

California-Nevada Annual Conference
Annual Conference Session
Monitoring Report
June 20, 2009

Bishop and members of the Annual Conference, my name is Jeffrey Kuan. I identify myself as a multi-hyphenated person, a Chinese-Malaysian-American. I am appointed to extension ministry at Pacific School of Religion.

My name is Barbara Horikoshi-Firebaugh. I am currently serving Oakland Lake Park UMC and will be appointed to Sacramento Faith UMC on July 1st. I am a Japanese American.

As members of the Conference Commission on Religion and Race and on behalf of our colleagues, we bring to you the monitoring report of our observations from the last two days of conference activities.

We begin with some general observations of the different sessions we monitored. In the plenary, we have been able to observe the diversity of the leadership seated on the stage, both in terms of ethnicity and gender. Of the twenty-nine presenters for the plenary sessions, 10% were African Americans, 31% Asian Americans, 7% Hispanic/ Latino American, and 55% European Americans, of whom 59% were men and 41% women. There were two younger adults among the presenters.

On the plenary floor, the participation was overwhelmingly European American constituting 80% of the time. The rest of the breakdown of the participation is as follows: 7% African Americans, 5% Asian Americans, 4% Hispanic/ Latino American, 3% Pacific islanders, and less than 1% Native American. The participation in terms of gender is quite even, 52% women and 48% men. As far as we were able to track, the lay-clergy participation was 56% laity and 44% clergy. Clearly, the area that we need to strive for better diversity is the participation of non European Americans.

In the plenary session that deals with the proposed constitutional amendments, we observed that among the six presenters, one was Hispanic/ Latina American, two African Americans, and three European Americans, with an equal number of women and men. The participation percentages from the plenary floor were as follows: 5% African Americans, 8% Asian Americans, and 80% European Americans. Only one Native American, one Hispanic/ Latino American, and one Pacific Islander participated. The participation from young adults was about 5% of the time. The question raised by our Pacific Islander brother about the lack of participation of racial-ethnic minorities in this process is poignant.

The worship service of the journey of the saints showed great diversity, in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, generation, and the inclusion of persons with disability. While all

three clergy who gave homilies were women, one was African American, one a younger adult, and one a person with disability. The transfer of the mantle from a European American male clergy to an Asian American woman clergy was a powerful symbol. This was a worship service that we observed diversity celebrated.

A few observations on the ministry workshops. The presenters were predominantly European Americans and those who participated in the conversations were also predominantly European American. One of our monitors observed a situation in which a delegate had forgotten that the particular workshop was continuous rather than a repeat. Since he had missed the early part of the presentation, he asked if the presenters could provide a recap. Our monitor noted a unanimous chorus refrain, "No." The delegate was a racial-ethnic minority person. Our monitor wondered if race and ethnicity played a part in the way that the delegate was responded to.

We observed the following in relation to the legislative sections. We want to note that good work has been done to bring diversity to the leadership teams. In the area of participation, it is the same refrain. It was predominantly European Americans.

From all these observations, we would like to provide the two reflections. Your Commission on Religion and Race proposed to the Bishop to include race, ethnicity, and cultural heritage in our self-introductions as a way to celebrate our broad diversity. We acknowledge that this has not been very comfortable for many of us and have at times given many of us pause to decide how to identify ourselves. Racial-ethnic identity is complex. For many of us in the minority, we want the opportunity to inscribe our own identity rather than for the dominant culture to inscribe who we are. We have all recognized in the last few days that even among our European American sisters and brothers, there is great heterogeneity in ethnic identity. Our racial-ethnic identity form and shape who we are and how we choose to identify ourselves speaks volumes of how that our race, ethnicity and cultural heritages have shaped us. We heard a number of you mention in your heritage Native American ancestry. It is my personal hope that this may propel us to give our energy to developing Native American ministries that our Annual Conference has long neglected. We heard too that it is not always easy to track our heritage, parts of it have been lost and perhaps irrecoverable.

Second, the predominantly European American participation in the processes of our Annual Conference Session should not come as a surprise to many of us. I want to go back to the question about the lack of participation of our sisters and brothers from racial-ethnic minority communities in engaging the proposed constitutional amendments. If we are serious about diversity and inclusivity, perhaps we need to pause and rethink the way we conduct the business of our annual conference. Have we done our work to help prepare our sisters and brothers from racial-ethnic minority communities to understand and engage the material? Do these material need to be translated into their first languages? Do we need to provide translators at plenary sessions? More importantly, is this the only way, the only process which privileges the

European Americans, to do business? Can we begin to explore other models that will be more beneficial to our racial-ethnic sisters and brothers? We do not know what these may look like, but it is time that we begin to use our collective wisdom toward a more diverse and inclusive church.

Submitted by Jeffrey Kuan and Barbara Horikoshi-Firebaugh