to Transform Our World," C.O.R. focused both on raising our voices in church to transform faith-based institutions and on listening to the voices of faith that have challenged racism and other injustices in the world.

The day opened with a prayer led by Ms. Patty Nolan-Fitzgerald, Principal of Queen of Peace, and Ms. Suzanne Wille, C.O.R. Coordinator, and responded to by student representatives.



This prayer asked participants to reflect on the voices they have heard, on the ways they have used their own voices and on how they would like to use their voices about race and racism.

After the prayer, the 138 participants from 17 schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago were introduced to the facilitator for the day: Georgianna Torres-Reyes, who has long worked on issues of diversity and who is currently the Coordinator of the McNair Scholars Program at DePaul University.

Conference attendees began the day by participating in an activity that asked them to identify how the environment of various faith-based



institutions felt to minority groups. For example, depending on how students felt their church or school would seem to a person of color, students chose to stand under signs that read ...

very hostile
somewhat hostile
very accepting
somewhat accepting
or other

Once students found their group, Torres-Reyes led students in a discussion of why they chose the labels they had. After the exercise, Torres-Reyes facilitated a discussion of how people of faith and the struggle against racism should and do intersect.

After sharing lunch with a purposefully diverse group of people, students went to classrooms with their groups and were led through small-group activities by teacher-facilitators. During the break-out sessions, students drew their image of a racist and classiest institution, which led to a discussion of the characteristics of institutional racism.



Once students identified these characteristics, they were

able to draw institutions that were inclusive. Students then learned about the allies of faith in history who have worked against racism and oppression in the past, such as Archbishop Oscar Romero, Dorothy Day, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Students ended the break-out sessions by writing personal action statements.

Upon returning to the chapel, students rejoined their school



groups, in which they wrote five-line poems to represent the voice that their school will use against oppression. The day ended with a mass that focused on the importance of all people using their voices to end racism and injustice.

Preaching to the Choir

DEC 2, 2000

RAISING OUR VOICE
IN OUR CHURCH

Introduction



In this season of gifts, we are so grateful for the gift of your desire to eliminate racism.

Thank you for the gift of your presence here today, and for your response to the C.O.R. invitation to raise your voices together to end hatred.

Some people would say that having Catholic Schools Opposing Racism is like preaching to the choir. Catholic school students already get this stuff and they don't really have a problem with racisms. It's not their problem, it's everyone else's. Isn't it?

In my school, we all stick together because there aren't too many of us around. And we really reach out and protect the freshmen when they come because they're the easiest targets.

At my school, we all get along. Except in the cafeteria we all have a spot; it's the same spot every year, not that anybody assigns it, but everybody knows: all the Hispanic kids sit here and the Black ones over there. I don't know if that's bad or not...

We've got a lot of different kinds of students, but most of the teachers are White. They talk a lot about diversity, but you sure don't see it on the faculty.

In this season of gifts, we are mindful of the gift of Catholic schools, places where we can pray freely and belong to a community that believes in the dignity of all persons. We share the luxury of common values and a common spirit, that is why we can dare to transform our world by our common action. Even so, is there work we need to do right in our own Catholic schools to create a more welcoming environment and fewer insider/outsider groups?

We're got the preps and the freaks, the snobs and jocks, the smart kids and the kids that no one talks to.

Yeah, and there's a special group that's the volleyball team.

In our school, it's the football team.

But I'm not in any group, I talk to everyone, but sometimes this causes problems with my friends.

In this season of gifts, we give thanks for the gift of our friends, they give us so much joy and laughter and fulfill the need we all have to experience belonging and being loved. And yet, do all of our friends look just like us? Have you opened yourself up to the gift of a friend of different race or ethnic background? Is your group of friends open to bringing in new friends into your circle of belonging even if they're brown or black or white?

We pretty much all dress alike and like the same kind of music, which is why no one ever goes to the dances, because they always play that music we can't stand.

Yeah, the alternative crowd never shows up and neither do the Black students, but they say the whole school is invited. I don't know why they don't come...

I tried to get more of my friends to come to C.O.R. but they don't get why I like it, so I just don't talk about it and that seems best.

In this season of gifts, we give thanks for the gift of color that splashes life with beauty. Do you see the beauty in all skin colors and shades, in all degrees of lightness and darkness?

I'm always expected to go out with someone the same or lighter than I am, otherwise my family doesn't approve. They don't say it out loud, but I know the rules.

In this season of gifts, we call our attention to the gift of our voice that we so often take for granted. Think of how differently we would experience life if we lost our ability to speak. Who would speak for us? Think of those who have the ability to speak but whose voices are ignored because they're different or less educated or speak a different language. Do we raise our voices for them? Do we raise our voices in our school on behalf of the outsider?

She never says anything; I don't even know what her voice sounds like.

I do. We went to grammar school together and she's got a stuttering problem. Everybody used to imitate her when the teacher made her read aloud. I think that's why she was absent a lot.

Slow down. I can't even understand what you're saying. You people have to learn to talk slower and quit using that trash talk if you ever want to get anywhere in life.

You people. Who is she talking about?

Think of how often we misuse the gift of our voices without even thinking.

Think of how often we use our voices to say hurtful things, to gossip, to ridicule or betray a confidence. We waste these voices of ours when we use them to repeat cruel jokes or when we don't bother to use our voice to comfort hate.

She'd go out with anyone. You should hear what my cousin said about her...

Hey, did you hear the one about the Jewish guy...

Shhh... Lisa made me promise not to tell anyone, but if you swear you won't tell...

Today, in this season of gifts, we ask each of us to practice the gifts of listening and openness. We ask you to listen to the voices that surround us and that you yourself speak. And then ask yourself what kind of voice you want to have - a voice that proclaims goodness into the world or a voice that divides? A voice that brings people together or a voice that whispers that she - said - that - he - said - something - really - rotten - about someone from a different race or nationality?

[Everyone then was instructed to stand and go and find a seat next to someone from another school that they didn't know.

When everyone was in their new seat, they were instructed to take a few minutes to talk with the person about the last word they would say if it were going to be the very last word they would speak and explain why they chose that word.]

In this season of gifts, we have the gift of choosing what kind of person we wish to be and what kinds of things we wish to say with our gift of voice.

Let's hear some volunteers willing to tell us how they would use their voice if it were going to be their last word. Some of these are certainly precious words that may remind us of the values we hear so often preached about at school or at church.

We come together.



The Homily

In the book of Jeremiah, the Lord tells him, "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you. We are never too young to speak the Word of God. He calls us to come together in unity and harmony, no matter what ethnicity, age or gender. In order to be a Church we must accept and love one another, reach out to our neighbors in partnership. The challenge is to be the one crying out in

the wilderness, just as I am crying out to you, to stand alone and raise your voice in the Church, to speak out against the injustices and segregation that exist and to encourage everyone to prepare the way for our Lord, because we the people are the Church. One Church, one body to love, pray, and rejoice together. Homily: Segregation within our church.

Vanessa Sheehan

I am a voice crying out in the wilderness. God calls me and every member of the church to cry out against segregation within our churches. The Catholic church is supposed to be our haven of love but without the diversity of age, race, and sex we are not the Church God has called us to create. We need to realize that we, the people, are the body, we make the church. The church is not just a building but a place of prayer where people can come together in love and faith. We need to use that faith to see that every member of the church is important, whether they be young, old, Black, White, Hispanic Asian, male or female. We also need to realize that we are not a unified being by associating ourselves with only our parish church. Our parish is only one convenient place of worship but our true parish is the community of believers around us. We are not called to be just one church, but the all inclusive Church. By accepting that we are a part of a bigger family, a more diverse Church, the Archdiocese of Chicago, we are opening ourselves up to the real Kingdom of God. We need to see that we are not truly living in God's image until the Church is desegregated and different forms of Catholic worship are accepted by all Catholics.

We are all called to be the voice in the wilderness that speaks truth about the teachings of God, that demands to be heard, a voice that does not compromise God's teaching that we are NOT CALLED TO JUDGE. We are called to LOVE AND ACCEPT. We are called to be right and just people who like John choose to follow the path that God has laid for us. By accepting people and allowing all people to have voice in our church we are taking steps towards that path. By doing so we will come to a place in the road where we can walk as brothers and sisters in Christ. Where we will be diversified people, accepting and loving each other, seeing different perspectives, and acknowledging that we are many parts, but we are all one body. As Catholics there is not room in our faith to pass judgment, to be racist, prejudice, sexist, or ageist.

As Timothy says God commands us to speak without fear, to speak the words he has put into our mouths, to root up and to tear down, to destroy and to demolish, to build and plant. Once we have uprooted the evils of racism, torn down the barriers of age and sex, demolished stereotypes about the young, and destroyed the fear of ignorance will we truly build the Church we are called to be. In this Church, we will rejoice in the Kingdom of God.



Psalm 133

How wonderful it is for God's people to live in harmony!

How wonderful it is, how pleasant, for God's people to live together in harmony! It is like precious anointing oil.

How wonderful it is for God's people to live in harmony!

It is like the dew on Mount Hermon, falling on the hills of Zion.

How wonderful it is for God's people to live in harmony!

That is where the Lord has promised to bless us with life that never ends.\

How wonderful it is for God's people to live in harmony!



Cinquaines

Creating a Cinquaine

Line one is a one word theme. Line two is descriptor words. Line three is three action words. Line four is an action phrase. Line five is the school name.

Voice
Celebrate,
Rejoice
Caring,
Guiding,
Praying
To become
one family in
Christ
Quigley

Voice
Loving,
Supporting
Spiritual,
Dedicated,
Caring
Men and
Women for
others
Loyola
Academy

Voice
Difficult,
Worthwhile
Accepting,
Reaching,
Committing
Speaking out
against in
justice
Marian
Catholic

Voice
Spiritual,
Hopeful
Educating,
Leading,
Inspiring
Being open
and caring
young women
Seton
Academy

Voice
Careful,
diverse
Sharing,
Respecting,
Encouraging
Acting on our
words
De La Salle

Voice
Spiritual,
Enthusiastic
Leading, Hard
Working,
Growing
Reaching out
to the
community
Trinity

Voice
Hopeful,
Courageous
Growing,
Creating, Risk
Taking
Working
towards unity
Mother
McAnley

Voice
Prophetic,
Expressive
Inspiring,

Voice
Faithful,
Passionate
Challenging,

Voice
Strong,
Mighty
Dedicating,

Voice
Welcoming,
Thought-
Provoking

Enriching,
Opening
Together we
can make a
difference
St. Barbara

diversifying,
respecting
Dare to be one
Nazareth

Forgiving,
Hoping
Voicing your
belief
DDHS

Accepting,
Changing,
Challenging
Embracing
diversity in
our lives.
Queen of
Peace

Read About Previous C.O.R. Conferences

***You call that music?
Turn that music down!***

***Raising Our Voices
In Our Families***

October 16, 2000: 4-7:30 p.m.

Location: Queen of Peace HS,
Burbank, IL

Read About Upcoming C.O.R. Conferences

***Many Voices, One Song,
Freedom & Liberation Songs,
Songs of Unity and Protest***

***Raising Our Voices
In Our Communities***

February 24, 2001 : Time: T.B.A.

Location: Field Experience
(Initial Meeting Point T.B.A.)
