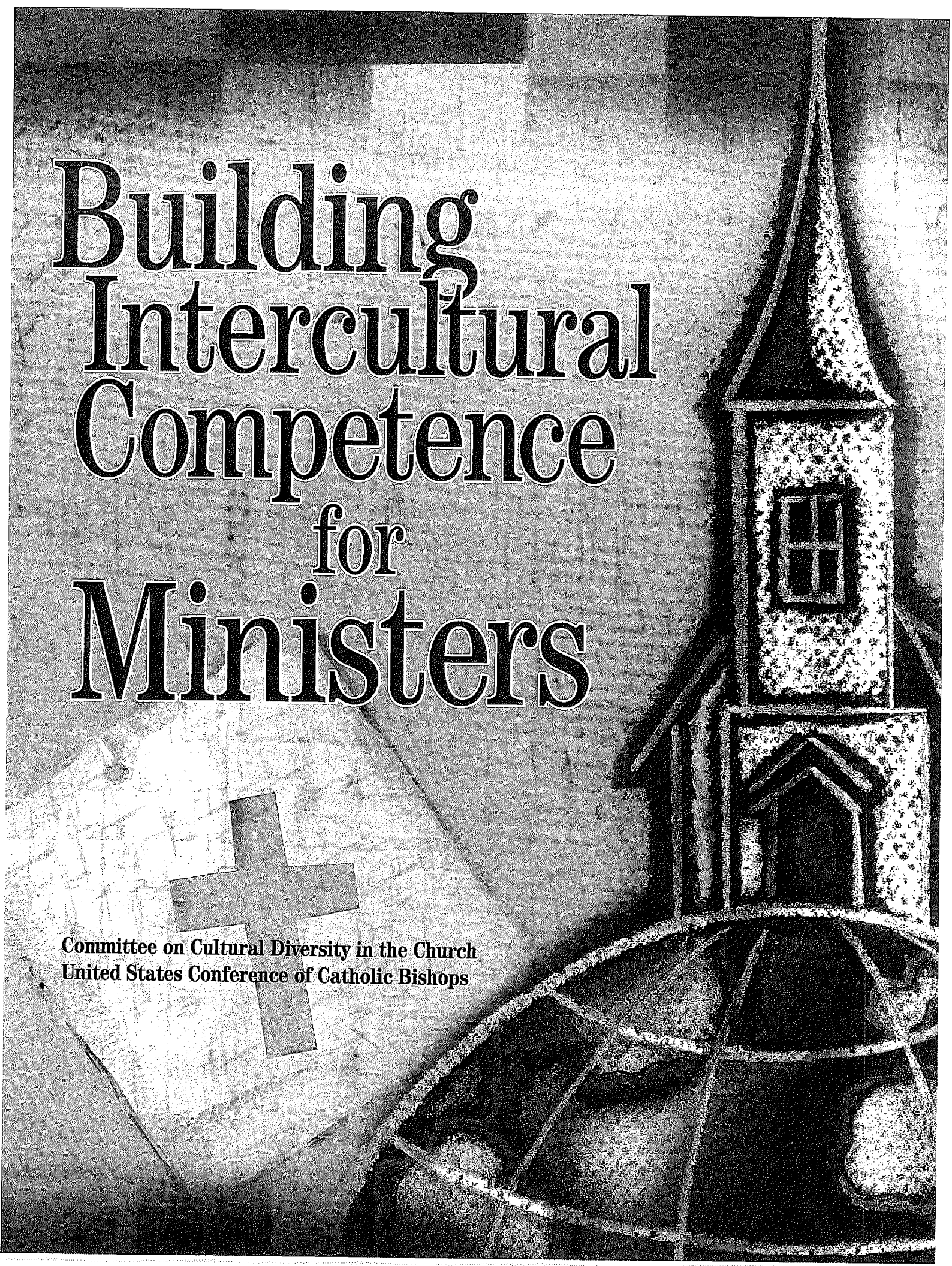
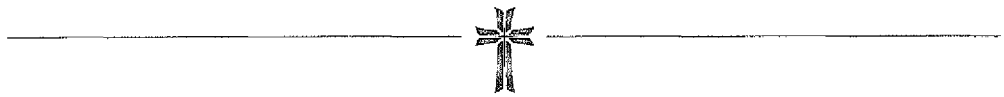
Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers



Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

APPENDIX 1

Intercultural Communication: The Mutual Invitation Process



Respectful Communication Guideline

R: take **RESPONSIBILITY** for what you say and feel, and speak with words others can hear and understand

E: use **EMPATHETIC** listening, not just words but also feelings being expressed, non-verbal language including silence

S: be **SENSITIVE** to differences in communication styles

P: **PONDER** on what you hear and feel before you speak

E: **EXAMINE** your own assumptions and perceptions

C: keep **CONFIDENTIALITY**

T: **TRUST** the process because we are *not* here to debate who is right or wrong but to experience true dialogue

The Invitation Method is a way to include all people in the conversation in a very respectful atmosphere. While each person is speaking, the others listen. No one may interrupt the speaker or jump in to speak without being invited by name. In this method, no one has more authority than anyone else—each person is invited to share, and after sharing that person has the privilege to invite who will share next.

PURPOSE: To ensure that each person in the group is invited by name to share in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

METHOD:

1. The leader clarifies what the group members are being invited to share.
2. The leader gives guidelines about the use of time.
3. The leader may share first or may invite another person by name to share.
4. Who you invite does not need to be the person next to you.
5. After the person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share.
6. If the person invited chooses not to share, the person may simply say "pass" and proceed to invite another to share.

   No explanation is needed or given for passing.
7. The process will continue until everyone has been invited to speak.
8. At that time, any person who passed will be invited again to share. Persons are still free to pass.
9. The main activity of the group is to listen.

—Eric H. F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*

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APPENDIX 3

Developing Intercultural Sensitivity

This presentation aims at helping people track the growth of intercultural sensitivity in their pastoral settings. It largely follows the model developed by Milton Bennett in his essay titled "Toward Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensibility." His model proposes a progressing growth in intercultural sensitivity from high levels of prejudice to healthy interaction.

People unaware or unconnected to other cultures around them are often *ethnocentric*—that is, centered on their own culture as the only valid way to live in the world. To live any other way is deviant or substandard. This is an attitude found among those who are part of a prevailing culture that can afford to ignore other cultures around them. People growing up in a minority culture, on the other hand, are keenly aware of powerful "others" and learn from childhood how to survive in such situations. However, ethnocentrism can also be found among minority cultures and groups.

Bennett's model is intended especially for prevailing-culture individuals wanting to overcome ethnocentrism and develop greater intercultural sensitivity. It is especially useful in ministry settings for working with people who are part of the prevailing culture of the parish or school and feel they are being "invaded" by others. In addition, it can be helpful for all ministry staff members who are trying to understand such reactions and help move people along to greater empathy for others.

Bennett charts six stages on the path from ethnocentrism to what he calls "ethnorelativism." (Note: "Ethnorelativism" is probably not the best word to use in ministry settings because "relativism" connotes indifference. A good substitute would be "healthy interaction" or even "communion.") Bennett's six stages to developing intercultural sensitivity are denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration.

Stage 1: Denial

Denial is a refusal to deal with the issue. It can be dealt with by trying to *isolate* the other culture away from ourselves (by not talking about it) or to *contain* it by seemingly benign stereotypes (such as treating the others as helpless children who cannot be mixed with the "adults").

Sometimes denial takes the form of maintaining a strict separation between ourselves and the other group. An example of this was the practice of setting up "chapels" for African Americans in white parishes.

Stage 2: Defense

When the "others" cannot be kept at arm's length any longer, a defensive attitude may set in. Because this attitude sees the other group as threatening, we have to take steps to defend ourselves. We then demonize members of the other group (see above) or denigrate them by using negative stereotypes.

At the same time, as we demonize or denigrate, we emphasize our own superiority.

Stage 3: Minimization

This is an attempt to minimalize the difference between ourselves and the "others." While such minimization may be well-intended and less adversarial than the first two stages, it is still a tactic to avoid engagement with the "others." Sometimes it does this by trivializing differences, acting as if the differences do not matter when in fact they do determine behavior. It may start from the assumption that culture is just an overlay on biology. Because all peoples share a common biology, the cultural differences are peripheral. Bennett calls this "physical universalism." At other times, a kind of "transcendent universalism" (Bennett's phrase) will be invoked. In church circles, as differences are being addressed, it is not uncommon to hear, "But we are all brothers and sisters in Christ!" This is indeed true, but in this particular setting, it is often a rhetorical stratagem to stop conversation about dealing with differences.

Stage 4: Acceptance

This marks the turning point in the process. In this stage, we move from defending ourselves from the "invading others" to finding ways of living and working together. At this point, difference begins to be valued more positively. We begin to realize that difference is irreducible and can even be helpful.

This step involves learning enough about others to come to respect their *behavioral differences* and realize that although their ways of acting and interacting are different, they have their own integrity. (The parameters presented in the second module of this workbook can be helpful here.) Also, behind those behavioral differences may be *value differences* that configure the world differently from our own. For example, what constitutes "family" is different in individualist and collectivist societies.

Stage 5: Adaptation

The next step after cognitively accepting difference is to take action. This involves adapting our own attitudes and behavior to accommodate the "others." Two adaptations are important here.

The first is *empathy*, or the capacity to feel what others feel and to see in some measure how they see the world. A capacity to experience empathy lays the groundwork for living and working together. Empathy is a little different from *sympathy*, which is the ability to show feelings of togetherness or solidarity toward others but always on our own terms.

The second is *pluralism*, or acknowledging that there are different and legitimate ways of living in the world. (In the context of a community of faith, this means recognizing that there are diverse and legitimate ways of living and even expressing such faith.)

Stage 6: Integration

At this stage, people become genuinely multicultural persons. We appropriate elements of the culture of the other group and make them our own, not in a patronizing, domineering, or colonizing way but by appreciating that their ways enrich our own culture or give better expression to our values. Their ways may address issues that our own culture does not do as well. Such integration makes interacting and appropriating *indispensable* for a fuller sense of life.

Bennett suggests that two outcomes are evident at this stage. The first is a capacity to evaluate behavior in light of its context, knowing that there is more than one perspective on the matter. He calls this "contextual evaluation."

The second demonstrates the capacity to stand outside a culture while having appropriate and effective interaction with it. He calls this "constructive marginality" because we are indeed in the margins of the culture, though we are not necessarily marginalized. We are able to engage the culture in appropriate and effective ways.

While reaching this sixth stage marks a certain completion of a journey from ethnocentrism to being able to work with other cultures well, it does not mark the end of learning about other cultures. This model shows the stages through which people go in becoming genuinely multicultural persons. As such, it provides a way of mapping a parish's or a community's capacity to interact with other cultures, and it can thus help ministers and staff move along to greater intercultural sensitivity.

Resources

Bennett, Milton. "Toward Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensibility." In *Education for the Intercultural Experience*, edited by R. Michael Page. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1993.