

A Journey Towards “Unity in Diversity”

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OUR LADY OF HOPE PARISH of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, located in 5200 North Broad Street was established in 1993 with the merging of three nearby parishes: Holy Souls Parish, St. Stephen's Parish, and Parish of the Holy Child. Given the change in the demographics of the neighborhood, Our Lady of Hope Parish has seen an influx of immigrants, very diverse in culture, language, and history. As a mission church, it is a microcosm of today's multi-racial America where its parishioners are predominantly African-Americans and European Americans, a sprinkling of Africans, a good number of Hispanics and Asians, especially Filipinos. All come together because of a common faith and worship, yet conscious of not knowing each one's culture.



Picture: Representatives of African Americans, Filipinos, & Hispanics/Latinos



Its pastor, Reverend Efren V. Esmilla (pictured, left) with his vision and his ten years' pastoral leadership in the parish, has gradually introduced them to each other thru multi-cultural Masses for the Feasts of the Parish, Pentecost, Divine Mercy, St. Martin de Porres and Christ the King. They partake of the Tables of Faith, Hope, and Love – an agape of cultural cuisine. These intercultural encounters have promoted a desire to go know each other better.

A big step towards ‘the parish - vision of one multi-cultural Eucharistic community living its spirituality of hospitality, reconciliation, and mission to the Church and to the world’ happened when the pastoral lay leaders agreed to a proposal by Fr.

Efren Esmilla to use the USCCB's BICM (**Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers**) 5 Formation Modules for everyone for the next two years in preparation for the 25th Anniversary of the parish in July 2018.



Picture: Fr. Gregory (back row in the middle) & BICM participants

Since October 18 till November 29, 2016, thirty five parish cultural lay leaders gather weekly in the Parish Rectory Conference Room from seven o'clock till nine o'clock in the evening. With the interactive learning process facilitated by a trained Archdiocesan team, they have gained a better understanding of how culture impacts on the difficulties and successes of communications. They

learn new skills towards promoting effective intercultural relationships. Laughter and serious reflection mingle as honest disclosures are shared of feelings, being 'minimalized' as well as experiences of acceptance and support. Their comment: *'This is enlightening.'*

BICM has confirmed the journey of ten years. In Our Lady of Hope Parish, cultural diversity is a gift, not an obstacle! A light and a hope... "unity in diversity" is celebrated!



Pictures, from left to right: Deacon Bill Bradley of the Office of Black Catholics & participants doing a dramatic reading of John 21