



A Campus Community that Values Racial and Cultural Diversity  
Francesco C. Cesareo, Ph.D.

Over the last few years, the College has witnessed an increase in the racial diversity of the entering classes, along with an increase in the number of international students. This has had a positive effect on the College, enriching the community.

As the College continues to reflect the demographic realities of the country, it is important, particularly in light of national events in recent months, of sustaining a campus environment that respects and welcomes racial and cultural diversity. I would like to spend a few minutes sharing with you with some of my thoughts on this subject in the context of our mission.

In the Book of Revelation we read: "With your blood you purchased for God men of every race and tongue, of every people and nation." (5:9) This passage suggests that diversity is part of the very fabric of the Christian community.

Indeed, the very word "catholic" means universal and all-embracing, suggesting that within the Catholic tradition diversity has well-established roots.

Throughout the New Testament, the inspired word of God reminds us that any sort of discrimination has no place in the Christian community. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians writes, "There is no Greek or Jew here, circumcised or uncircumcised, foreigner, Scythian, slave or freeman. Rather Christ is everything in all of you." The lessening of the dignity of any person represents a direct contradiction of the Scriptural text.

The early Christian writers held that the unity of humanity was a reflection of the creative genius of God. Augustine wrote in his classic *The City of God*, that the scriptural creation story points to unity. In his view, Augustine sees the first parents as part of the divine plan for unity. He writes, "...by this means (of shared parenthood) the unity of society and the bond of concord might be more effectually commended to him, men being bound together not only by similarity of nature, but by family affection." (XII, 21)

The union of Adam and Eve, coupled with the concept of the oneness of humankind, places the modern world into an ancient and sacred bond.

The theology of the Second Vatican Council allows no room for discrimination or exclusivity - for political, social, or racial separation or distinction. The Council fathers made clear that there is in Christ...no inequality on the basis of race or nationality..."

Catholic colleges and universities also have been called upon to respond to the sociocultural changes of the nation in light of the mandate from Pope St. John Paul II. In his apostolic constitution on Catholic colleges and universities, *Ex corde ecclesiae*, he called for a new evangelization - new in its fervor, its method, its expression, and in its fullest exposure of the social doctrine and teaching of the universal church, rooted in the sacredness and the dignity of the human person.

This prescribes that every Catholic college and university assist in the protection and advancement of human dignity and of a cultural heritage through research, teaching, and service to the community.

What does all of this mean? At an institution like Assumption, our religious character facilitates, in a unique way, the development of community in the context of various cultures. A successful heterogeneous community is defined as one in which diverse groups, are present on campus and fully participate, and in which the ethnic, racial, and religious identity of each individual is respected. As a consequence, such a community provides the means through which each member has an opportunity to contribute to the vitality of the whole, and this contribution is valued.

With all of our differences, we are still human beings on a relatively small planet, each seeking to understand and to be understood.

The college campus in many ways is a microcosm of the larger world in which students will live out their professional and personal lives. Or, at least it should be. If our campus does not look like the world beyond our gates then we are not preparing students to enter into that world.

If that is the case, we are doing a disservice to our students educationally because their own experience will be diminished. Let me explain.

Cultural and racial diversity contributes to a higher quality of campus life. The intellectual enterprise is enhanced by the dialogue of varied and diverse viewpoints, providing the promise of new energy and new ways of thinking.

The educational promotion of and the appreciation of racial and cultural differences enables all of us to learn from each other and to grow, allowing for the development of students' intellectual and social self-confidence, through exposure to different ideas and viewpoints, consistent with a liberal arts education.

And since the college experience involves more than just academic programs, but also experiences that provide students with an opportunity to learn how to interact with others who

are from different racial and ethnic backgrounds this hopefully will destroy some stereotypes. This is critical since our world is a diverse place and providing students with an exposure to that world during their formative years should be part of the college experience.

Our commitment to racial diversity rests on our commitment to the Catholic nature of Assumption College which calls for the inclusion of all peoples in the salvific love of God.

The system of values and relationships that constitute Assumption are shaped by the Church's mission to proclaim this salvific love. The education that we provide seeks to promote between individuals, between groups, between cultures, religions, and races relations that reflect the love story of God's steadfast presence and transforming love.

Consequently, everyone on this campus shares in the mission to promote the conversations that are necessary for successfully achieving such relations of respect and reverence between individuals, groups, cultures, religions, and races. To that end, I am establishing a Presidential Task Force on Race comprised of members of the College community from across the divisions.

This task force will explore how, institutionally, we can prepare for a future that will necessarily include a more racially diverse student body given the demographic shifts taking place in the country and sustain a focus on race that will benefit the College so as to develop a strategy that addresses this issue systemically based on a Catholic perspective on this question and in line with the goals of our Strategic Plan. A memo will be shared with the College community early next week announcing the members of the Task Force.

The love story of God's steadfast presence in human history teaches us that the mystery of God has been "throughout the whole of human history, touching every religion, every culture, every race, and every person." I ask you to enter into this love story and see the face of God in every person who comes to this campus so that together we can be transformed by this love, which in turn will transform Assumption College so that it comes to be fully in God.