

## Diversity Within the Catholic Church

### Ethnic Diversity

Just as all races, ethnicities, and cultures in the world are represented in the population of the United States, so too do they find a home within the Catholic Church. Each group brings its own language, history, customs, rituals, and traditions “for building up the body of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Since persons can only achieve their full humanity by means of culture, the Catholic Church in the United States embraces the rich cultural pluralism of all the faithful, encourages the distinctive identity of each cultural group, and urges mutual enrichment. At the same time, the Catholic Church promotes a unity of faith within the multicultural diversity of the people.

While the influence of Hispanic/Latino Catholics within the Church has been substantial even before the founding of the nation, their increasing numbers and their growing presence in the United States today have a significant impact on the inculturation of the faith in the United States and the continuing formation of a new People of God.

“The historical roots of Black America and those of Catholic America are intimately intertwined.”<sup>2</sup> The experience of slavery has profoundly shaped the lives and culture of African American Catholics. Evangelization has been woven into their story since their arrival in this country, and elements of their culture continue to enrich and enhance the Church in the United States.

The European colonization of the Americas was often harsh and painful for the indigenous peoples. These peoples were more often than not displaced from homelands, subjected to the ravages of war and disease, and ultimately relegated to living on reservations made up of lands that no one else wanted. Nevertheless, Native Americans responded generously to God’s gift of the Christian faith, and his word took root in their cultures. Due to the Church’s pastoral care and evangelizing presence among the Native peoples, the proportion of Native Americans who are Catholics is often higher than other ethnic groups.

Many new immigrants come from Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific Islands, the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe.<sup>3</sup> The Church has a unique opportunity to call these recent immigrants to “conversion, communion and solidarity.”<sup>4</sup> The diversity of ethnicity, education, and social status challenges the Church to integrate the new immigrants in ways that both respect their diverse cultures and experiences of Church and enrich both the immigrants and the Church. The Church of the twenty-first century in the United States will be a Church of many cultures, languages, and traditions—yet one in faith.

1 Eph 4:12.

2 Black Bishops of the United States, *What We Have Seen and Heard* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1984), 17.

3 Cf. USCCB, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2000), 1.

4 John Paul II, *The Church in America (Ecclesia in America)* (EA) (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1999), no. 3.