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## Treasures in diversity

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## EDITORIAL

# TREASURES IN DIVERSITY

As this issue of JACL, *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, came together and the various authors submitted their papers, one thing became clear. The issue you are holding in your hands is fundamentally about diversity. But before we talk about diversity, I have to tell you a story.

In 1983, my family and I moved to Pakistan to support the educational work among Christians. Not long after our arrival, I wanted to bake bread—not the typical chapatis (unleavened flatbread) that are baked in a frying pan or in a tandoori oven, but the kind of bread that ends up as a loaf that can be sliced. The main ingredient, flour, was readily available in any marketplace. In fact, whole wheat flour is used for chapatis and is what makes them such a healthy staple throughout all of southern Asia.

But there was one problem. Flax seeds, an ingredient I really wanted, were seemingly unavailable in Pakistan. I had searched in the marketplace as well as in the stores that catered to Westerners in the big city of Lahore. One day, while gathering vegetables for lunch, I decided to ask the “dry goods” *walla* or shopkeeper in the little village close to our home if he knew where I could find flax seeds. Now, shopkeepers specialize in their own unique products. And the shopkeeper I knew best was the one who specialized in flour and dal—the hundreds of varieties of lentils and beans used most often for curries that are often scooped up and eaten with chapatis. There were huge, open bags of these products all over his shop. After carefully inspecting the contents of each bag, with the shopkeeper watching and trying to figure out what I wanted, I finally pulled a little plastic bag of flax seeds out of my pocket and showed them to the shopkeeper. I had come prepared for this last desperate attempt at communicating my wishes. I don’t know why I hadn’t shown them earlier. For me, living in a foreign country was some kind of amazing treasure hunt. I somehow believed that most of what we needed could be found if I just stopped hanging onto the belief that I should have brought it from home!

With laughter and hand motions, the shopkeeper clarified that people don’t

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eat flax seeds; only animals do. Finally, after many more hand motions, the shopkeeper agreed to show me where I would find flax seeds. So I followed him down a back alley, through a bunch of other little shops to the “dealer” who sold animal feed. There, in a big sack, were flax seeds. Oh, pure joy! But I only needed a little bit, not a lot—I wasn’t feeding animals! How could I communicate that? Still more hand motions. When the shopkeeper realized I needed such a small amount, he just gave me a nice package—one that lasted almost six years! Such a great treasure had been found in such an unlikely place!

In the last issue of JACL, we published an article about the role and mission of a Christian college. Just a few days ago, we received a request from a university to allow them to share that article with all of their board members. They felt like they had found a treasure in an unlikely place!

In this issue, we celebrate different times and places: China, Africa, Germany, and North America, as well as family issues at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And our authors are Christians studying in the Seminary, working in the U.S. Senate, fundraising for Wycliffe Bible translators, leading church youth ministries, and more! The articles represent diversity. I wonder what you will learn from these different times and places and people? It’s easy to respond with, “Oh, that worked in China, but it won’t work in my country because. . . .” Or sometimes the lack of familiarity with words or concepts or habits of life cause us to shut down rather than open up to the reality of the “other.”

But we live in a global community. The world has shrunk. Ease of travel and various technologies bring us into contact with other tribes on a daily basis. We are not alone in this world! Through looking back at the early church, Wilkens and Sanford (2009) help us understand what it means to be Christian leaders in a diverse community:

Christianity was born in a context in which people of different languages, ethnic backgrounds and religious sympathies were in close proximity, and those people had to make some important choices about how to deal with tribal loyalties. Christianity’s response stands in contrast to modernism’s attempt to level off all cultural differences and postmodernism’s quest to absolutize the tribe. On the one hand, when Paul proclaims, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male not female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28), he points to Jesus as the reality that binds all together and transcends our religious, ethnic, economic, political or gender identities. (p. 158)

When differences of opinion and practice regarding circumcision threatened to disrupt and even destroy the early church, Ellen G. White (1911) tells us that “God Himself had answered the question at issue by bestowing upon the Gentiles the Holy Spirit; and they realized that it was their part to follow the guidance of the Spirit” (p. 196). She further explains that Peter “reasoned that the Holy Spirit had decided the matter under dispute by descending with equal

power upon the uncircumcised Gentiles and the circumcised Jews” (p. 193).

When I see the incredible beauty in the flowers, trees and birds in all of God’s creation, I am certain our Creator and Redeemer is a lover of diversity. I have a feeling there are many hidden treasures yet to be discovered. But it will take discernment. Regarding the dispute over circumcision, Wilkens and Sanford (2009) point out that “in short, they were able to distinguish between a cultural means of expressing faith in God and faith in God itself” (p. 158). God’s people at that time had discernment.

Mosaic art consists of many different pieces of glass or stone or other materials put together to make a beautiful picture. It’s interesting to me how one must stand back a bit to get the full impression of the art; in fact, sometimes the closer we get, the more we lose the beauty of the whole. That happened to me the first time I experienced the Tiffany Chapel in the Morse Museum of American Art in Winter Park, Florida.

For the uninitiated, “in 1893 Louis Comfort Tiffany exhibited a chapel interior at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago that brought him international acclaim few American artists enjoyed at the time” (The Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art, n.d.). After the Exposition, the Tiffany Chapel has gone through a succession of moves, the latest being its “rescue” to the Morse Museum. The Museum’s description gives a mere shadow of the experience of being there:

The chapel’s rich, Byzantine-inspired interior was built up from simple classical forms, columns, and arches, which are huge in size relative to the chapel’s intimate space (1,082 square feet, including the baptistery). Visitors entered another world of intricate, reflective glass mosaic surfaces and light filtered through the intense colors of stained-glass windows—a world that enveloped them and at the same time dwarfed them through its massive architectural forms. It included six ornately carved plaster arches, 16 mosaic columns, a 1,000-pound, 10-by-8-foot electrified chandelier, or “electrolier,” in the shape of a cross, a marble and white glass mosaic altar, a dome-shaped baptismal font, and several windows. . . . The chapel, it was reported at the time, so moved visitors that men doffed their hats in response. (The Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art)

Art leads to a response of awe. Beauty does the same thing, and so does diversity. And there’s always something about light. The way the light shines on the mosaic, or the way the light shines through the glass, increases the beauty many times over. It seems clear that, in a diverse world where opinions sometimes clash, we often need some light—sometimes a lot of light. And we know from the Bible that Jesus is the source of light:

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” (John 8:12, NKJV)

Then Jesus said to them, “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in

darkness does not know where he is going.” (John 12:35, NKJV)

The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned. (Matt. 4:16, NKJV)

And when we receive “light” from Jesus, we are compelled to go out and share it with others:

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matt. 5:16, NKJV)

You are the light of the world. (Matt. 5:14, NKJV)

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Pet. 2:9, NKJV)

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7, NKJV)

We live in a complicated world. Ideas swirl all around and we wonder where God’s light is shining, where the treasures are, where the truth is. Wilkens and Sanford (2009) conclude their comments about postmodernism in this way:

Perhaps the place where this picture comes together most vividly is in Revelation, where we see “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. . . . And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’” (Revelation 7:9-10). In this vision, we see the ultimate episode of a grand Christian metanarrative that stretches from creation, Fall and redemption, and it culminates in this glorious vision of God. . . . However, we should not overlook the fact that this worship of God occurs, not apart from, but within the context of different nations, tribes, peoples and languages. Within this passage, people retain their identity as members of specific nations, tribes and language groups while, at the same time, addressing their worship toward the same God. (pp. 158-159)

And so we can have confidence that God’s light is shining in diverse places and times and will bring a great multitude of diverse groups of people through to His throne of grace. As you read the articles in this issue of JACL, I trust you will sense God’s light shining into your world.

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