

The Challenge of Radical Welcoming of the Other

The CRC 2014 General Assembly challenged us to intercultural living and summoned us to navigate cultural boundaries for the sake of mission in our world today. Fr. Anthony J. Gittins, CSSP, emphasizes that invitation to and inclusion of community members from cultures that are not our own are not enough for today; we must arrive at radical welcome of *the other* within our midst.

He points out that diversity, as important as it is, must go further, and that we must invite those from other cultures to bring their voice, their whole self, so as to engage in total mutual relationship.

This is not an easy task; the personal and communal transformation required does not happen without a profound commitment to deep personal change. In a way, to accept anything less is to put at risk the relevancy of religious life in a world evermore ruled by the effects of globalization.

Fr. Gittins forces us to consider intercultural living for the sake of the Gospel and goes on to suggest that our ongoing presence in the world—perhaps survival itself—may be dependent on it.

These are tough words to hear. Are they true? And do they apply to all of us?

We Are Interconnected

Religious life is in a period of great transition. The Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) sees this evolution at each successive general assembly as many of its participants address the challenges of aging and diminishment within their own congregations.

Why does it matter that we consider this question now at this point in our lives?

First, we need to view religious life from an overall perspective, the big picture. Religious life in Asia and Africa is growing at a fast pace, and new communities, although small, are emerging across the globe, including Canada. We are not separate from this. Religious men and women from around the world are part of one spiritual family. Just as the world is becoming interconnected, religious life, too, is experiencing this same interconnectedness.

Fr. Gittins' challenge makes sense to us because it reveals a deeper level of who we are as Church: a Church without borders where radical welcome of *the other* is constitutive of its very existence.

Second, we need to remember that religious life is an all-inclusive movement of the Spirit as we encounter Jesus in our midst. Jesus is the ultimate Other to whom we extend radical welcome. Intercultural living can happen in our cities, neighborhoods and ministries, regardless of our various ages and physical realities.

Again, Fr. Gittins' challenge makes sense to us because it forces us to encounter Jesus more intimately as we question our own views of the world and those around us. As religious, we stand in witness to Jesus as the ultimate Other.

The CRC is not exempt from this call. Accepting the challenge to intercultural living does not guarantee more members within our communities, but it is a doorway for all communities, large and small, international or not, to experience and understand the world, the Church, and the spirit of radical welcome at a new and profound level. It is a challenge to which we must say "yes."

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