

The Pentecost Paradigm:

Creating a New, Multicultural Border Space

By Jacqueline J. Lewis

The story of Pentecost is not only a story about Spirit but a story about borders. The people are gathered there from all over the known world; they crossed borders to come to Jerusalem for Shavuot, sometimes called Pentecost because it is the fiftieth day after Passover. It is the celebration of God giving the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai after Israel was freed from slavery in Egypt. When the Spirit came that day in Jerusalem, those gathered there were devout Jews. They did not think they were creating a new religion! We Christians claim this day, this moment, and we share it with Judaism. Pentecost is a border holiday, historically on the border of Judaism and the growing new community called a church.

Two important phenomena happened on that border: (1) There was an outpouring of Spirit; and (2) It enabled the gift of *bearing* in one's own tongue while others did the same. On the border of a new thing, God's people were gifted with a multiethnic, multicultural worship experience! It was a miracle!

The world around the Church is changing. God is calling us to respond. Gone are the days when it is appropriate for 90 percent of us to worship in places in which 90

percent of the people look just like us! The new place to which God is calling us is a border space. In that multicultural/multiracial space, we need the gift of the Spirit to help us share the good news with the diverse peoples in our midst, in whatever *cultural language* they speak. I call that the *Pentecost Paradigm*. The Pentecost Paradigm means that God's Spirit enables the translation of the good news in many cultural voices, at the same time. In order for us to have this miraculous experience, we need a few skills.

Develop a Border Hermeneutic

Learn to listen to the biblical text, exegetical materials, and the living texts in our congregations with a "both/and" empathy that identifies with the "other" and the "other" in ourselves. We hone these listening skills in conversations with a breadth of people in our community and in conversation with authors that tune our ear to the voices of people on the margins. One-on-one conversations with a wide variety of people in our communities should be a discipline. We need to listen to their stories, interpret their stories.

The books in our study should re-

present a breadth of scholarship and perspective. The more voices we can bring to our table to help us translate, the better. Womanist, Mujerista, Feminist, and Liberation theologies can help us hear new things in familiar texts. We listen also to the Spirit in music, hymns, and prayers that come not only from what is familiar and "traditional" but from the places that represent those outside who need to get in.

Cultivate Multi-vocality

Learn to preach and teach in many voices, to "switch codes." When multi-vocality and simultaneous discourse become self-conscious and careful skills, our illustrations and stories are enriched with the cultures of many peoples. Young people and old people, struggling people and wealthy people can find a portal into worship. We stay attuned to what is going on real-time in the culture so that we are relevant and the new story we weave "fits." We offer music and supporting texts and prayers that are accessible for the ethnicities and cultures in our community as the arts offer us more "languages" with which to speak the good news. Our whole worship celebration hangs together because we have given ourselves and those who

help us time to plan and create and “play” to make worship a joyous celebration.

When people feel heard, recognized, known and understood; when they recognize their own “language” in worship, they come back! When they hear their “language” in educational settings and in congregational life, God’s people feel honored for their unique particularity; they feel safe to grow relationships, to build community, to work for mission and social justice, and to join their leadership in creating a new group story of Shalom. The result is a holding environment in which all feel welcomed and affirmed.

Go deep, get naked and come clean

Get real, be honest. Show ourselves and be willing to take the risk of being seen. Receive others for who they are. Make a safe space for sharing and talking and listening and struggling. When we share our stories, listen to stories, and invite those stories to change us, they will do that. We are changed in relationship with each other.

Human beings are living texts. Our lives are storied by our families, our

teachers and our friends, the culture in which we grow up. We hear stories about gender and birth order, and responsibility and respect. We read stories about ourselves in history, some true and some not as true. All of these stories shape us, and the task of human development is to edit and redact those stories in our own narrative voice as we make meaning of the stories. People in our lives—mentors, parents, and clergy, for example, help us weave our stories with other stories, and make a narrative whole out of them.

Congregational leaders are story-weavers, friends. Our task is to help our members to have their identity stories—their living texts—transformed by the compelling story of God’s relationship to humanity.

Virgilio Elizondo says the future is mestizo—mixed! Being new people in

the new place, the border space, the mestizo space requires new skills in ministry. It is a great adventure and so wonderfully rewarding to take risks, to try on new ways of being, to create a new story—one woven together in God’s story, an ongoing story that ends with a Pentecost vision of all peoples praising God in one voice! □



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For more information on leadership in multicultural congregations, see www.middlechurch.org or www.middleproject.org for how to attend *The Leading Edge: A National Conference for Leaders Committed to a Multiracial/Multicultural Future*, April 24-27, 2010.

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