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**Edilson Volfe**

**Pastoral Leadership in a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural, Conflict-Driven Congregation:  
A Filipino Case Study**

A Professional Project Submitted to  
The Faculty of Perkins School of Theology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry

Dallas, Texas

May 2019

**Approved:**

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**Pastoral Leadership in a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural, Conflict-Driven Congregation:  
A Filipino Case Study**

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## ABSTRACT

Christ Redeemer was a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural church where the majority of the members were Filipinos. The church experienced way too many conflicts that distracted everyone in the congregation from the real calling to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”<sup>1</sup> The ethos of Christ Redeemer seemed to be driven by conflict, regardless of whether the leadership provided came from a Filipino or a non-Filipino pastor. The congregation fed conflict upon conflict, creating a cycle of tension with little engagement in critical issues in the life of the church. It was very common for Filipinos at Christ Redeemer to hold grudges originating from said conflicts.

This project will attempt to address the questions, “Why is there so much conflict at Christ Redeemer, and why do they occur so often?” and “How might the findings in this project help non-Filipino, as well as Filipino pastoral leaders provide leadership to a church congregation with a majority membership of Filipinos in the religious context of a United Methodist Church in the United States?”

This project will provide non-Filipino, as well as Filipino pastoral leaders with a deeper level of understanding of the Filipino Culture that can enhance their ministry with Filipinos by having insight into the dynamics amongst Filipinos in their relationship with people from their own Culture, as well as Filipinos in their relationship with people beyond their own Culture. Furthermore, this project will demonstrate for pastoral leaders in a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural context working with a Filipino population that being in solidarity with the people as they seek to serve God together is more effective than attempting to resolve their conflicts. That is because there is no set of rules to approach conflict with Filipinos that will work best and, very often, “letting them be” to sort out their own personal and relational conflicts most clearly shows pastoral sensitivity that embodies solidarity with the people as they serve God together.

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<sup>1</sup> The United Methodist Church. What We Believe. The Book of Discipline, Section 1: The Churches, Article 120, “The Mission,” <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/section-1-the-churches> (accessed March 18, 2019).

**Pastoral Leadership in a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural, Conflict-Driven Congregation:  
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**INTRODUCTION**

I am an ordained Elder in the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church in Texas. Elders in our denomination move quite often because we are appointed to the mission field by the cabinet (bishop and District Superintendents). Under normal circumstances, any given appointment may last anywhere from one year to a number of years. At one time, I was the Senior pastor to a small, White, aging membership congregation in a rural area in one of the Districts in the Conference. After that appointment, I was assigned to Christ Redeemer United Methodist Church located in another District in the Conference.

Christ Redeemer was a local, Cross-Cultural, Multicultural United Methodist church located in Townspeople, TX, USA, averaging a 200-membership. Its members and constituents came from different ethnicities for Worship under one roof, including Africans, African-Americans, Caucasians, Hispanics, Cambodians, Vietnamese, Brazilians and Filipinos. The majority of members and constituents were Filipinos, and most of them came from different religious backgrounds other than Methodism. Christ Redeemer experienced way too many conflicts among the members that distracted the congregation from their real calling, that is, to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”<sup>2</sup> And that is unfortunate

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<sup>2</sup> The United Methodist Church. What We Believe. The Book of Discipline, Section 1: The Churches, Article 120, “The Mission,” <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/section-1-the-churches> (accessed March 18, 2019).

because the Reign of God loses when time and resources are wasted on something other than God's people building the Reign of God. In his book, *The Cross- Cultural Process in Christian History*, Walls emphatically says Christians must offer and live out a "credible [theological] praxis" because "if Christians cannot produce a working model in the church, how much have they to say to the wider society?"<sup>3</sup>

The ethos of Christ Redeemer seemed to be driven by conflict, regardless of whether the leadership provided came from a Filipino or a non-Filipino pastor. The congregation fed conflict upon conflict, creating a cycle of tension with little engagement in critical issues in the life of the church. It was very common for Filipinos at Christ Redeemer to hold grudges originating from said conflicts.

This thesis emerged from my experiencing those conflicts in that church as I sought to understand why they happened so often and never seemed to be resolved but rather morphed into new and different issues that generated new conflicts.

This project will attempt to address the questions, "Why is there so much conflict at Christ Redeemer, and why do they occur so often?" and "How might the findings in this project help non-Filipino as well as Filipino, pastoral leaders provide leadership to a church congregation with a majority membership of Filipinos in the religious context of a United Methodist Church in the United States?"

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 114.

In this project, I argue that by knowing the dynamics amongst Filipinos both in their relationship with people from their own Culture, as well as Filipinos in their relationships with people beyond their own Culture, provides non-Filipino as well as Filipino, pastoral leaders with a deeper level of understanding of the Filipino Culture that can enhance their ministry with Filipinos. As the pastor to Christ Redeemer, I learned that it is more effective for pastoral leaders working with a Filipino population in a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural context to be in solidarity with the people as they seek to serve God together rather than attempting to resolve their conflicts. This is so because there is no set of rules to approach conflict among Filipinos that will work best and, very often, “letting them be” to sort out their own personal and relational conflicts most clearly demonstrates pastoral sensitivity that embodies solidarity with the people as they serve God together.

Another purpose of this writing is to reflect upon my experience as the pastor to Christ Redeemer and glean some understanding of the Filipino Culture and the dynamics in the relationships amongst themselves, as well as in relationship to people of other Cultures. The experiential observations described in this work should not be taken as descriptive of all Filipinos.

I found that cultural clashes often happen on different levels when people interact with people of a culture other than their own. This applies in general to human groupings of different cultural backgrounds. In this light, I found that conflicts at Christ Redeemer were common with Filipinos in their relationships, and that most of the conflicts at Christ Redeemer came from the dynamics at play within the Filipino Culture and also when they engaged the other Cultures present in the life of the church and beyond. Most of all, conflicts at Christ

Redeemer predominantly arose from the personality traits of individual Filipinos in that Culture and from Filipinos' personal and communal expectations regarding church life derived from their own church experiences as learned in the Philippines and in the United States. The question of whether the conflicts at Christ Redeemer were generated by such personality traits and occurred because these were Filipino traits, or whether such traits were exhibited by individuals who happened to be Filipinos (i.e., and could have been generated by those with such traits who were NOT Filipinos), is a question I will not attempt to resolve here. I will simply take as my starting point the fact that these traits that led to conflicts were manifested in the concrete individuals I worked with, who were Filipinos. My motivation for undertaking this project to delve further into Filipino sociological history and culture was sparked by such circumstances of being a non-Filipino pastoral leader brought into the midst of those conflicts.



## 1. BRIEF SOCIOLOGICAL HISTORY OF FILIPINOS IN THE U.S.

Evidence suggests Filipinos first settled in what is now the United States of America in places near New Orleans in 1763.<sup>4</sup> The early significant arrivals of Filipinos in the United States took place in the 1830's,<sup>5</sup> settling on the West Coast and Hawaii. Their primary languages were Tagalog and English. After 1899, great numbers of Filipinos migrated to the States to study or to fill agricultural jobs. After WWII, many immigrated as "war brides" of U.S. servicemen and as recruits into the armed forces, but many also came to train as health-care workers. The Filipino population in the United States increased by leaps and bounds over the following years, making the United States home to the largest number of Filipinos abroad. In 2016, the number of Filipinos in the US surpassed 1,942,000.<sup>6</sup> As of 2016, 32% of the Filipino population were accounted for in the greater Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York Metropolitan areas.<sup>7</sup> Today, Filipinos who obtain a Green Card (Lawful Permanent Residence – LPR status) do so through sponsors (family or employment).

The Migration Policy Institute states that Filipinos stand out when compared to other immigrant populations in the United States, observing, "They are more likely than other

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<sup>4</sup> Rick Bonus, *Locating Filipino Americans: Ethnicity and the Politics of Space* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 32.

<sup>5</sup> Carl L. Bankston III, "Filipino Immigrants," <http://www.immigrationtotheunitedstates.org/497filipinoimmigrants.html> (accessed March 18, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, "Filipino Immigrants in the United States," Migration Policy Institute, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/filipino-immigrants-united-states#Distribution> (accessed March 18, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, "Filipino Immigrants in the United States," Migration Policy Institute, [https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/filipino-immigrants-united-states#Age\\_Education\\_Employment](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/filipino-immigrants-united-states#Age_Education_Employment) (accessed March 18, 2019).

immigrants to have strong English skills, and have much higher college education rates than the overall foreign- and U.S.-born populations.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, “Filipinos are also more likely to be naturalized U.S. citizens than other immigrant groups, have higher incomes and lower poverty rates, and are less likely to be uninsured.”<sup>9</sup>

Filipinos are naturally hospitable, flexible, frugal, jolly and grateful; they adapt easily, express the “bayanihan spirit” (help each other out in everything), and have a good sense of humor.<sup>10</sup> First generation Filipinos come from their “Batangas” and “Barangays,”<sup>11</sup> or “municipalities” and “neighborhoods” varying in size in the Philippines. It is common for people to know each other in their small neighborhoods and to know each other’s first names. They do a lot of things in common, just like a big family does. And this family gets ever bigger. When Filipinos meet Filipinos in other countries, it is as if they have known each other forever. They greet each and the next thing they ask is, “Where in the Philippines are you from?” The reason is that their origins give them identity and they even might speak the same dialect. Sometimes people refer to the Philippine language as Tagalog and Filipino. Tagalog is the foundation of the Philippine national language, Filipino. According to Living Language, “There are thousands of loan words in Tagalog, particularly from Spanish, and the use of “Taglish,” the mixing of Tagalog and English, is common, especially in urban areas.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Zong and Batalova, “Filipino Immigrants in the United States.”

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Victorino Q. Abugar, FAQ.Ph, “14 Good Filipino Habits that Make the Philippines a Great Country,” <http://faq.ph/good-filipino-habits-that-make-the-philippines-a-great-country/> (accessed March 18, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> “Barangay: Filipino Settlement,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/barangay> (accessed March 18, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.livinglanguage.com/blog/2014/11/25/tagalog-a-history-of-the-language-philippines/> (accessed May 10, 2019).

Friedman's description of the dynamics of family systems<sup>13</sup> has helped me understand the dynamics of the relationship amongst Filipinos. During my tenure as their pastor, the Filipino population at Christ Redeemer included Filipinos of first, second, and third generations. Many of the Filipinos at Christ Redeemer were nurses, physical therapists, a few doctors, a couple of engineers, IT professionals, musicians, teachers, child care facility workers, and construction workers. Most of these categories of professionals are considered the "brain" of the Philippines. The majority of Filipinos at Christ Redeemer had relatives back in the Philippines, as well as in the United States and/or other countries. Because of Visa issues, some Filipinos are not able to travel back and forth as they wish. Although money can be a constraint when it comes to travelling abroad, Filipinos at Christ Redeemer always seemed to find a way to afford the trip. As we will see elsewhere in this writing, family ties are important for Filipinos and worth any cost.

Filipinos able to travel back to the Philippines bring "pasalubong" (souvenirs) to their families, relatives and friends, as well as send "balikbayan boxes" (boxes packed with goods) to their families and relatives back home in the Philippines.<sup>14</sup> Filipinos also send money back to the home country on a regular basis. Some statistics from the Migration Policy Institute mention that, "In 2017, Filipinos living abroad sent nearly \$33 billion in remittances to the Philippines via

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<sup>13</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), chapter 1.

<sup>14</sup> LiezMediaChannel, "Packing and Securing Balikbayan Boxes," 11/26/2017. YouTube, <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=documentary+on+filipinos+sending+gifts+back+to+the+philippines&view=detail&mid=CA8034F52411EBEB6ABDCA8034F52411EBEB6ABD&&FORM=VRDGAR> (accessed March 18, 2019).

formal channels. Remittances more than doubled in the past decade and represented about 11 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2016."<sup>15</sup>

Filipinos are by nature very ethnocentric. In general, they tend to cluster together and enjoy activities together, such as eating and drinking together for any reason, singing karaoke, attending church, celebrating birthdays, and celebrating special religious holidays such as Easter and Christmas. During Thanksgiving in the United States, nearly two-hundred fifty Filipinos from the Dallas area get together for a Thanksgiving Service at a local church chosen to hold the event. This is one of the many Filipino gatherings I had the opportunity to be part of while I was the pastor to Christ Redeemer. For that celebration, each family brings a dish to share. Very often two or three "Lechons" (roasted pig, a Filipino delicacy) are paid for by different sponsors to be shared amongst all the attendees. One can find lechon at Filipino celebrations around the globe.<sup>16</sup>

This very brief introduction to Filipinos in the U.S. has not contemplated their history, for instance, the Conquistadors and Empires that ruled that country in the past and forever changed who they are and who they are becoming.

Before considering how dynamics in Filipino Culture may have come into play in the conflicts at Christ Redeemer UMC, we will first discuss a theological approach to conflict.

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<sup>15</sup> Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, "Filipino Immigrants in the United States," Migration Policy Institute, [https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/filipino-immigrants-united-states#Age\\_Education\\_Employment](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/filipino-immigrants-united-states#Age_Education_Employment) (accessed March 18, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> C. Layug, "The Historical Lechon," <https://web.archive.org/web/20110719081028/http://www.articledashboard.com/Article/The-Historical-Lechon/811477> (accessed March 18, 2019).

## 2. THEOLOGICAL APPROACH TO CONFLICT

God created the world and everything in it. Then, after creating the world, God sees that it is “good.” In the two descriptions of God creating the world recorded in the book of Genesis, God brings order to chaos and, with God’s word, infuses God’s life into that chaos which, in turn, becomes what we know as the seas, the sky, the stars, etc. This suggests that God is a God of order and creativity. When God creates the human being, God sees that they are “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Conflicts start when Adam feels compelled to eat from the forbidden fruit and gives in (Genesis 3). From there, conflicts have been part of human nature, as if a gap opened between God and humanity, separating us from God, the Creator. One of the first, big conflicts between one human being and another is found in the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4).

From the Hebrew Scriptures to the New Testament, one can see how God has initiated the process of bridging the gap between God-self and humanity as God constantly makes every effort to bring God’s children back to God.

As an example, in Psalm 133:1, King David highlights the fact that living together in unity as brothers and sisters is a good and pleasant thing, indicating that unity is desirable and should be sought after. Amos 3:3 unequivocally declares that two people must agree in order to walk together! This applies to people walking together and upholding a vision and mission by nurturing each other in their discipleship to Christ.

Conflict is possible whenever there are at least two or three people interacting with one another. This is because of the fallen and broken nature of the human race thus making conflict

“part of the human predicament.”<sup>17</sup> I believe there are environments where people seem to live off conflicts because the system they live in is, for some reason, inherently conflictual, places of ministry “mired in controversy” generating “habitual conflict.”<sup>18</sup> In environments like that, where conflicts are continually exacerbated and out of proportion, conflict is pathological.

In the context of discussing conflict resolution between two people in Matthew 18:19-20, Jesus favors agreement. While on the one hand Jesus can be understood to be saying “For where two or three are gathered. . . there you will find conflict!” His words can also be understood as saying something to the effect, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them *to mediate their conflicts and lead them to transformation.*”

On another occasion, while Jesus and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem, they come to a Samaritan village. The disciples are sent ahead of him to prepare for their visit. When the Samaritan villagers do not accept him there, the disciples, enraged, ask Jesus, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (Luke 9:54b). When I read Luke 9:54b, I can almost hear Buber<sup>19</sup> interjecting, “James, John, what is your problem? Get out of this *I-It* position and move on over to the *I-Thou* position right now!” Who has not felt like James and John after being rejected at some point in his or her lifetime? I have, and I would guess that many of us have at times felt like calling on fire from heaven to burn up all the evildoers around us. Thank goodness there is Grace and Mercy!

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<sup>17</sup> Norma Cook Everist. *Church Conflict: From Contention to Collaboration* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), vii.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Buber, *I-Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Touchstone, 1970).

Christians should keep in mind we are the body of Christ comprising different parts, doing different things, and all working together for the good of the whole body (1Cor 12:12; Eph 4:1-3). The focus should not be on the parts by themselves but on the work the parts do together for the wholeness of the body.

A great number of Christian people born in the United States of America romanticize the idea of what a Multicultural church looks like, especially those who have little to no contact with people from a culture different from their own. To that effect, I once heard someone say that a Multicultural church is like “heaven on earth, just what God wants; people from different cultures under one roof worshipping Him.” Very interesting comments! In reality, a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural, religious context presents extra layers of challenges for a church leader.

In churches in which members of one ethnicity constitute majority, the stronger voice will be from that ethnic majority! There may be room for other Cultures to express their religiosity, as well, but the majority will more than likely dictate the rules in the congregation. However, how can this scenario be forestalled? This is precisely what calls for Christian sensitivity and also is a big challenge for a pastor who is called to lead the entire community amidst its differences, to map out certain rules of operation that would be acceptable to the various groups big and small. Intra-religious dialogue is called for in such contexts.

For Branson and Martinez, “the church’s identity and agency should be characterized by reconciliation. Such reconciliation, if it is defined and empowered by the gospel, must be personal, interpersonal, cultural and structural.”<sup>20</sup> I agree with that generalized concept of

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership. A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 12.

reconciliation applied to any church context. Yet, something I cannot come to terms with in Branson and Martinez is their definition of reconciliation based on the Gospel in relation to different Cultures coming together as a sign of God's reconciliation for the world. I disagree with this understanding of reconciliation as being God's ultimate goal for humanity on earth. Take for instance the story of Tower of Babel, "All people on the earth had one language and the same words." That is, there was one language spoken and people understood each other. Then chaos takes place when God mixes up the languages, so they would not understand each other anymore, thus causing them to disperse from there all over the earth. It seems like God's purpose in this passage is to stop humanity from getting too conceited and from trying to be gods themselves. God's purpose has always been to spread God's name to all the world, not just to Israel. By scattering people throughout the world, God may have increased the possibility for God's name to be known in the four corners of the earth.

Another example comes from Pentecost. The Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples and gives them the ability to speak the languages of people from many nations gathered in Jerusalem those days who are able to understand what is being spoken and say, "We hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!" (Acts 2:11 CEB). Pentecost can be interpreted as the reverse of Babel. Whether the disciples spoke the different languages and people heard and understood them or, if the disciples spoke a certain language and people understood it in their own languages, is debatable but the point at Pentecost is what the language conveys, that is, the mighty works of God! That is the uniting element via "language understood" at Pentecost.



Language, also, can be a source of conflict. There are over 120 English translations of the Bible today. Even when people talk to each other via a common language, such as English, for instance, there will be misunderstanding which, in turn, may generate conflicts. My first degree is in languages and literatures. One of the things I will never forget regarding languages is that Translation is limited, and Modulation does the job better. "Translation" is transposing the word-for-word and grammatical structure of a text (spoken, written, signed) in one language into another language for meaning and relevance. And that is what machines are, to some extent, able to do these days. No wonder many translations we see today are what I call Frankenstein translations. That is, words are translated in grammatical patterns into another language in an attempt to convey meaning and relevance. "Modulation," on the other hand and in simple words, is appropriating the core message of a text in the source language and carrying this core meaning and relevance onto the target language in ways that go beyond translation to convey a similar, core message and have a similar, expected impact in the target language. Adventina Putrani, on Vinay and Darbelnet's discussions on approaches to translations, writes that Modulation is "a variation through a change of viewpoint, of perspective, and very often of category of thought" in order to maintain naturalness in times when translators find that literal translation would result in "awkward or unnatural translation."<sup>21</sup> For Grassilli, Modulation "basically means using a phrase that is different in the source and target languages to convey

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<sup>21</sup> Vinay and Darbelnet in Adventina Putranti. "Modulation," <http://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/JOLL/article/download/1115/886> (accessed May 10, 2019), 98-99.

the same idea: *Te lo deajo* means literally *I leave it to you* but translates much better as *You can have it.*"<sup>22</sup>

Sanneh uses the word "Translation" for what I mean by "Modulation," nonetheless he explains, "Lexical resources must be deepened with the force of usage, custom and tradition in order to become meaningful, particularly if we want to represent the dynamic quality of life."<sup>23</sup> Sanneh says there is "ethical, qualitative power" in Translation and "that power may be defined as the capacity to participate in intercultural and interpersonal exchange [...]"<sup>24</sup> I am not disregarding the fact that whether Translation, or Modulation as I call it, builds bridges across Cultures. Remember that the mighty works of God were understood by people of different nations at Pentecost. However, it is in such intercultural and interpersonal exchanges mediated by language that conflicts may arise.

I clearly do not advocate for a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural congregation as the model that God wants for God's church on earth even though Christians in general may believe that this model is what we will have in Heaven, that is, people from every tongue and nation together worshipping the Lamb. In Revelation 7:9a we read, "After this I looked, and there was a great crowd that no one could number. They were from every nation, tribe, people, and language. They were standing before the throne and before the Lamb." Again, while it is important to highlight the fact those people come from every nation, tribe, people, and language, we need to understand what their purpose is, "This is the reason they are before

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<sup>22</sup> Chiara Grassilli, "Modulation," <http://translathoughts.com/2016/05/modulation/> (accessed May 10, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Orbis Books, 2009), 238.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 242.

God's throne. They worship him day and night in his temple..." While many people love the idea of worshipping God in a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural setting, the ultimate purpose is to speak of the mighty works of God and worship God. And that goes beyond Multiculturalism.

I believe having people from different ethnicities worshipping God together as a church is fine, but this should not be the main focus to start a church, *unless the purpose is to start a church that will be Cross-Cultural, Multicultural in its DNA*. If that is the case, the church leaders and congregants will have to "pay attention to cultural characteristics and the work of shaping intercultural life"<sup>25</sup> as to encourage, welcome and honor diversity at that level, a church where people will be intentionally focused on building this Cross-Cultural, Multicultural body of Christ. That means the life of the church must have some "piece of home" for as many different people as possible.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, such cultural characteristics will add many, extra layers of possible conflicts in the life of the church because of the fact different cultures will be encountering each other in the same space and time for a common purpose and bring with them possible, different ways of understanding church life. And that is not to say that fact is a problem in itself. However, let us keep in mind that the ultimate purpose of being the church of God, above all, is to testify to the mighty works of God in a language people will understand. And that will obviously mean possible conflicts, as well.

For Everist, we must learn to live together amid conflict. Conflict is real and seems endless. Collaboration must be both a strategy to use amid conflict, as well as environment that

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<sup>25</sup> Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership. A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 12.

<sup>26</sup> Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Church Leadership*. Rev. Ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 105.

can be established and maintained for long-term life and work together. According to Everist, every person looks at conflict through their lenses and that determines how people will start understanding each other. It is crucial to understand what kind of conflict it is since there are many layers to it. Asking “what is going on and why?” will help peel off those layers. It is important to determine the pattern of conflict so that it can be productive and not contagious or even habitual. Every person has experienced conflict in their lifetime and how we dealt with them then influences how we respond to them today. It is also important to understand the role we play in conflict to discern the appropriate style for effective ministry. Avoiding conflict is not bad in itself. Jesus at times avoided confrontation because it was not his time yet. Avoiding conflict gives time to gather information, to calm and strengthen the community. When stakes are high, and people feel passionate about an issue, they will likely become confrontational. When confrontation is applied moderately and engaged in healthy ways, differences can strengthen the community. Some people are driven by competition and some others are not. Finding the place of competition in a community of faith will foster collaboration. Mutual accommodation is produced where there is reconciliation. Compromise in a community is encouraged because compromise means living *with* one another in the promises of God. When a community strives toward collaboration, the destructive means of dealing with conflict is lessened. Where there is collaboration, people feel valued, engaged, at the same time fatigued and energized. For Everist, collaboration is essential to life together in the church and “can be very effective when a group is committed to working toward a creative, integrative solution to

conflict.”<sup>27</sup> I truly believe collaboration holds promise all the while it takes time. Romans 8:22 mentions the whole creation groans in labor pains and, verses 18-39 empower the congregation working together throughout conflict since they deal with suffering, hope, weakness and prayer, at the same time the Spirit is interceding for us. Romans 8 urges us to keep in mind that in the midst of challenges in life and even persecution, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

The role of the leader in an environment of conflict is crucial. Lovett H. Weems, Jr. provides theological guidance to leadership in the life of the church. For Weems, the task of leadership *is* change, to inspire higher purposes. Leaders are not satisfied with the *status quo*, they are idealists, utopians dreaming of perfection. They must create and guide innovation. Leaders are change masters. Leaders formulate a vision, mobilize people, and maintain momentum. Leaders persevere, learn from mistakes, redirect efforts when necessary, urge people onward, and celebrate minor victories. Leadership is an act of commitment. Leaders, or change masters, stay personally involved. “Leadership does not exist within a person; it resides in the relationship between persons.”<sup>28</sup> Change masters produce more change masters and produce fresh expressions of values. For Weems, “All effective leadership in the church begins with God’s call, God’s people, and a vision of God’s reign.”<sup>29</sup> Christian leadership comes from different sources. First, from God (theological): Our calling from God represents the essence of our spiritual identity. Then, the Church (ecclesial): The church legitimizes leadership power. And

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<sup>27</sup> Norma Cook Everist, *Church Conflict: From Contention to Collaboration* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 146-147.

<sup>28</sup> Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Church Leadership*. Rev. Ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), xi.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

finally, the Context (contextual): Leadership is finally about actual people in actual circumstances at particular times. From Proverbs 29:2, “When the righteous are in authority, the people flourish.”

Four elements of effective leadership are vision, team, culture and integrity.<sup>30</sup>

**Vision** is necessary for change. Vision is a dream, “a picture of what is possible,” and “a picture of a preferred future.”<sup>31</sup> According to Proverbs 29:18a, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Vision is the guiding purpose in the life of the church, and it needs to be discerned, articulated and shared. In his book *Church Leadership* Weems quotes Rueben P. Job,

*Vision is a gift from God. It is the reward of disciplined, faithful, and patient listening to God. Vision allows us to see beyond the visible, beyond the barriers and obstacles to our mission. Vision “catches us up,” captivates and compels us to act. Vision is the gift of eyes of faith to see the invisible, to know the unknowable, to think the unthinkable, to experience the not yet. Vision allows us to see signs of the kingdom now, in our midst. Vision gives us focus, energy, the willingness to risk. It is our vision that draws us forward.*<sup>32</sup>

**Team** - When a vision is taken up and carried out in light of 1Corinthians 12:18-21 (body and its parts), you are able to build strong teams, treat everyone with respect, involve people, foster collaboration, strengthen others through sharing power, there is communication, you are present with the people, you recognize people, develop others, and love the people.

**Culture** – By culture, and more specifically church culture, Weems means, “ the values that are shared by the people in a group and that tend to persist over time even when group

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<sup>30</sup> Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Church Leadership*. Rev. Ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 18-19.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 24.

membership changes.” And he adds, “every congregation has a unique culture.”<sup>33</sup> A powerful advice Weems gives pastoral leaders in their new church settings is to come not as experts but as learners. In a Multicultural ministry, the life of the church must contain some “piece of home” for as many different people as possible.

**Integrity** is the impeccable ethical standards indispensable to credibility. Integrity has to do with consistency between articulated values and behavior, the “operating capital” leaders draw from to advance the vision, the “ethical proof” of the leader and organization, involving also personal integrity and creditworthiness. Integrity in church has more to do with the way we welcome people than it has to do with rules and regulations in the life of the church.

Starting in chapter 3, we will discuss the possible sources of conflicts at Christ Redeemer as these emerged from the Filipinos’ religious experience and background.

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<sup>33</sup> Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Church Leadership*. Rev. Ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 82.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF SOURCES OF CONFLICT: FILIPINOS AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

The Philippines is the only Christian nation in Asia.<sup>34</sup> Catholics are in the majority with 70% of the population, followed by Protestant Christianity (17%), other religions including Hinduism, Judaism, the Baha'i Faith, Indigenous Beliefs, other Christians, and Atheists (6.6%), Islam (5-10%, concentrated on southern islands), Iglesia Ni Cristo (2%), and Buddhists (2%).<sup>35</sup> Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism are influences from the Chinese minority. Before the arrival of Christian missionaries and members of other faith traditions, Filipinos believed a pantheon of gods, spirits and creatures, with reward or punishment after death depending on one's behavior in this life.<sup>36</sup>

Every person growing up is exposed to some sort of religious life, whether formally or informally, regardless of his or her location. Filipinos are not different. When Filipinos immigrate to another country, they bring their previous religious experiences embedded in their ethnic Culture. Branson and Martinez observe that when nineteenth-century immigrants came to the United States, "they tended to bring their ethnic-specific religious expressions with them."<sup>37</sup> That means that, once they arrived in the United States, some people would cluster together with other people who shared their beliefs, thus forming their own, religious

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<sup>34</sup> Jack Miller, "Religion in the Philippines," Center for Global Education, <https://asiasociety.org/education/religion-philippines> (accessed March 18, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> Diana Anthony, "Religious Beliefs in the Philippines," page last updated on 11/14/2018, World Atlas Society, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-the-philippines.html> (accessed March 18, 2019).

<sup>36</sup> Miller, "Religion in the Philippines."

<sup>37</sup> Branson and Martinez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 13.



denominations, while others created joint structures at the same time having their differences clearly defined.

As a denomination, The United Methodist Church has its bylaws and ways of understanding and doing church. Depending on their age, when Filipinos immigrate to the United States, they also bring their life-long, religious experiences and expressions with them wherever they are in the country. That is a fact. Problems emerge when Filipinos (or members of any ethnic group for that matter) want to impress their religious background upon a denomination such as The UMC in the United States that does not recognize or even look like what they had known in their previous religious life back in the Philippines. That can become a source of conflict in the life of the church in the U.S. Take for instance the celebration of “Simbang Gabi.”<sup>38</sup> Simbang Gabi is a Catholic Novena celebrated nine days before Christmas in the Philippines in honor of Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ. While the Methodist Church in the Philippines holds Simbang Gabi for their church members, that does not hold true in The UMC in the United States. In this connection, it is incumbent upon the UMC community in the US to welcome and acknowledge the differing cultural traits of their immigrant brothers and sisters as to allow the latter to worship in that cultural context rather than imposing pre-existing Western-based cultural norms on them. That helps with the whole issue of “inculturation” as a reaction to the colonial dominance of Western Christianity. That means, unless the religious tradition of Simbang Gabi, as the aforementioned example in this case, is established as an

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<sup>38</sup> Maricel Eballo and Arnulfo V. Fortunado, “Simbang Gabi, Pre-dawn Masses, Prepare for Christmas in Philippines,” Catholics and Culture, updated June 20, 2018, <https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/philippines/christmas-epiphany/simbang-gabi> (accessed March 18, 2019).

additional celebration in the life of a particular UMC in the States, people will not recognize it or even be aware that such a celebration called Simbang Gabi exists.

Christ Redeemer held Simbang Gabi at the time I started my appointment. The Filipinos told me Simbang Gabi was celebrated in the Philippines and they maintained that tradition at Christ Redeemer. Very soon after I became their pastor, some of the Filipino church leaders approached me to ask if we could either do away with Simbang Gabi or, at least, shorten the number of days to maybe three or four days, instead of holding nine days of celebration. They told me that nine days of celebration was too much and that people got tired, especially the ones providing leadership in Worship during all those nine nights. Based on that request, I started asking people in the congregation, people from all the Cultures represented, but especially the Filipinos, for their opinion on the matter. After all, it was their tradition we were talking about. I spoke individually with most people in church about shortening the days from nine to four. From those, 99% indicated it would be a good change. So, I had the Worship Committee prepare a proposal to bring to the Administrative Council to be put to a vote. That was when I learned a very important lesson about the Filipino decision-making process.

The Administrative Council met and one of the items on the agenda was the proposal to shorten the celebration of Simbang Gabi from nine to four days. Based on my conversations with them on an individual basis, I truly believed that was something the Filipinos wanted. When the topic came up, all sorts of comments and emotions arose, and I was baffled. It felt like we had just upset the beehive and the bees were attacking. I learned that day that what one Filipino says in private he/she will deny or switch his/her thoughts and decision based on the thoughts and decisions of the larger group. People in general do not want to lose face and

they do not want to be “the odd one out” who disagreed with the group and risk being ostracized later on, and that trait can be strongly observed with Filipinos. The end of the story is that, because of the presence of different Cultures represented at the table and because there was a strong push from some Filipino Council members to shorten the days for Simbang Gabi, the committee voted in favor of shortening the days. However, I was about to learn another important lesson from that decision.

I learned that people everywhere want to have their voices heard and when they believe it was not, something goes awry. Filipinos seem to display that trait in sensitive and expressive ways. By that I mean, from my observations of Filipinos at Christ Redeemer, they either got their way or they got upset with me for a long time. One particular Administrative Council member, Mrs. Cruz, who was outvoted on the Simbang Gabi proposal got so upset that she decided not to talk to me any longer. Yet another lesson I learned from that decision was the fact that Filipinos at Christ Redeemer United Methodist Church did not quite understand how the members on the Administrative Council make decisions for the church and the fact that a particular committee spoke for the local church. Mrs. Cruz fought the decision by badmouthing me to people in the congregation and beyond. In her mind, it was my fault the number of days we would celebrate Simbang Gabi at Christ Redeemer in the future would be four days instead of nine. A handful of other members in the congregation were upset about the decision, as well, but not to the point of avoiding me altogether. In order to help with the

change and restore the homeostasis of the congregation in that context, among other approaches, I applied Osmer's Practical Theology<sup>39</sup> technique as outlined below.

First, employ **the Descriptive-Empirical Task**: Gathering information that will help the people in the congregation discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations, or contexts in order to understand where people are coming from and where the church is at at different times and in the given circumstances is crucial. Listening is vital at this stage. It is important to ask questions such as, "What is going on here?" in order to meet people where they are, thereby respecting their uniqueness and otherness. One must keep in mind that people are "living documents" which means they have their own, separate journeys in life. Understanding the different "church models" is also helpful in this step.

Second, employ **the Interpretive Task**: Draw on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why patterns and dynamics are occurring. The question to ask here is, "Why is this going on?" This will enable the leaders of the church to identify the important issues people are struggling with and draw on theories that allow them to understand these issues. In mapping these issues, it is necessary to use wise interpretive guidelines in order to differentiate between theory and the reality it is mapping. Wesley's Quadrilateral (Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Experience) can be useful here.<sup>40</sup> It is important to keep in mind people need help today, not tomorrow. Life can be a moving target, filled with uncertainties. It is thus essential to help people with wise guidance so that they will be able to

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<sup>39</sup> Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> Alan K. Waltz, *A Dictionary for United Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), quoted by The United Methodist Church, "Wesley Quadrilateral," <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/wesleyan-quadrilateral>. (accessed March 18, 2019).

make sense of the circumstances of their lives and the world. Techniques alone will not suffice. This approach will need good character, reflective judgment, and a sense of timing.

Third, employ **the Normative Task**: Use theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations, or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide your responses, and learn from “good practice.” The question to ask here is, “What ought to be going on?” Seek discernment from God, that is, seek God’s guidance amid circumstances, events, and decisions of life. First admit “we don’t know,” and then actively seek God’s will. Keep in mind God is the Redeemer, that God loves the world and enters into human suffering to bring good out of evil. Our human response should be gratitude, trusting faith, acknowledging sin, and not relying on our own moral righteousness.

Forth, employ **the Pragmatic Task**: Determine strategies of action that will influence members of the church in ways that are desirable and enter into a reflective conversation with the “talk back” emerging when they are enacted. The question here is, “How might we respond?” Applying Osmer’s “Three forms of Leadership”(p. 176), will help in this process: Task Competence (excel in tasks), Transactional Leadership (trade-offs), and Transforming Leadership (deep change). If you want change, you must ask ask this question: “Change to what end and for what purpose?” (p. 183). The approach, Servant Leadership, is based on Christ’s servant leadership model. The Cross is the norm and pattern. “The Lord is a servant, and the Servant is the Lord,” a big reversal. It is crucial to discern whether the congregation needs a major jolt or having incremental changes that will impact the whole system would be more effective.

In the days and months following that decision, feeling the pressure from the few church members who were disgruntled, I helped the congregation understand how decisions are made in The United Methodist Church in the United States. I found the best approach to the whole conflicting situation was to listen to the concerns and expectations of the few disgruntled church members, based on their previous religious experiences in the Philippines and elsewhere, and to provide pastoral care to those who were feeling hurt. In this specific situation with Mrs. Cruz, I called her phone number several times and left messages. I came by her house with flowers and knocked on the door. I know someone was inside the house, but no one answered the door. And a more powerful and sacred moment in my interaction with Mrs. Cruz and her family prior to this conflictual situation, I remember holding her son's hand and praying for him as he took his last breath in a hospital bed. Mrs. Cruz, however, would avoid me in church when she saw me. As I started understanding the Filipino Culture a little more, I realized that there were times in those days when, in order to be in solidarity with those few, I simply had to "leave them be" to sort out their own struggles in light of that particular change that had occurred, and other conflictual situations, as well.

Chapter 4 will help us better understand the family dynamics, as well as the social dynamics, of Filipinos.

#### 4. DESCRIPTION OF SOURCES OF CONFLICT: FILIPINOS AND FAMILY DYNAMICS, FILIPINOS AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS

My observation and perception are that there is no such thing as one Filipino existing by himself or herself when I compare them to the individuality and oftentimes sense of entitlement a person born in the USA claims and demands for himself or herself. It is clear to me Filipinos place value on the family unit and friends instead of an individual. Filipinos move in clusters. As the saying goes, it does take a village to raise a child in the Filipino Culture. Filipinos see themselves as “WE,” not as “I.” In general, Filipinos will not say, “I am,” but “We are,” or, more specifically, “I am in us.” If we think in terms of Bowen’s<sup>41</sup> differentiation of self theory, Filipinos are extremely enmeshed with each other, similar to the ways in which Brazilians can be very much enmeshed in their relationships, as well.

In his book, “Where Angels Dare to Dance, Dr. Gilliam cites Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, who observe, “To be is to be related, for relationship is the essence of existence... Nothing is itself without everything else.”<sup>42</sup> Maybe Filipinos, similar to African Cultures, echo what Donna Hicks says in her book about the most important thing in relationships, that is, to “recognize that the most elevated experience of dignity is achieved in connection with others, where I’s converge to become We.”<sup>43</sup> Likely, Donna Hicks is not talking about Bowen’s “self-differentiation” concept.<sup>44</sup> Rather, her point is the need for people to take on the “I-Thou”

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<sup>41</sup> The Bowen Center, “Differentiation of Self,” <https://thebowncenter.org/theory/eight-concepts/> (accessed March 18, 2019).

<sup>42</sup> W. Craig Gilliam, *Where Angels Dare to Dance: Anxiety and Conflict in Congregational and Organizational Life* (Washington D.C.: Just Peace, 2013), 8.

<sup>43</sup> Donna Hicks, *Dignity: The Essential Role It Plays in Resolving Conflict* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 157.

<sup>44</sup> The Bowen Center, “Differentiation of Self.”

stance in their relationships, something that is necessary beyond understanding of self-differentiation concepts. Regardless of whether people are “self-differentiated” or “enmeshed,” Donna Hicks is affirming the fact that people need to relate to one another on an “I-Thou” stance. Yet, I wonder how much Filipinos are able to relate on the basis of an “I-Thou” position given their being so enmeshed with each other. Or maybe the approach to understanding their interrelationships should differ from that suggested by the self-differentiation theory.

A very interesting trait in the kinship relationship Filipinos have with each other is the fact they treat each other like a big family.<sup>45</sup> Older sisters are called “Ate” and older brothers “Kuya.” However, “Ate” is also used for older female relatives, for older female friends, or just as a sign of respect toward an older, same generation, female person. Similarly, “Kuya” is also used for older male relatives, or for older male friends, or simply as a sign of respect toward an older male person of the same generation. Amongst Filipinos, the words “Ate” and “Kuya” are largely used. This is like meeting someone for the first time, someone who is a bit older than you, and immediately calling her “Aunt,” or him, “Uncle.” Koreans similarly very often call each other “cousin,” even if they are not related. Hispanic persons also call each other “cousin” (primo/prima) or “brother/sister” (hermano/hermana), and “Uncle” (tio) and “Aunt” (tia). These cultural practices posed a real challenge for the health caregivers at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, where I worked as a Resident Chaplain for a year, when we had to identify a patient’s next of kin depending on their culture.

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<sup>45</sup> Chara Scroope, “Filipino Culture,” Cultural Atlas, <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/filipino-culture/filipino-culture-core-concepts#filipino-culture-core-concepts> (accessed March 18, 2019).



When church members wanted to talk to their pastor at Christ Redeemer, they would come in twos or threes. Hardly ever did one church member speak with me by herself or himself on matters of the church and interpersonal relationships. One of the reasons for this was they needed the extra support. Pastors are placed on a pedestal in the Filipino Culture and talking to a pastor can be intimidating for them. Another reason they wanted the extra person in the room was they wanted a witness to the conversation.

Filipinos move in clusters. One time, the choir members at Christ Redeemer decided to go on a mission tour to Europe. If you have ever flown internationally, you understand how the check-in process works and the fact that in order for things to go smoothly you must allow yourself plenty of time, from the time you arrive at the airport to the moment you are in your seat on the plane, ready for take-off. Though I did not sing on the choir, I was allowed to come along as one of their spiritual leaders (there is more to this story that explains why I say, "I was allowed," which was a point of contention, but I will not describe it here). Twenty-five choir members were expected to go on that tour. Of those, three were Africans and they were on the tour, as well. Since my wife Daniele was a choir member, we got ready for the trip and showed up at the airport together. As we arrived at the check-in area, we immediately saw some of the choir members clustered together nearby. The choir director had not arrived yet. I asked if they had checked in yet. The answer, from one of the choir members was, "Pastor, we are going to do the check-in together. If you want, you can go ahead and do your check-in. We are going to wait for everyone to get here first." International flights are almost invariably packed, and something always goes differently from what was originally planned. My rationale at the moment when my wife and I arrived at the check-in area and saw the choir members waiting to

begin the check-in process for an international flight was, the sooner we were all checked in, the faster we would all be onboard. This does not mean we would not wait for everyone to check in. After all, that was a Mission Trip of the church, so of course, we would make sure everyone was accounted for.

As noted above, Filipinos move in clusters. Well, if some of us on the choir trip were going to cluster together, we might as well *all* cluster together, right? So I thought. The caveat is, if you are not a Filipino/a, you may be left behind because you are not part of the cluster. On that same choir Mission Trip, when we arrived at one of the destinations, we gathered at night to debrief and go over the logistics for the next day. We had decided we would all gather in a small room the hotel had available and do the head count at 7 a.m., before proceeding to breakfast. At 6:40 a.m., all the Filipinos were gathered in that small room, and our two African sisters were present, too. Markus, our African brother, had not showed up yet. The Filipinos started becoming impatient and wanted to go ahead and have breakfast without Markus. At 6:50 a.m. Markus was not with us yet and the Filipinos grew even more impatient. I then raised my voice, enough so that everyone in our group could hear, “Did we not agree last night to wait for everyone to show up, do the head count, then we all would go have breakfast together? We *are* going to wait for Markus and then we will go for breakfast together as we agreed last night!” The Filipinos did not like that at all. A couple of minutes later, Markus showed up. We did the head count and moved on to the breakfast area. Here one may wonder, would the same situation be conceivable without the cultural labels? I.e., if a group had an appointment to go to breakfast, and someone was late, irritation would of course be a natural and expected

reaction, and some would be impatient? Perhaps so. Then, what if Markus was a Filipino? Would the situation have played out a little different?

Thinking back on that situation, could we not have just moved on to breakfast and then I, as their pastor, could have taken the time to check on Markus while everyone else was self-serving their breakfast? Yes, but I wanted the Filipinos to honor the agreement we all had made the night before and also was thinking about the “cluster together” thing, trying to be in line with the Filipino mentality! Well, that was the day I learned, if you are not Filipino, you may be left out of said “clustering together.”

## **HOSPITALITY**

Hospitality is extremely important for Filipinos. It is in their nature to offer you hospitality and try to make you feel at home. One of the first things they will do to welcome you is to offer you their food. A Filipino gathering is not genuinely Filipino without food. As a matter of fact, there is no such thing as a Filipino gathering if there is no food involved. Some of their favorite foods are: Pancit,<sup>46</sup> Adobo,<sup>47</sup> and Lechon.<sup>48</sup> Lechon is reserved for large gatherings and special events because it consists of the whole pig roasted on a skewer. Obviously, there are other foods in the Filipino cuisine, but you will find these in most Filipino gatherings, whether small or large. The women and the men will cook, and they will bring their pots to the

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<sup>46</sup> Nancy Reyes Lumen, “Republic of Pancit,” Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, January 2, 2005, <https://pcij.org/stories/republic-of-pancit/> (accessed March 18, 2019).

<sup>47</sup> Cecile C. A. Balgos, “The Tastes that Bind,” Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, April 2, 2005, <https://pcij.org/stories/the-tastes-that-bind/> (accessed March 18, 2019).

<sup>48</sup> Layug, “The Historical Lechon.”

gathering to share. They will insist you go for seconds and thirds. At the end, when everybody has had enough, they will insist you bring food home. Suggestion: Accept whatever leftover food is given you to bring home as a courteous gesture towards the one offering you the food.

As a pastor and from my experiences traveling around the world, I have learned that hospitality should not be based solely on what you can offer, but also and especially on what the guest needs and somewhat expects. One day I was attending a cross-disciplinary training session on hospitality at one of the Baylor Hospitals in the Dallas area and one of the speakers highlighted the Filipino hospitality as THE way to be hospitable toward people. I scratched my head and was thinking for a moment. I did not speak up then because the training was coming to a close and we would not have the proper time to discuss the matter further. For me, while the Filipino hospitality is a good thing it can be imposing to the point of becoming annoying and unwelcome at times. It can become just too much to bear, sometimes, but Filipinos do not realize that because it is something ingrained in their Culture and thus they may be unable to assess whether their hospitality is just enough or overbearing. Do I want to eat all the different foods offered? I may try their different cuisine delicacies, but I do not want to feel obligated to try them all. Can I leave some of that food on my plate if I do not feel like eating it all? You might hear someone say, "You did not like it, did you?" because you left food in your plate. Parents will eat their kids' leftovers so that it will not go to waste. Coming from the Brazilian Culture, I understand the Filipinos' offering you food to bring home because we sometimes have similar behavior in Brazil. However, I do not want to feel obligated to bring home leftovers if I do not want to. In the U.S., when there are leftovers, each person who brought their food will gather their utensils and leftover food upon departure, and bring them back home with

them or dispose of it altogether. In the U.S., we might make leftovers available for people to bring home but still allow for them to feel comfortable in their decision. It seems to me that saying “no” to such an offer in the Filipino Culture – and in many other cultures, such as the Brazilian, Arab, or middle-Eastern Cultures - can be taken as a sign of disrespect. It can certainly cause disappointment in the one who offers, so the question for the person who receives the offer is which to value more - one’s convenience or inconvenience (in having to take home food that one does not really want, but pleasing the host, or declining the offer, and disappointing the host).

Food can be a source of conflict, too.

When I started my appointment at Christ Redeemer, as people lined up to get their food, I would just stand around, visiting with people. One person after another insisted I went on ahead to get my food because I was “the pastor of the church” and the pastor “should go eat first.” Since I was learning my way around the church and its members, I believed I should listen to them and go ahead of the line to get my food. For some time that is exactly what I did at lunch time. One day, perhaps not even a year into my appointment, as I was making my way ahead of the line to get my food, thinking I was doing what was expected of the pastor to do during lunch time, one of our church leaders looked at me and said, in a very clear and convicting way, “Pastor Ed, you are the pastor of the church. You should be the last one in line so that all the members can go on first and get their food first...” I stopped in my tracks. I was taken aback in total confusion. I did not know what to do or what to feel. I slowly turned away from the head of the line and headed away from the food line altogether. I cannot exactly recall what I did after that. But one thing I know, I never went on ahead of the food lines again. I still

stood around visiting with people in line whenever possible. Very often I would be the last person in line for food. People would still insist I went on ahead but I never did after that incident. Very often, I would wait for everyone to go get their food first and then I would come to the kitchen only to find out there was no more food left. And yes, I would go hungry for the day unless I had stashed a snack away somewhere in my office for situations like this which, unfortunately, repeated over and over again. It was very common for me to stay at the church until around 5 or 6 p.m. on Sundays on a regular basis because of the needs of the church. This entire cluster of incidents about lining up for food is a good item for reflection as a leader of a group. Of course others would say, "Pastor, go ahead." And a Pastor may well take this at face value and go ahead and take food first. But even upon being invited to go ahead, if a Pastor declines and lets others go ahead, would they see that Pastor as more Christ-like? (First shall be last, last shall be first). Perhaps this is a point for reflection on "Pastor as Leader."

What is eaten can also be a cause of contention. Filipinos eat a lot of fish, chicken and pork. From my tenure as pastor to Christ Redeemer, from my trips to the Philippines and from sharing the table with Filipinos around the world where I have been, I believe I am yet to meet a Filipino who is a vegetarian. That is not to say there are no vegetarian Filipinos, though, and in no way will I generalize that. Thinking about one being a vegetarian and our gatherings at Christ Redeemer, every Sunday the members would bring food to share at the end of the morning Service. Our eldest daughter, who was a vegetarian at the time, would go hungry unless we brought vegetarian food for her. Very often she would have rice, fruit and vegetables if these were available from the potluck. She always felt misplaced during lunch time for vegetarianism

did not seem to be a concern amongst the Filipinos we shared the table with over the years at Christ Redeemer and at other Filipino encounters and gatherings in the US and abroad.

Filipinos also love to get together for Karaoke. You will find Karaoke stations in many of Filipinos' homes. They can spend hours together singing, drinking, eating, and enjoying themselves with a mic in their hands. If you are a fan of Karaoke, jump right in.

When you visit a Filipino home, be prepared to take off your shoes at the door and walk barefooted in the host's house. When you enter a Filipino home, you will see lots of pairs of shoes together from family members and friends visiting. They will not be mad at you if you do not take your shoes off, but it is a sign of respect toward their Culture if you do. Same trait in the Japanese Culture.

Filipinos are very sensitive about and concerned for their appearance. Their Culture places a high regard on people with a fairer complexion and with a nose that is not flat. When I visited the Philippines for the first time, I had the chance to go into small convenience stores to buy snacks and anything else I needed. At one of those stores, I came across a bar soap that caught my attention. I read the label that had the word "white" on it. I asked one of our church members who was next to me what that meant, and he said, "This soap, pastor, is to whiten the skin." Filipinos' skin is normally dark, and different shades of dark. That bar soap I came across supposedly whitens the skin of the user. On billboards spread throughout the Philippines, you see fair-skinned Filipino and Filipina models, with straight noses. In their own words, "The dark-skinned models are not attractive." It is as if people with dark skin in the Philippines are not fit to be models and will not "sell the product," thus making dark-skinned

color Filipinos/as a subclass of people for that purpose. This all affects a Filipino's confidence and worldview as a person. That reminded me of when only skinny models appeared in advertisements in the U.S. some years ago. This is something to keep in mind when interacting with Filipinos, that is, the way they see their physical appearance in relation to each other and in relation to the rest of the world.

Filipinos will, in general, place high value on material things that can be purchased because such things display a decent, "financial status" or, at least, will allow one to fake it. Because the Philippines was colonized by different countries throughout its history, and due to constant corruption in the political system in the Philippines, most Filipinos in that country live in poor conditions and, if they can do something to give themselves a sense of pride - such as owning an expensive item - they will go for it. For instance, sporting an expensive car or an expensive woman's purse, with the right attire, will send the message that the person who "owns" such things is an important person and deserves attention. Similar behavior happens in Brazil, where people dress up to go to shopping malls, whereas here in the U.S. people may even wear their pajamas to go shopping without any worries about what other people will think of them. In Brazil, a person would never, ever, dare go to a shopping mall dressed in their pajamas!

## **RESPECTING THE ELDERS**

Filipinos respect their elders. To be an elder in the Filipino Culture means you have more experience and wisdom. Filipinos express respect for their elders by addressing them with "po"



(the Tagalog equivalent for sir/madam). In Filipino culture, an honoring gesture known as “Mano po,” or Pagmamano in Tagalog, is performed as a sign of respect to elders and as a way to request a blessing from the elder. The word “mano” is the Spanish word for “hand.” It is similar to hand-kissing. The person greeting the elder bows forward and grabs the hand of the elder and presses his or her forehead on the elder’s dorsal side of the hand. This is done more often in family settings but also in church and other settings, especially because the children are expected to greet the elderly.

In a church setting, a Filipino elder may ask the blessing of the pastor by addressing the pastor with “po” and sometimes grabbing the pastor’s hand as a sign of respect and also asking for a blessing, even if the pastor is a younger person. That has to do with respect toward the office of the pastor. It was very common to have elders at Christ Redeemer approach me, greet me with “po” and grab my hand for a blessing. Similarly, out of respect, I would reply with “po,” grab their hand and place it on my forehead. Parents brought their children to greet the pastor with “mano po” all the time.

I am currently appointed as Associate Pastor at First United Methodist Church Plano, a diverse congregation with different cultures represented. At the end of the services, I stand at the door to greet people. The Filipino members and guests greet me with “Kumusta po?” (Sir, how are you doing?), and at times take my hand and place it on their foreheads. I reply with, “Mabuti po” (Doing well, sir/madam) or simply “Mabuti,” if the person is younger than me or same age. When an African woman passes by, she brings her two hands together as in a clasp, slightly bows her head down and leans forward, at the same time flexing her legs bringing her body a little lower than mine, and with a smile asks for a blessing. The Korean couple, one after

the other, the woman first, puts out her right hand to greet me and the left hand holding her right hand underneath, slightly flexes both of her legs to bow in front of me while leaning towards me for about 30-45 degrees, then saying, "Kamsahamnida" (formal for "Thank you"). The husband comes by and does similar gesture. And I reply in the same manner to both by mirroring their gestures and words. The Indian family comes by with a big smile on their faces and say, "Good morning, pastor!" To which I reply, "Good morning!" To the church German lady I say, "Guten Morgen." To the young African American guy, I say, "What's up, bro?" With some children I fist bump and make a whooshing sound as I pull back my hand wiggling my fingers, or I simply high-five them. With some people, I hold their hand with both of my hands, look them in the eyes, and wish them a blessed Sunday. With a particular elderly, White couple, a hug is always in order. I noticed this elderly woman's perfume gets stuck on my suit after she hugs me. Her husband wants a hug, too. I noticed an elderly, White woman whose fingers are crooked so when she comes around to greet, I gently grab her hands with both of my hands, look her in the eyes, and with a smile bless her day. She smiles back at me. There are about three elderly women in the church whose fingers are crooked, more than likely from a stroke. Some of the young adult couples stop by to greet and I say, "Whattup?" and sometimes give them a hug, and a smile. Everyone is different. Everyone comes from his or her own culture. Everyone is a child of God. And I get to serve Christ with them in this wonderful church called FUMC Plano!

Rhodes observes that, sometimes it is not problems to be solved that generate friction or misunderstandings in a diverse congregation, but simple factors such as how to greet members of a diverse population. He shares, "During my first year at Culmore, one of the most

perplexing issues I faced was how to greet my parishioners properly. Should I shake hands, should I bow, or should I give them a big ol' east Tennessee hug?"<sup>49</sup> And he struggles on further, "How close should I stand? Should I look someone directly in the eyes, or should I avert my eyes?"<sup>50</sup> But, as he urges readers to keep in mind, people will appreciate you, even your small gestures, by which you will communicate your willingness to learn, whether a greeting or attempting to speak their language, if necessary.

### **MATAMPUHIN (Moody, Temperamental, "Passive Aggressive Behavior")**

**Matampuhin** is a passive-aggressive behavior that may be observed among Filipinos. It is very common in the Filipino Culture for one person to hurt another without even noticing it. Filipinos are by nature non-confrontational – as compared to North Americans who can be extremely confrontational - and very sensitive in their relationships and you never know when a Filipino is going to feel offended, whether it was intended or not, and sometimes the other person may not even realize he/she did something to hurt someone. For instance, once I was talking with Aunt Rose about Filipino relationships, she explained to me that, if Aunt Ana passes Aunt Cecilia by and does not greet Aunt Cecilia, does not look at Aunt Cecilia, or does not acknowledge Aunt Cecilia at all, even if Aunt Ana is busy speaking on her cell phone and she is not paying attention, perhaps just minding her own business, Aunt Cecilia may truly believe Aunt Ana is ignoring her intentionally and therefore take offense at that.

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<sup>49</sup> Stephen A. Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet: The Church in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity, 1998), 165.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Rhodes relates his experiences of similar conflicts in his Cross-Cultural settings, noting “much of the conflict resolution I have been involved in has been ethnocentric. It is not uncommon for a member of one group to feel slighted by another member of that same group.”<sup>51</sup> He explains, “The phrase ‘passed me by’ is often used, as in ‘so-and-so passed me by and did not take notice of me or greet me.’ In American street slang, one might say, ‘I was dissed.’”<sup>52</sup> Rhodes explains that refusing to acknowledge the other person may show a major lack of respect and, in cultures in which time is valued by how time is spent with others, “there could be no greater offense.”<sup>53</sup>

But now, back to our story, how will Aunt Ana know that Ate Cecilia is upset with her? Perhaps Aunt Ana notices Aunt Cecilia is distancing herself from her or avoiding her, altogether. Then, things get worse. More than likely, Aunt Ana will start asking others why Aunt Cecilia is not talking to her anymore, and a chain reaction of gossip begins. Aunt Cecilia is matampuhin (grouchy, bearing a grudge) against Aunt Ana, even though Aunt Ana is not aware of what really happened. The way Filipinos deal with a situation like that is by allowing Aunt Cecilia space and time to heal on her own, and then come back to the relationship with Aunt Ana as if nothing happened. But something interesting happens at this point. You may think the problem has been resolved but, in fact, it has morphed into something else. Aunt Cecilia kept it to herself or may have spread rumors about Aunt Ana. When Aunt Cecilia appears to have made peace with herself and comes back to the relationship with Aunt Ana, any conflict that happens from that moment on between Aunt Cecilia and Aunt Ana will bring back to Aunt Cecilia the incident of

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<sup>51</sup> Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*, 170.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

feeling ignored and rejected by Aunt Ana in that previous incident. It is like a ghost that rises back to life and poisons relationships.

“Matampuhin” is also said of the person who has had a real altercation with another and is now grouchy, feeling hurt, and holding a grudge against that other person. When Filipinos feel offended, it is expected that they may distance themselves from the events they normally attend, such as church services or social events where they would see the other person present. When that happens, there is a special way to go around it. The one who feels offended expects and awaits the person who allegedly inflicted the pain to seek him/her out to make amends. Depending on the level of the conflict, extra time will be necessary for healing to take place so that the relationship can be restored. Depending on the situation, sometimes when Matampuhin is noticed in a relationship, the best thing to do is just leave the person alone, give the hurting person space and time to heal and wait for everything to go “back to normal,” like it was before. But in reality, because Filipinos are generally non-confrontational, the situation will simply be “swept under the rug” and, someday, it will come back to haunt the relationship and cause further pain to those involved, and even drawing in other people who were not involved in the issue in the first place.

There are some Filipinos who are confrontational, and I came across some of them in my ministry at Christ Redeemer. Aunt Reynante was one of them. She spoke her mind, no matter where, no matter when, no matter why, as long as it was convenient for her. Once the church decided to throw a mini party to celebrate their pastor’s birthday. People were given the opportunity to speak words of encouragement and appreciation. Guess what? Aunt Reynante got the microphone and started out well. Then, thirty seconds into her words, she

started calling me out on things in church she believed needed more attention. Everybody in the room could feel the awkwardness of the moment but no one did anything to stop it. I did not either. Was it not a time to celebrate their pastor's birthday? The whole situation was indeed odd and painful. As mentioned before, Filipinos are not normally confrontational like Aunt Reynante appeared to be.

Let us move on to consider other aspects of the Filipino family and social dynamics.

You may notice Filipinos can talk about human body parts with ease. So, do not show you are overly surprised if a Filipino starts describing where the pain in his or her body is, and that in detail. Once I was talking to a Filipino church member. While talking, he stuck his hand in the back of his pants, pulled it out, brought his hand up to his nose, smelled it, and then showed his hand to me. In his mind he was joking, but I must confess that was quite an unpleasant experience for me.

Filipinos do tell jokes, sometimes a lot. They like to laugh and to smile. Filipinos also can be sarcastic when they feel intimidated. It is not that you are trying to intimidate them, but their self-confidence can be so low at times that depending on what you say they may feel less than and then start being sarcastic toward you by making jokes or comments that shows their passive-aggressive behavior. It all has to do with how they perceive themselves in relation to the world around them, particularly in relation to you and your role in the context you both share at any given time. I also noticed a Filipino may praise you to your face, and even say nice things about you to a group of people you are present with, and then, once you are gone, that same person will start "back stabbing" you by spreading rumors.

Filipinos also have a unique concept of time. There is the real time, and then there is Filipino time. Filipinos are fashionably late for their events. When I started my appointment at Christ Redeemer, I was asked if I was going to start the Service at 10 a.m. The time for the Service to start those days was at 10 a.m., so I replied, "10 a.m." Then I decided to ask why. That is when I learned Filipinos at Christ Redeemer came late to Service, sometimes 30 minutes or more. I asked around in church if changing the time to start the Service to, say, 10:30 a.m., or 11 a.m., would make any difference. The answer was that it would not matter at all because the people who were usually late would come late, no matter what time the Service started. Then I decided we would start at 10 a.m., sharp! And that is what we did during my four-year tenure as the pastor to Christ Redeemer UMC. And yes, people came in late all the time. Our Ushers and Greeters arrived at church after the Service started. Our acolytes were never in position to start the Service (because their parents drove to church late) and nobody ever knew where the lighter for the candles was (on a side note, once or twice I bought three or four lighters so that we would always be able to know where they were and use them to light the candles, but those lighters also disappeared. I saw one or two of those lighters in the kitchen one day). Our Choir Director's son always and gladly filled in for the acolytes when they did not show up and for that I am thankful. After the Service, those who came in late jokingly said, "Filipino time, pastor!"

Rhodes also talks about time for worship in his diverse church, noting "People continue to come into worship at half past the hour,"<sup>54</sup> and observing, "We don't quite finish at noon,

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<sup>54</sup> Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*, 177.

but we don't go until one o'clock either."<sup>55</sup> Another fascinating aspect of Rhodes' church is the fact that half way through the Service each Sunday, "The members of the congregation get up and for five to ten minutes roam around the sanctuary, noisily hugging, kissing and greeting one another. It has become a distinctive mark of worship at Culmore."<sup>56</sup>

Interesting enough, when Filipinos attend an event in the U.S. that is sponsored by an American entity or by a non-Filipino person, they usually come on time. I was always expected to pray at birthday parties or at church gatherings. Once I was invited to pray at a church member's son's birthday party. The party was going to be held at a closed-home complex with a golf course in it, in a nearby city. Knowing Filipinos are late for events, I was not myself in a hurry. I arrived right on time but the party was at full-blown already. There were Filipinos present, but many people there were not Filipinos. It was definitely not a church-family-only gathering, but I was invited to offer a prayer. I was told it was time for the prayer and the children were somewhat noisy. Obviously, they were excited. I offered some remarks and a quick prayer, and the celebration went on with a magician performing right after the prayer. Filipinos will put in the effort to arrive on time when the event is sponsored by non-Filipinos.

In chapter 5, we will draw on some more observations about the Filipino Culture in a discussion of a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural, Conflict-Driven Ministry.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 166.



## 5. DESCRIPTION OF A CROSS-CULTURAL, MULTICULTURAL, CONFLICT-DRIVEN MINISTRY

Christ Redeemer's Mission Statement:

*Christ Redeemer UMC is a multicultural congregation whose mission is to fulfill God's purpose in this world by seeking, inviting and nurturing people in Christian fellowship to become disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*

Please, note the word "multicultural" in Christ Redeemer's Mission Statement. While the members of the church understand themselves as multicultural today, the church started out as First Filipino American UMC. Later down the road they decided to be called Christ Redeemer UMC because the Youth in the church insisted on the fact that there were other Cultures amongst them in addition to Filipinos. This idea was first rejected and faced opposition from Filipinos and White Anglos, as well. But today they call themselves a Multicultural congregation.

Cross-Cultural, Multicultural contexts are bound to experience more conflicts on several, different levels due to clashes between Cultures.

What is Conflict? According to JustPeace, "Conflict is the result of differences that produce tension. Attitudes to conflict determine whether our response to conflict is destructive or constructive."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> JUSTPEACE: *Engage Conflict Well* (Washington, DC: JustPeace Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation, 2011), 1.

Conflicts in a Multicultural setting very often originate from the clash between Cultures, one in relationship to the other. “You are not Filipino...” were the first words I heard coming from the mouth of Aunt Reynante during my introduction to Christ Redeemer. What was happening at that moment that made Aunt Reynante stand on her feet, point her fingers at the pastor who was newly-introduced to the SPPRC at Christ Redeemer, and sternly say those words? It was clear that Aunt Reynante was anxious. Anxious because I am not Filipino and I had just arrived to be their new pastor. Immediately, I became the “bad guy,” something Friedman calls the “identified patient.”<sup>58</sup> Obviously, there is a lot to talk about here. What was happening at that moment was, primarily, a clash between Cultures. I could only imagine what the future held for the relationship between the newly-appointed pastor and that church based on that evening of introductions.

The dynamics between people in relationship with people from a culture other than their own can be the primary cause of conflict. It is like putting two different worlds together and having them interact with each other for a brief moment to achieve a common, desired goal. The clash is almost inevitable. And when we talk about Cross-Cultural, conflict-driven ministry, we add more layers to the conversation. In his book, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations*, Israel Galindo addresses the question: How can we best understand congregational dynamics? His answer is that congregations are best understood as systems of relationships. According to Galindo, congregations are “dynamic, complex, multilayered, intergenerational, and multigenerational institutional relationship systems. Those forces and

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<sup>58</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 130.

dynamics that shape the congregation as a relationship system and affect the lives of its members”<sup>59</sup> are what Galindo calls the hidden lives of congregations.

Rhodes, in describing conflicts he experienced in Multicultural settings, tells a story of a phone call he received at 6 a.m. one Good Friday. Since no one called that early, he thought something terrible had happened. Ms. Monte Campbell, the director of their English as a Second Language classes, was at their church making photocopies and heard thumping sounds coming from the sanctuary which was upstairs. Ms. Monte Campbell did not think twice and called the police immediately. Rhodes, because of his extensive experience with people from different cultures, started wondering, “Is there any other explanation for what she is hearing? Who else would be in the church this early?”<sup>60</sup> He asked Ms. Campbell if she had gone upstairs to check. She said she decided not to go when she heard the thumping. Rhodes believed some Korean men had gone to the church early in the morning to pray because, after all, that day was Good Friday. Upon hearing that, Ms. Campbell told Rhodes she would call him right back. Rhodes did not wait for Ms. Campbell to call back. He headed to the church and confirmed that two Korean men had gone to church to pray that early in the morning. Rhodes says that story ended well, “but many times in Multicultural ministry, Cross-Cultural misunderstandings such as this one end in tragic confusion and conflict.”<sup>61</sup> Branson and

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<sup>59</sup> Israel Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Understanding Church Dynamics* (Herndon, Virginia.: Alban Institute, 2004), 3.

<sup>60</sup> Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*, 159.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

Martinez concur saying, “Cross-cultural communication in churches is often subject to distortion – an experience that may include tension, a lack of trust and misunderstandings.”<sup>62</sup>

Cultural clashes will happen whenever we interact with people of a culture other than our own, whether we want them to happen or not. The question is, to what degree are such clashes a problem? Many Cultural clashes have to do with language and expectations of the people involved in the conversation. Cultural clashes are not all bad or negative in themselves, though they may feel that way at first.

Language can be a source of conflicts when engaging anyone who grew up speaking a language other than your own. First generation Filipinos may have a good grasp of the English language. However, many first-generation Filipinos in the USA can barely speak English. That is to say, you may be eloquent in what you want to say but others may not hear what you say or what you mean. You may have to repeat yourself three or four times until your message gets across. You may even have to ask, “Please, tell me back what I’ve just told you” instead of “Do you understand?” because they will say, “Yes, I understand you” even if they do not have a clue of what you are trying to say. You will be surprised to know very often what they give back to you is something different from what you just said three times.

As an example, whenever I wanted to tell a joke in my sermons, I always asked myself, “Is there a word I’m going to use that is going to pose a barrier in their understanding of the joke?” Or, “Is the joke too North American or too regional to the point that my audience will fail

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<sup>62</sup> Branson and Martinez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 192.

to grasp the nuances of it?" I realize sometimes jokes are not really funny, and sometimes the way I tell jokes is not funny, either. Even my daughters say I cannot tell jokes.

Another example regarding language issues is that Filipinos may mix up the pronouns "he/she/it/they" depending on the proficiency in English of the non-native speaker. When referring to a female person, they may say "he" first, then "she," and then go back to "he." You really have to pay attention to know whom they are referring to, otherwise things will get messed up. You can clear things up by asking questions like, "So, we are talking about Mr. Bonito, your sister's brother-in-law, correct?" Also, very often, Filipinos will mix up verb tenses (present, past, future). This is because the way their language is organized is very different from English. While many Filipinos speak English in the Philippines, every day, many of them do not. Many speak only their dialect, not even Tagalog (or, Filipino, the national language). And yet, Filipinos can be highly qualified, smart, and hard workers.

Engaging a person from a culture other than our own will always require patience, openness to the new, and willingness to learn about the other person's worldview. Emotions can run high in any exchange that takes place between two or more people of different Cultures. Inevitably, any prejudices, stereotypes, and biases one has toward the other will be at the forefront in these exchanges. Fear also plays a big role such exchanges. That is, fear of the unknown, fear of being taken advantage of, fear of being hurt. Regarding fear in Cross-Cultural interactions, Rhodes observes, "In crosscultural interaction we sometimes approach one another with fear – fear of difference, fear of what we do not understand, fear of what do not

want to understand.”<sup>63</sup> Establishing some degree of trust is necessary for an acceptable engagement that allows for the least troublesome exchange between the parties involved. That “dance” between cultures, as I call it, requires extra effort and perhaps that is why Rhodes says, “fear of what we *do not want* to understand” (italics mine). Some people might say, “Why bother, right? You are in America, and that means you had better speak English!” Exchanges between people of different cultures invariably require them to walk the extra mile with each other. As the saying goes, it takes two to tango.

Every single church has its own “culture.” A church’s culture includes the way members and leadership understand the Worship Service, how people in a particular church dress for Services, how they relate to each other, their mission and vision statements, their celebrations, etc. Even two churches of same denomination, located a couple of blocks away from each other, will each have their own, unique cultural *modus operandi*. That has to do with the people who attend it, their context, and how they understand their church. When you add Multiculturalism to the mix (more than two ethnicities and/or nationalities), more and deeper layers of cultures emerge, increasing the probability for cultural clashes to happen, consequently leading to the likely emergence of unnecessary, stressful situations in the dynamics of that particular church. Dealing with all this Cultural clashing demands special skills and Multicultural experience on the part of leaders for people to remain focused on the

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<sup>63</sup> Rhodes, *Where the Nations*, 159-160.

mission. These factors are highlighted in the scholarly discussion about “Cultural Intelligence”<sup>64</sup>  
and “Cultural Competency.”<sup>67</sup>

“You are not Filipino. You will have to learn our Culture. You will have to learn our Language...” Those were some of Aunt Reynante’s words to me at my introduction to the members of the SPRC (Staff-Parish Relations Committee) at Christ Redeemer. A good start for me as their new pastor, correct? Big expectations! What was behind all that? A lot, to say the least. Even though English was the *Lingua Franca* at that introduction, Aunt Reynante’s words indicated that a pastor who is not Filipino, does not look Filipino, and does not speak Filipino will be pushed to prove him or herself, repeatedly, in order to be accepted and trusted as the new spiritual leader to that congregation, not just because an appointment was made by the cabinet but because the context of that church demands it.

Although Christ Redeemer was a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural congregation with Filipinos, Africans, African-Americans, Hispanics, Vietnamese, Cambodians, White Anglos, one person from India, and four Brazilians, all Methodists worshipping God together under the same roof, Filipinos clearly dictated the norms because they made up the majority of the members at

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<sup>64</sup> Cultural Intelligence Center, “What is CQ?” <https://culturalq.com/what-is-cq/> (accessed March 14, 2019).

<sup>65</sup> Southern Methodist University, “SMU Moving beyond diversity to Cultural intelligence,” April 4, 2018, <https://www.smu.edu/News/2018/smu-beyond-diversity-cultural-intelligence-ciqsmu-04april2018> (accessed March 14, 2019).

<sup>66</sup> Maria Dixon Hall, “The Cultural Intelligence Initiative @ SMU,” <https://www.ciqatsmu.com/> (accessed March 14, 2019).

<sup>67</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Cultural Competence,” <https://npin.cdc.gov/pages/cultural-competence> (accessed March 14, 2019).

Christ Redeemer. Related to that, Branson and Martínez observe, “Even churches that have intentionally gathered a multiracial congregation still exhibit the dominance of one culture.”<sup>68</sup>

At that pastoral introduction mentioned above, the other ethnicities were represented but they remained somewhat quiet; they did not demand much or express their opinions as strongly as Aunt Reynante did. As a matter of fact, they did not offer opposition at all.

Therefore, what does that abrupt reaction from Aunt Reynante tell us about the dynamics of Christ Redeemer? For one, it means that Filipinos, by being the majority, were the driving force in that congregation.

You may be curious to know what was on my mind the whole time Aunt Reynante was standing there, lashing out at their newly-appointed pastor. I must confess, were it not for the Holy Spirit, I would have got up and walked away from that place and never looked back. But, because the Holy Spirit was in charge of my heart and mind at that moment, the one thing that kept coming back to me was the thought, “This person can be a great partner in ministry!” Believe it or not, I did not take any of her “insults” personally and was in the right mindset to start my new appointment as the new pastor of Christ Redeemer United Methodist Church. I called that reaction an “insult” because her attitude is not what is expected at an introduction. On the other hand, as I understand more clearly now, Aunt Reynante was coming from a place of fear and concern about a radical change in the dynamics regarding pastoral appointments and the effects this might have on a pastor’s ability to understand and meet the needs of a particular dominant Culture in that church, that is, the Filipinos.

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<sup>68</sup> Branson and Martinez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 17.



A brief explanation about the previous appointments to Christ Redeemer is important here. If you ever go to Christ Redeemer, spend a couple of minutes looking at all the pictures of the previous pastors appointed to that church. From its inception, and throughout the major changes they had gone through over the years, all the faces you will see in those several pictures are the faces of Filipino pastors until 2012, when I was appointed to them. I was the first non-Filipino pastor appointed to Christ Redeemer. That meant some radical changes might be expected in the future exchanges between church and their new pastor. I must also say, prior to my being appointed to that congregation, because of the lack of Filipino pastors in the appointive system in the North Texas Conference, Christ Redeemer used to sponsor pastors from the Philippines to be appointed to them. That gave the church total control over their pastors, especially because the immigration status of those pastors depended on their good relationships with the church. To have a non-Filipino pastor appointed to Christ Redeemer in 2012 might mean the end of the Filipino autocracy in that church and served as a reminder from the Conference they are in fact still part of the appointive system and the Conference is still in charge. No wonder Aunt Reynante reacted so vehemently at the announcement of their new, non-Filipino pastor!

After my introduction to the SPRC of Christ Redeemer, I exchanged conversation with Aunt Reynante in the church's kitchen. We spoke as if we had been friends for a while, and she even welcomed me with a hug. I was not fooled, though. During four years in that church, Aunt Reynante was a blessing and a thorn at the same time. In many ways she spoke the truth, though very often not in love, which also helped me understand the dynamics in the life of the church.

Let me give you an example of the power the Filipino population exerted on every other ethnicity represented in church and their pastors. One day, a couple of years into my appointment, Aunt Reynante and two other female church members who are friends with her, pulled me aside to have an “eye-opening conversation,” as they put it. One of the things they told me that Sunday afternoon was, “Pastor, if you let us, Filipinos, we will control you. We will tell you what to do, and you will have to do it. And you will certainly have conflicts with Filipinos and then you will have to apologize, even if it was not your fault. That is the expectation!” Talk about an eye-opening conversation! They were very much aware of this power of being in control! How to lead them as a pastor, was the task at hand.

You might ask, “Was the church not Multicultural? Why, then, were there only Filipino pastors until 2012?” Well, first because the majority of the members were Filipinos. Second, the other ethnicities joined the Filipino church at a later time in the course of its life. The Africans and African-American population were the second largest group within the church but these, and all the other ethnicities represented in the church, did not increase exponentially to the point they would be able to have a stronger voice within the church. They did hold positions in the different ministries, but the stronger voice was always Filipino.

Three months into my appointment to Christ Redeemer, church members still lined up at the pastoral study to talk to the pastor about the internal conflicts that had taken place long before I arrived. Very often I was talking to a couple of people (they always wanted to have “witnesses” to the conversation) and other church members would poke their faces in the door where one could see through the glass pane. They all wanted to talk after the one and only morning Service, at the time when the church members shared lunch together. Very often I had

to skip lunch because I did not have time to grab a bite. There was indeed a lot of learning for me to do in that congregation.

One of the things the Filipinos complained about regarding members of other ethnicities was their lack of participation. They would ask, “Why don’t the Africans attend our events?” even while the Africans complained about the Filipinos because they did not participate in their events. On this dynamic, Rhodes says, “I cannot tell you how many times I have heard different groups in the church say, *Why don’t they come to our activities? Why don’t they invite us to theirs? Why don’t they want to get to know us?*”<sup>69</sup> And he continues, “Virtually every group in the congregation has said this at one time or another.”<sup>70</sup>

Church members and their committees at Christ Redeemer met every Sunday because they concentrated their planning sessions and all the necessary conversations on Sundays, when most people were present. Some meetings were held during weekdays but most of the meetings took place on Saturdays and Sundays. That means there were multiple meetings going on at the same time. Moreover, at the beginning of my appointment I realized that the committee members wanted the pastor to be present at their meetings, and at the same time! Pastors are often present at committee meetings in The United Methodist Church, but we do not need to be present at every single church committee meeting. However, one thing that was hard for church members in those committees to understand was the fact that the pastor could not be present at more than one meeting at the time! And to make things worse, some of the committee members got upset with the pastor because they wanted the pastor to be present

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<sup>69</sup> Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*, 163-164.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 164.

at THEIR meeting, regardless of the fact the pastor was leading a meeting next door. One of the reasons to have the meetings at the same time was to be done with it so that people could enjoy the rest of the day in church, together. In order to mitigate the issue, I would spend a few minutes at one meeting and then a few minutes at the other meeting. Finally, after some time, if the presence of the pastor was needed at a given meeting, the committee leaders would schedule it at different times on Sunday so that the pastor could be present to lead and to assist with leadership. I attended the meetings that required my leadership, such as the Staff Parish Relations Committee and some other meetings such as the United Methodist Women's meeting, if they were not in conflict with one another. That seemed to resolve the issue.

At the beginning of my appointment at Christ Redeemer, I focused on getting to know the people and observing how the church approached its mission, grew in discipleship, held their meetings, resolved general and specific issues, addressed complaints of what worked and what did not work, and so on and so forth. I immediately noticed a lack of organization in the system. One of the first things I prioritized at that church, among other things, was organization. I very quickly realized the church did not quite understand Methodist History and Polity. A great deal of confusion came out of that lack of understanding. They did not quite understand what "rotation" in the committees meant, or that having a family member on the SPRC and another family member working for the church and being paid created "conflict of interest." Many of the things they did before I arrived were done according to their own ways of understanding church back in the Philippines and from their limited experiences with other churches in the U.S. One of our leaders on the SPRC committee shared with me that "in the past," they used to pay employees (Choir Director, Children's Ministry Director, Church

Assistant, etc) “under the table.” I asked what that meant. That meant the church paid employees and left no paper trail, especially if the employee did not have a Visa to stay in the country. In addition, some aspects of the Worship Service also needed adjustment and I proceeded to take care of those.

In Chapter 4, I wrote on Matampuhin (to be grouchy, hold a grudge, to engage in passive-aggressive behavior). Here is a story about someone in church who was holding a grudge and how it boiled over at one of our meetings: One Sunday afternoon, the Administrative Council of Christ Redeemer met and was discussing the need to change the schedule for lunch and Sunday school classes. The question was, should we keep the Sunday school class time after lunch or should we move it before lunch? The reason the possible change was needed was the fact our church members had lunch together every Sunday and lingered around the lunch table way too long, which affected the time to start Sunday school classes afterwards. We were right in the middle of the session when Ms. Cruz, a woman in her mid-60s and one of the Administrative Council members, stood up and, in a loud and angry voice, started lashing out at the pastor. Ms. Cruz was a passionate Sunday school teacher and the superintendent of the Sunday school. She was visibly mad at the pastor for some reason and she took that moment during our meeting to arrest the conversation and shame the pastor. Ms. Cruz and her husband had quite a long history of holding grudges. At first, Ms. Cruz did not talk about what was frustrating her in her soul but about the possible change to the Sunday school class schedule. However, the way she talked about the changes needed, her loud voice, the way she pointed her fingers at the pastor blaming him for the problems in church, her hard breathing, and her frantic body movements, displayed her deep internal indignation

and frustration. She knew what she was doing as she put up a show that moment: She was really unhappy with one of the changes the Administrative Council made on another issue in church (Simbang Gabi), which she was vehemently against and she could not accept the fact the Administrative Council is the body that makes major decisions in the life of the church and not one individual person. Ms. Cruz started out talking on the subject of the need for change in the lunch time schedule but immediately switched to blaming the pastor for the changes in the life of the church about which she was not happy.

The room was quiet. Everybody simply let Ms. Cruz vent her indignation against the pastor. She kept on repeating the changes the pastor was making in church and reiterating the fact she was not pleased with them. She was very abusive in her language and demeanor. Not one person in the room, all of whom were on the Administrative Council, intervened. They were all quiet. I was listening. Ms. Cruz finished her words and left the room in a very angry manner. After she left, I asked everyone what had just happened. Some of them said, "Well, pastor, that is how she is. She is just like that. She will calm down later." I asked them if they were OK with that and they said, "We are used to that." I asked them why no one, not one person, intervened while she was being disrespectful towards the pastor and the Administrative Council members. They said I would have to deal with her later to help her find peace. I took a deep breath and the meeting continued. I followed up on what had happened with Ms. Cruz but she never gave us a chance to sit down and talk like two adults. She had totally shut down on me and would not allow us to have a conversation, no matter how hard I tried.

In my Conflict Transformation class at Perkins, one of the lessons we learned was to respond early in the life of the conflict. According to JustPeace,

If conflict is not engaged early, there is greater potential for escalation of tension where the person is seen as the problem, issues multiply and become generalized, other people are dragged into the conflict (triangulation), people become reactive (eye for an eye) and opposition grows to the extremes.

And elsewhere, the authors affirm,

Early engagement of conflict in a constructive way can deescalate tension, decrease the chances for violence, maintain the ability to trust, ensure better communication as difficult issues are discussed and prevent person-to-person contact from becoming less direct.<sup>71</sup>

In a multicultural context, things get a bit more complicated depending on each Culture involved. With Ms. Cruz, as soon as I found out she had a conflict with the decision the Administrative Council had made, I sought her out to listen to her. Because of her being Filipina, she needed time to process things in her mind. Also, she did not understand how United Methodist Polity works, thus making her feel unheard, unacknowledged, and invalidated. As an elder in her Culture, her voice and decisions “should” have a lot of weight and, in her mind, the changes made to the Simbang Gabi celebration should never have been made in the first place. So, no matter how early on I tried to find a resolution to that particular situation, and no matter how much I sought her out to listen to her and help her understand how decisions are made in The United Methodist Church, nothing would change her mind and she would not become open to having a conversation.

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<sup>71</sup> JUSTPEACE: *Engage Conflict Well*, 6.

In their book *Getting to Yes*, Fisher and Ury assert, “Everyone knows how hard it is to deal with a problem without people misunderstanding each other, getting angry or upset, and taking things personally.”<sup>72</sup> And that goes for every single relationship, regardless of Culture. Filipinos in general take all things personally, and they frequently confuse their perceptions with reality.

On that note, I observed many of the Filipinos I interacted with to be extremely anxious. Gilliam’s book, *Where Angels Dare to Dance*, gives us a clear picture of how people can be anxious in their relationships. It is true that anxiety is “the response of the organism to a threat, real or imagined”<sup>73</sup> and that anxiety is “a basic human emotion and part of every relational system.”<sup>74</sup> However, at Christ Redeemer, anxiety is more chronic than acute among the Filipino members. For Kerr and Bowen, acute anxiety is “a response to a real, immediate threat. Chronic anxiety is more imagined and surfaces around ‘what if’ questions that are not grounded in reality.”<sup>75</sup> I have a clear sense that anxiety for people at Christ Redeemer was more chronic than acute.

One of the elements that fueled anxiety in the life of Christ Redeemer was that it seemed to me Filipinos have a hard time listening, especially in conflictual situations. I am under the impression that they are so busy trying to come up with an argument that will prove they are right and you are wrong one can hardly expect them to reflect an ideal “*I-Thou*”

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<sup>72</sup> Roger Fisher and William Ury. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating without Giving In* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 17.

<sup>73</sup> Michael E. Kerr and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory* 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1988), 112, quoted in W. Craig Gilliam, *Where Angels Dare to Dance: Anxiety and Conflict in Congregational and Organizational Life* (Washington, DC: Just Peace, 2013), 11.

<sup>74</sup> Gilliam, *Where Angels Dare to Dance*, 11.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.



relationship as explored by Buber.<sup>76</sup> While they are busy trying to put together an argument to convince you that you are wrong in a conflictual situation, they are also feeling threatened and their emotions are rising to the top of the roof. Their whole being is anxious, and their reptilian brains are screaming for a way out of the pressure that the conversation brings. They do not want to lose face; they have to win the argument, so they are stuck in their position. Sometimes you do not even know what is causing a person to be so set in their position that no negotiation seems possible. They may raise their voice and sound erratic at this point. They might even simply walk away, puffing and huffing like a horse, and could not care less for you at that moment.

What to do then when you see yourself in a situation like this?

One Sunday, our SPPRC was supposed to meet at 11:30am, right after the Service. Mark, one of the committee members, was running late. He had not come to church that morning. Another member of the committee called him on the phone and Mark said he was on his way to church. We all waited for him until 12-Noon, then we disbanded to go to our respective Sunday school classes. We would meet again after our Sunday school classes were over. Mark arrived at church around 12:10pm. He went around in the fellowship hall trying to find the SPPRC members. He was mad. He looked and acted mad. He started loudly complaining that he had to leave his family at another church he started attending and had to rush to our church for the meeting. And now, we were not meeting until after Sunday school classes were done!

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<sup>76</sup> Martin Buber, *I-Thou*.

Mark was being loud in the fellowship hall. I approached him and engaged in conversation immediately. He wouldn't listen. I tried to tell him we waited for him long enough but we would meet after Sunday school. Mark made sure people in the fellowship hall understood he was mad. Mark dashed off. Right after Mark left the church, people in the fellowship hall who heard him and saw him screaming at me approached me and asked, "Pastor, what did you do to hurt him and to make him mad like that?" Whatever I might say to explain what happened, they would not listen. After all, one of their own was "wronged" by the pastor.

Going back to my question, what do you do in a situation like this? The answer is: Nothing! Absolutely nothing at that moment if those holding down their positions which are bubbling up out of anxiety will not listen. Trying to be nice will not help. If there is more than one person involved, it does get even worse. In situations like this, the "soft negotiation" approach<sup>77</sup> will not do any good. You must take care of the presenting issue - and possibly the real issue - some other time. While this does not sound very different from any person acting out of his or her reptilian and limbic brain, this situation seemed to be exacerbated in the life of Filipinos I encountered. This often means there is more stress in dealing with emotions and "monsters" created in their heads (chronic anxiety) than dealing with real issues.

Can you separate the people from the problem when addressing conflicts in which Filipinos are involved? The answer is perhaps, but only after they have learned to trust you and respect you. Only then, possibly, will they be willing to consider your side of the story and what

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<sup>77</sup> Fisher and Ury, *Getting to Yes*, 13.

you have to say. But keep in mind their default response to conflicts is to feel threatened and take flight.

How can we focus on interest and not positions when working with Filipinos whose identity is enmeshed with each other and enmeshed with their issues?

First, it is important to understand that their thinking is different from yours because their reality, very often, is what is in their heads. You will have to deal with their fears first, even if they are ill-founded. You will have to deal with their hopes first, even if they are unrealistic. Second, putting yourself in their shoes may help you see things differently. That means you will look at yourself as well, and see your behavior for what it really is, not what you think it is. At the same time, try not to judge as you put yourself in their shoes. Remember, your experiences and expectations may be totally different from theirs, and your worldview can be totally different from their worldview. The next helpful thing to do is refrain from blaming them.

Fisher and Ury suggest discussing each other's perceptions.<sup>78</sup> With the Filipino population, if you're able to get them to really listen, you might try to bring this up. However, in my experience, whenever I tried to discuss the perspectives involved in a given situation with Filipinos, they got very defensive and consequently shut down and shut me out. It felt like walking on egg shells all the time.

I started to help "organizing" the church in the first year of our ministry at Christ Redeemer. Soon after some changes were made, one of the leaders referred to me as a

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<sup>78</sup> Fisher and Ury, *Getting to Yes*, 22.

“manager,” not as a pastor. In their minds, a pastor will spend more time coaching and “leading” than “managing” the church so perhaps her impression of me as the pastor was that I was a manager, not a pastoral leader. For a church of around 200 people with so much conflict, it was always a challenge to be faithful to the calling of an ordained Elder in The United Methodist Church, someone who is called to Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service, equally balanced. I always felt Christ Redeemer was a “moving target” in terms of their needs and wants as a church. I felt I was not quite able to pin-point what those needs and wants were exactly because, whenever I thought I understood them, they morphed into something else.

Rhodes observes, about changes, “I have found that in most congregations, change is accepted until that change forces concessions from the majority culture.”<sup>79</sup> Also, in trying to tackle different things at the same time, Rhodes concedes, “I have concluded that although I wish we could be all things to all people, that is not realistic.”<sup>80</sup>

There is a difference between Conflict Resolution and Conflict Transformation. I believe the whole time as the pastor to Christ Redeemer I wanted and expected people to be learn from the bad, conflictual situation and then move on to transformation so that we all could focus on the missions of the church. Conflict Transformation is more than conflict management or conflict resolution. According Ron Kraybill, a peacemaker, the goal of Conflict Transformation “is not only to end or prevent something bad but also to *begin* something new and good. Transformation asserts the belief that conflict can be a catalyst for deep-rooted, enduring,

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<sup>79</sup> Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*, 172.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 177.

positive change in individuals, relationships, and the structures of the human community.”<sup>81</sup> I believe some very important questions leading towards Conflict Resolution should drive the conversation: “How shall we live together?”, “How might we flourish together?”, “How can we break the cycles of injury, retribution, and violence?”, “How do we create a culture of justpeace in our relational life?”

Here are some of my beliefs about Conflict Transformation:

### ***I BELIEVE...***

- *Transformation of behavior and character is possible and desirable*
- *I must accept forgiveness and healing to be a mediating presence in conflict*
- *Conflicts must be addressed early*
- *Conflicts can be the death of something and the birth of something else*
- *I am becoming a new being every time I encounter and interact with another human being*
- *Conflicts can be a good thing but also a bad thing*
- *Some conflict is expected in human relationships, but too much conflict that occurs too often is pathological*
- *All human beings desire to be valued and appreciated for who they are*

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<sup>81</sup> Ron Kraibyl, In: “Conflict Transformation,” Washington, DC.: JustPeace Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation, <https://justpeaceumc.org/category/conflict-transformation/> (accessed March 14, 2019). Kraibyl is a Facilitator and Educator in the Washington, DC and Baltimore areas.

- *God can help bring healing between two people*
- *Anxious people get into conflicts more often than non-anxious people*
- *Sometimes people will not give up their positions, thereby precluding agreement between the parties involved*
- *Conflicts are not about winning but about long-term relationships*
- *My non-anxious or anxious presence will affect my surroundings*
- *Every person has a story to tell*
- *The pancake has two sides and, in every conflict, there is a silver lining*
- *People can get hurt if conflicts are not dealt with properly and fairly*
- *In listening*
- *In speaking up when necessary, especially speaking up for those with no voice*
- *Doing no harm and doing good*
- *There is a God and I am not Him (or Her, or...)*
- *I must regulate myself all the time*
- *I am a work in progress*

Chapter Seven will present findings from my experience as the pastor to Christ Redeemer in Townspeople, TX, with focus on their Filipino population.

## 7. FINDINGS

This chapter will discuss findings from my experience as the pastor to Christ Redeemer in Townspeople, TX, focusing especially on the Filipino population. During my four-year tenure as their pastor, I took copious notes from the many planned and unplanned conversations and interactions with church members and their friends of different age groups and on various occasions and places, including a few mission trips abroad. Although my findings will now and then mention my experiences with people of different Cultures in the church and beyond, this chapter will focus mainly on some of my findings about the Filipino population from Christ Redeemer and other Filipinos I have met beyond the church walls. In this chapter, based on my conversations with multi-generational church members and particularly Filipinos, I attempt to capture how Filipinos see themselves in the world they live in and in their relationships, especially their relationships and expectations in the context of a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural, United Methodist Church in the United States.

The findings of this study will provide non-Filipino and Filipino pastoral leaders with a deeper understanding of the Filipino Culture that will enhance their ministry with Filipinos. The findings of this study will also offer lenses through which a non-Filipino and Filipino pastoral leader will be able to examine Cross-Cultural, Multicultural congregations in their specific contexts and dynamics, thereby increasing their awareness and understanding and providing them with extra Multicultural tools to better engage in ministry with members of Cultures other than their own.

## **LEADERSHIP IN GENERAL FOR FILIPINOS**

Leadership is the ability to motivate, inspire, encourage, and empower people to accomplish what needs to be done as a group. Leaders do not just delegate but also know how to “roll up their sleeves” when the need arises. There are two kinds of leaders: Those who love to delegate and those who love to do everything by themselves, so things are done “right.” One is seen as a “lazy” person and the other as an “alpha” type of person.

For a younger, second generation Filipino mind, leadership is the ability to influence, to affect the actions, thoughts, ideas, and growth of an individual or group. There are many strategies for which this can be achieved: Leading by example, fear, propaganda, inspiration, establishing relationships, etc. Influence is an indicator of how effective a leadership method is; however, there is a clear way we are to conduct ourselves as Christian leaders, which enriches the lives of others and cultivates the fruit of the Spirit.

## **LEADERSHIP IN THE FILIPINO ETHNIC CULTURE**

In the Filipino Culture, one can become a leader by being “popular,” even if the person is not qualified to do the job. In a way, leadership in a Filipino context should be in line with leadership in general, that is, its dynamics should be encouragement, enjoyment, recognition, and accountability. However, leadership in a Filipino context can be problematic because Filipinos love paying respect to their elders. Kuya’s (older brothers) and Ate’s (older sisters) are viewed as people with wisdom and knowledge because of their age and life experiences, so it can be difficult for elders to listen to and respect a young leader. Also, because the Philippines



were colonized and oppressed several times by different nations, elders seem entitled to give voice to their opinions easily and without being asked. Filipino elders feel entitled and perceive themselves as “qualified” to lead just because they are older. Power, status, and age are the dynamics at play. Leadership in the Filipino Culture also means the leader is a father figure who provides for the needs of the family.

Leadership in a Filipino context may be defined similarly to leadership in general, but with some particularities. The Filipino influence tends to manifest itself superficially through status, employment, education, appearance, charisma, and pride. Generally, Filipinos place high expectations on their leaders and desire mutual respect. Amongst Filipinos, there is great lack of interpersonal understanding and communication. This creates disharmony within many Filipino groups. So much focus is spent on reputation, many forget to take an introspective journey for self-discovery. Pride keeps them from being honest with each other and communicating their deepest needs. Instead, many resort to gossip as a means to vent. Many Filipinos are passive-aggressive in nature. To be an effective leader to them, one must look beyond surface comments and actions and speak to their hearts.

Leadership for Filipinos, in any organization, means a deep connection between the leader and the follower.<sup>82</sup> A good and healthy bond between leader and follower fosters higher productivity. Followers’ expectations definitely shape their perception of their leaders and consequently their responses to their leaders. Filipino followers respond better to a leader who

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<sup>82</sup> Emerald J. D. Ilac, “What Makes a Filipino Leader,” [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263470969\\_What\\_Makes\\_A\\_Filipino\\_Leader](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263470969_What_Makes_A_Filipino_Leader) (accessed March 18, 2019).

is focused on the team and who is also knowledgeable about the job. If the leader is compassionate, takes time to listen, and really cares about each follower's professional and personal life, there is great probability followers will give their best for the company and the team. Filipino followers also expect and appreciate a leader who is able to mentor his or her followers and bring out the best in them.

### **LEADERSHIP IN A MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT, IN GENERAL**

While fear, power, and wealth are sometimes used to attain positions of leadership, a good leader leads by example. A leader must be knowledgeable and committed. A leader knows how to listen and to identify people's skills. In addition, leaders in a multicultural context must have the ability to relate to most people regardless of race or ethnicity. A leader in a multicultural context is expected to be open-minded and able to unite all different types of people.

For younger people, Multicultural leadership should not be a balancing act between Cultures, but a mixing of them. The temptation for members of each respective Culture is to remain separate, with each party remaining comfortable and compartmentalized while receiving equal treatment and opportunity. Such an assembly is "Multicultural" in definition to everyone except the leader, who is guiding "multi-separate" cultures. The real advantage springs forth when each culture is integrated to some extent into one another, producing strengths and lessons coming from each one separately but converging into one, bigger, and somewhat unified body.

## **LEADERSHIP IN A RELIGIOUS, MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT, SUCH AS THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Leaders in a religious, Multicultural context, such as The United Methodist Church, should know how to “follow,” adapt and integrate achievable ideas. According to some Filipinos’ understanding, everything in The UMC denomination is done by volunteers, which means no one should be held accountable if he or she does not perform his or her assigned task. This is but one way in which leadership can be a challenge in a context where people come from different Cultures. Yet, nurturing and helping them to know Jesus Christ and develop a deeper relationship with Him, while also directing and encouraging them to use their respective Cultural heritage as an advantage instead of a hindrance, can help further the mission. A leader in that context should have the ability to be in relationship with most people regardless of race or ethnicity, gender identification, or socioeconomic background, and must display compassion and love and have a servant’s heart. In a religious, Multicultural context such as The United Methodist Church, leadership must be contextualized by the Bible and guided by the Spirit. As a shepherd tends to the needs of the flock, so a United Methodist leader must bear the responsibility of tending to the spiritual needs of the church.

## **WHAT LEADERSHIP IS NOT FOR FILIPINOS**

Leadership is not about one person in particular; it is about the people whom one works with or leads as a group. It is not about saying the right thing but doing the right thing. It is not about telling people what they need to do but inspiring them to work and by joining them in springing into action. To lead by fear is not true leadership. Bossing others around,

condescending, and constantly micro-managing are not good leadership. Some Filipinos see a leader who loves delegating as someone exerting poor leadership. Leadership implies that someone is following. Therefore, if no one is following, there is no leadership. For Filipinos, overly criticizing and demanding leaders will more than likely be ineffective with their followers.

### **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN THE FILIPINO CULTURE**

There is a difference between male and female leadership in the Filipino Culture. Some of these differences are evident in style, communication, and handling of situations. For Filipinos, leaders are predominantly male. However, females are increasingly becoming leaders in society. Male leaders are still perceived as *macho* and strong figures, whereas female leaders are perceived as soft, indecisive, and emotionally charged. However, very often behind the scenes, the female figure dominates. Women in the Philippines are traditionally expected to control the family finances and take care of the household, while the men may help in some duties. These traits in male-female leadership dynamics can be observed in many cultures.

### **THE ROLE CULTURE PLAYS IN LEADERSHIP**

Leadership must take culture into consideration in order to be effective. Culture affects leadership in relation to values, norms, and practices. Leaders confront Culture in seeking to understand how to deal with people and how to define goals that work and foster energy and dedication among different groups of people. Since the Philippines were colonized by Spain, the

USA, and Japan, some believe they truly lost their identity as a nation and as people. Losing their identity has redefined what leadership looks like for them. In the Philippines, people with lighter skin color (mestizos) may be perceived as more qualified to lead just because of the way they look, but they are also seen as “authoritarian” because of the history of Conquistadors. The stereotype is that people of darker skin color may be less educated and thus less than qualified to lead. These are results of the “colonial mentality.” For younger generations, to lead another ethnicity requires truly understanding and respecting the other without betraying one’s own. This comes about through more than immersion and emulation but through deep reverence. If the leader is of the same ethnicity, it is critical to grasp their shared roots. If the leader is of a different ethnicity, it important to share one’s own culture, while acknowledging the differences positively.

## **EXPECTATIONS ON THE PASTOR**

In the Filipino Culture, a pastor is a man. This may have to do with the male-dominated clergy culture of Christian communities up to recent times, a mentality that has come to be embedded and therefore difficult to uproot without intentional re-direction. The Filipino word “pastor” refers specifically to male clergy, whereas the word “pastora” (she-pastor) is used to refer to a female person (not necessarily clergy) who assists the male pastor and is very often used for the pastor’s wife, who more often than not is not clergy. The pastor is the religious and spiritual nurturer of members and expected to live in such a way as to set the example. The pastor should display humility as opposed to “arrogance,” should be respectful toward those

with differing opinions, sincere, devoted, and enthusiastic. The pastor is expected to be supportive, encouraging, affirm good deeds, walk the walk, and do required visitations. The pastor is the spiritual leader who is sensitive to all types of people without judgement and discrimination.

A pastor in the Filipino Culture is expected to build relationships first and foremost, no matter what skin color or ethnicity people represent. He should ask questions, get to know their Culture, listen carefully, and speak lovingly. Authoritative leaders may collide with their cultural trauma from colonialism and oppression.

Rhodes touches upon those dynamics of leadership amongst people from various cultural backgrounds, particularly concerning the participation of people in the decision-making process in a Cross-Cultural context in the United States. He found that among immigrant populations, whose national and political history has been shaped by a succession of all-powerful leaders such as the conquistadors in Latin America, the legacy of leadership among these populations is permeated and determined by power and control over inclusion, hierarchy over equality, and status over humility. People from such oppressive backgrounds will clash both culturally and religiously with the dynamics of more egalitarian, democratic organizational structures and operating systems in the U.S. church. Thus, for Rhodes, “although it might seem like a good thing for pastors to have more power, the downside is that true congregational ownership may not occur in the ministry of the church” in a Multicultural context.<sup>83</sup> He explains that native-born Americans who are accustomed to democratic decision-making structures feel

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<sup>83</sup> Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*, 174.

frustration and resentment in such non-democratic systems. For instance, while Filipinos expect the pastor to be the main driving force and at the forefront of decisions in the life of the church, only those who are used to the democratic approach of making decisions in The United Methodist Church through its committees will appreciate and favor it.

As pastor of Christ Redeemer, I found many people believe authoritarian leaders can be a scary thing, and I agree with them. However, in spite of this, Filipinos will respond “fairly well” to authoritarian leaders, which makes “collision” a likely dynamic. As the pastor to that congregation, I always felt as if I were walking on eggshells all the time because of the tension between providing leadership to the church in the more egalitarian, democratic-structured organization of The United Methodist Church and trying to lead people where I believed God was leading us. When the Administrative Council decided on some matters for the life of the church, and those decisions did not quite align with some people’s expectations, some of them truly believed the pastor was authoritarian and did not listen to people’s voices. Then they would rise against the decision made by the Administrative Council and make the work of the whole church more difficult, creating more and more conflicts. On the other hand, when I made room to listen to people and asked for their opinions and encouraged them to participate, many said I was not “leading” them but only “managing” the church. Most definitely there is no easy answer to that question. Very often, knowing what to do and how to do it felt like a moving target. It seems there is no way to reconcile that tension. I still ask myself the same question today: How to resolve that tension in a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural context?

Younger, second-generation Filipinos may expect that every pastor will be different and understand that no pastor will be perfect. They hope the pastor will get the obvious things

right: Believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, proclaim how we are transformed by the Gospel, share the Gospel with others, love his neighbor as himself, and help the congregation grow spiritually. Everything else is icing on the cake and surely the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church has rules to abide by and administrative by-laws to follow which very often younger members are not privy to. These second-generation Filipinos may also understand the expectations of their Filipino cultural background, which can be a long list. For instance, the pastor should be present for most events related to the church and its members, be responsible for church and parsonage maintenance, be a mediator of sorts, and much more. Filipino congregations just want to know they are heard and respected by their pastor, want to share a personal connection with their pastor as one would share with an extended family member, and want to have some control over what happens in their community, not just over the loud minority, but especially over the silent majority. Very few people have a say in what happens in the church in the Philippines, and usually those who engage in loud, dramatic behavior get all the attention.

#### **EXPECTATIONS ON THE PASTOR'S WIFE**

Assuming the pastor is a male, and married, Filipino churches also place substantial expectations on their pastor's wife. For instance, the wife must be fully supportive of the pastor and his ministry, must be warm and friendly to people, and must get involved in the programs and ministries of the church. Many people expect the pastor's wife to support her husband and church in all aspects and that without complaining. As a matter of fact, for Filipinos in the



Philippines, and by default here in the United States and other countries, the pastor's wife is seen as an extension of the pastor and even called "pastora" (Filipino for "female pastor"). In many ways, the *pastora* is to be a "shining example for all women to follow." The pastor is like the father of the house, and the pastor's wife is the mother. Filipino members of Christ Redeemer witnessed these expectations with their relatives who are pastors themselves and their wives. That is the "norm" in the Philippines. If she is not that committed to the church, the pastor's wife is seen as weak and uninterested.

Although younger generations of Filipino immigrants, who were brought to the U.S.A. when they were babies or as toddlers and have lived most of their lives in the U.S.A., have similar expectations for the pastor's wife. But they also believe there should be boundaries and limitations to those expectations. Some of them will even say they are not opposed to the wife's attending church somewhere else and would recommend the pastor's wife to stay as neutral as possible to avoid conflicts and cliques. In a Multicultural church context in the United States, the pastor's wife may end up spreading herself too thin among members of the different Cultures and, in the end, people from none of these Cultures represented will be pleased to the fullest, no matter how much she gets involved.

It is true that non-Multicultural churches in the United States also place expectations on the pastor's wife to some extent, especially in small churches (50-200 people), but that is for another conversation.

## **EXPECTATIONS ON THE CHURCH LEADERS**

Filipinos expect the leaders of the church to be involved and support its ministries and to attend meetings and leadership training provided by the church. They must be hard workers and visionaries who are willing to encourage and inspire while remaining sensitive to people's needs. Church leaders are expected to be knowledgeable about and committed to their positions. They must be strong individuals who can see past their differences and work together for the church's interests. Younger generations also expect church leaders to be accountable for their actions or lack thereof. After all, church leaders should set a good example for their fellow congregants and know that their reputations are at stake. They should keep in mind that everyone is expendable, and they should be flexible and ready for correction. Their comments, opinions, and suggestions should be directed to people related to the matter at hand and through proper channels. Also, younger generations expect older church leaders to show respect toward younger leaders and younger pastors because of their position in the life of the church. Some younger Filipinos say church leaders should be professional in what they do at church, should attend church faithfully, and should also have good communication skills. Young Filipinos who have lived in the U.S. most of their lives expect conflicts to be dealt with immediately and in a healthy manner. Obviously, there is plenty of room here to discuss what "healthy manner" might mean when it comes to conflicts within Filipino culture.

Filipinos in general center their expectations and demands on a person or people who exert a "strong" influence on them. Let me give you an example of that. I was invited to give a devotional during our Worship Ministry Retreat on a Sunday evening. I asked the choir director about the theme. We decided my devotional would be on healing and comfort since many of

our music ministers were going through health struggles or knew someone going through health challenges. Even our choir director was undergoing treatment for breast cancer at that time in her life. After we were through with most of the activities that afternoon, I was given the floor (literally, since we were all sitting on the floor).

I wanted to create space for the music ministry to feel embraced and loved by God. I brought in a candle, the Scriptures, and anointing olive oil. I explained what they symbolized for that moment of sharing and how we would proceed with that moment in the presence of God and each other. I started by sharing a poem I had written especially for the occasion. Then, I gave the devotional. At a given moment, after the devotional, I explained and offered everyone a chance to affirm anyone in the group, especially those struggling with a death in the family or struggling with illnesses. I waited. And I waited. Since nobody took the initiative, I decided to start by modeling for them what I expected for that sacred moment. I looked at the choir director's husband and briefly affirmed him. Next, our choir director decided to play a song on the piano in affirmation of a friend and sister in Christ who was going through pancreatic cancer, someone who attended another church in another town.

My expectation was that people would have a chance to affirm each other, especially those going through illnesses or grieving the loss of a loved one. And there was quite a number of people who needed to feel embraced and reminded of God's love for them. However, here's what happened. One of them started by affirming our choir director. To finish her words, she said, "Our choir director is strong. Because she is strong, we are strong." After that, those present, one by one started affirming our choir director. Nobody else received affirmation,

other than our choir director (here I am not concerned with whether I received affirmation or not). That makes me think that either my directions were not clear or that their focus was placed on their leader, in this case, our choir director.

After the majority of those present spoke up, affirming our choir director only, and after a long silence, I suggested those who had lost loved ones say their names aloud. The purpose was to be able to give them the chance to take the grief from their chest and share it with everyone else in that room. They did so. Those who had lost loved ones named them. Everyone was weeping towards the end of that moment. After that, I invited anyone who wanted to come forward to be anointed on his or her forehead and to be prayed for to do so. Everyone came forward. I prayed with them all. I brought that moment to a close by ringing the chime twice, saying a prayer, and blowing out the candle.

I believe the people in that room that day did not even realize what happened. Their focus was on their leader, the choir director, only. They could have turned to one another, as explained and encouraged by Wheatley,<sup>84</sup> especially those we knew needed affirmation the most, and allow God to bring them reassurance and comfort through everyone in that room.

## **EXPECTATIONS REGARDING MEETINGS**

According to some Filipinos, meetings should have a time limit and the agenda should be followed strictly, minutes must be taken, and meetings should be properly announced.

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<sup>84</sup> Margaret Wheatley, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, Inc., 2009).

There should be a time keeper to keep the meeting on time and on point. In the Filipino Culture, however, everyone has something to say and wants to be heard. During meetings, people should be able to speak freely and hopefully accomplish agenda goals. As may be expected, issues at hand can, and more than likely will, go in circles, and things frequently get out of hand. The pastor must then put his or her foot down. That shows “strong leadership” and that can be scary, but the Filipino Culture responds well to it. If one does not take that approach - using their own words – he or she should be ready “to be steamrolled.”

I was somewhat surprised to hear the Filipino understanding of meetings, and especially about the element of time. When it came to meetings at Christ Redeemer, we often started our meetings late and ended late. Everybody wanted to have a say. Very often, emotions took over and meetings sometimes got derailed. To be on point and focused were my biggest challenges during meetings at Christ Redeemer. My sense of accomplishment came when we were able to have a dignified conversation around issues, tackle them, set deadlines, decide who was going to act upon our decisions, and most importantly follow through with our decisions we made during our meetings. Very often however, we had to start things from scratch each time because of lack of follow-up and follow-through.

## **EXPECTATIONS REGARDING THE WORSHIP SERVICE**

Worship Services should be “Spirit-filled” and should feel “alive.” Church member participation should be encouraged. Messages validating the congregation and their opinions are generally well received. Sermons should be an instrument to help develop the faith of the

congregation and offer powerful messages that make the congregation want “to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). The truth is hard to hear, though. It nonetheless should be enjoyable, there should be a time limit, and the choir should encourage the congregation to sing along with them. The worship service should be beautiful, spiritual, fulfilling, and timely, and the music should cater to all age groups. As is the case in many different cultures, there are those who prefer the worship service to be traditional in nature instead of incorporating contemporary praise and worship, and there are those who prefer them separately, that is, not blended. As a matter of fact, the traditional style of worship is favored by Filipinos across generations. Younger Filipinos tend to go with the flow because they want to keep in line with the point of view of their elders and to maintain their cultural bond.

At Christ Redeemer, we had a blended worship service, and encouraged participation of the whole congregation. As a matter of fact, the fourth Sunday of the month was entirely dedicated to the Youth and was mostly Youth-led: The Youth gave testimonies and led the music. We had lots of opportunities for the congregation to participate and that meant one could expect a lot of frequent “new ways” of approaching Worship, to put it mildly. The Service always started on time. When I first started my appointment, I was asked if we would start the service on time or would start it sometime after the scheduled time. Because we had an array of Cultures in the congregation, including White folks, I decided we would start on time. Also, when I asked about their previous practices, I was told no matter what time we started, there would be those who would come to church late. So, from the very beginning of my appointment I wanted to give people some “idea” of when to expect the service to start. During my tenure as the pastor of Christ Redeemer, there were people who came to worship between

fifteen minutes and thirty minutes late. The service would normally last somewhere between one hour and fifteen minutes to one hour and thirty minutes and sometimes one hour and forty-five minutes. There were times we went longer than that.

It looked as though people wanted to have a set timeframe for the worship service to start and to finish, but reality was something totally different. That is what Israel Galindo refers to as “disparity between what the church should be and what it actually is.”<sup>85</sup>

## **EXPECTATIONS REGARDING BIBLE STUDIES**

Church members should be encouraged to attend Bible studies which, in turn, should encourage people to learn and to apply their learning to their lives and to share the rich experiences they receive from attending Bible studies. The leaders of such studies should be well-prepared, offer hand-outs, and encourage questions and answers for discussions. The pastor should be present to answer questions. Note that some will not attend a Bible study unless the pastor teaches it. Some expect the Bible studies to reflect Wesleyan theology because they love belonging to The United Methodist Church. For many, Bible studies offer a chance to enjoy fellowship outside Sunday services and are more interactive, more intimate, have a family feel, and of course food is a requirement at those Bible studies.

We had four distinct opportunities to study the Bible every two weeks, in addition to our weekly Wednesday gatherings and some other gatherings to study the Bible, as well as

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<sup>85</sup> Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations*, 14.

leadership training. Those four opportunities were called “small groups” when I started my appointment and then, after some time, we changed the name to “Growth Groups” because the idea was to increase the number of opportunities to study the Bible in the different neighborhoods where the groups would be offered by theme and not by geography, and the dynamics would change in order to include people who were not attending on a regular basis. The idea was to include members from other Cultures, as well. The small groups had become “cliques” and grounds for gossiping more than anything else. The Growth Groups were led by lay people and I would rotate among the different groups on a regular basis to offer insight and pastoral presence. The gatherings would very often be cancelled at the last minute because one of the families would not be able to attend so the gathering would be rescheduled. We would start the gathering late and would end it very late. The main focus was to study the Bible but very often they mainly became another reason to meet each other, to share our food together, and to have fellowship. That sounds like a great idea if they had not seen each other in a long time, but they were always together in church and beyond the church. People continued to call the “Growth Groups” small groups and the dynamics were pretty much the same as before as people refused to change for growth.

### **EXPECTATIONS REGARDING BIRTHDAYS**

Filipino church members expect and appreciate a call from the pastor on their birthdays. For some Filipinos, a simple celebration with family and friends will suffice, while others like a grand celebration. Some Filipinos expect to have their names on the church bulletin for their



birthdays. Pancit for “long life,” along with other foods and the cake, is a must-have food shared on birthdays.<sup>86</sup> Most of the time, pastors are invited to attend to pray for the one celebrating a birthday.

I was always invited to celebrate birthdays with members of all ages at Christ Redeemer. Once I was invited to attend the birthday of one of our elderly members. Upon arriving at the place, I noticed other pastors had been invited too, both Methodist and non-Methodist pastors. There were about eight pastors present and all were invited to share a word and a prayer. That was a surprise to me, since I was not used to seeing so many pastors invited to a church member’s birthday. However, inviting a great number of pastors to one’s birthday is common in Filipino Culture. It shows the importance of the person whose birthday is being celebrated and it is believed to bring blessings to person as well as his or her family and friends.

## **EXPECTATIONS REGARDING WEDDINGS**

Some Filipinos are content with a simple and affordable wedding ceremony, which will be a typical Christian wedding with sponsors (Ninongs and Ninangs, i.e., Godparents). The pastor of the couple provides counseling to the couple and is expected to officiate at their wedding. Customarily, there are readings from the Bible about love, and the pastor usually shares a few words and mentions a few things about life together as husband and wife. The couple exchanges wedding vows and rings, lights the candle, and observes cord and veil

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<sup>86</sup> Lumen, “Republic of Pancit.”

traditions, followed by a kiss at the end.<sup>87</sup> In the Filipino culture, most people wear barongs (a formal Filipino shirt) to a wedding.<sup>88</sup>

## **EXPECTATIONS REGARDING HOSPITAL VISITATION**

The pastor is expected to visit church members in the hospital, or when they are dying, as part of his job. Some expect the visit to be short and end with a prayer. Some expect the pastor to stay as long as possible. Some expect church leaders to visit them or their families to pray with them and to uplift them. Depending on how ill the person is, and the length of time he or she will stay in the hospital, Filipinos will camp out in the waiting area in big numbers with their food, blankets, pillows, Bibles, and whatever else they deem necessary and make that place feel like home. Very often different pastors will deliver short messages and offer lots of prayers for healing at their gathering. The use of anointing oil is desired and expected. They will share stories and laughter together, as well. As I mentioned before, Filipinos see each other as a big, tight family and support from everyone is important.

## **EXPECTATIONS REGARDING HOME VISITATION**

Church members, especially older church members, expect the pastor to visit them at home. For some, a pastor's visiting them at home is not as critical as visiting them in the

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<sup>87</sup> Jeffrey Hays, "Weddings in the Philippines," Fact and Details, updated June 2015, [http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Philippines/sub5\\_6c/entry-3871.html](http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Philippines/sub5_6c/entry-3871.html) (accessed March 18, 2019).

<sup>88</sup> "Traditional Clothing in the Philippines, Barong Tagalog & Baro at Saya," <http://nationalclothing.org/asia/34-philippines/48-traditional-clothing-in-the-philippines-barong-tagalog-baro-at-saya.html> (accessed March 18, 2019).

hospital. Also, the pastor is expected to visit members who are “matampuhin.”<sup>89</sup> Some Filipinos expect the visit to be short and end with a prayer. For some younger generation of Filipinos, a home visit is a nice gesture, but they may prefer to receive phone calls or text messages instead. During a home visit, the pastor is expected to be respectful, remove his shoes at the door if applicable, greet everyone if possible, and be prepared to eat.<sup>90</sup>

### **HOW ARE CONFLICTS ADDRESSED/RESOLVED IN THE FILIPINO CULTURE? WHAT ABOUT MATAMPUHIN?**

Conflicts are expected to happen in any given culture because they are embedded in the fallen human nature and our interactions with the world around us. In my experience with Filipinos, I observed conflicts were something one could expect to arise. I am almost tempted to say conflicts seem to be part of the fabric of the Filipino relationships. Thus, rather than asking how conflicts are resolved, I suggest the better question is, “Is a conflict ever resolved in the Filipino culture?” As the pastor to Christ Redeemer, I noticed many conflicts were never really resolved but only morphed into other, new conflicts.

Filipinos in general are non-confrontational but there are those who are extremely confrontational. When someone feels hurt in the Filipino Culture, he or she normally becomes MATAMPUHIN. “Matampuhin” is said of a person who feels hurt by someone and therefore holds a grudge against that person. This has to do with his or her self-esteem. Filipinos’ self-esteem, in general, is very low. They live in a constant state of “suspicion,” thus revealing some

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<sup>89</sup> MATAMPUHIN: Said of a person holding a grudge against another. This term will be explained later on in this chapter.

<sup>90</sup> Filipinos remove their shoes at the door before entering a home.

myths mentioned by Wimberly,<sup>91</sup> such as Rejection, the myth of the need of a Savior, the myth that the pastor should over-function, the myth that the pastor should please at all costs, and some others.

Many Filipinos hold a grudge out of pride. Pride covers low self-esteem, and it is easier to place blame elsewhere than to admit being flawed and dealing with one's own issues. Filipinos may feel hurt easily, even if the other person did not intend to hurt them. Sometimes the other person is not even aware that someone else is feeling hurt because of him or her. The grudge will only become obvious when the person feeling hurt starts distancing himself or herself from the person who allegedly caused the hurt and/or distance himself or herself from the bigger group of friends or church fellowship, and very often without any explanation. People who take this approach in conflicts believe "time will heal things" but, in fact, it does not.

People may be hurt when they do not get what they want, or when they feel left out. Some Filipinos, though not all, are "onion-skinned" (an expression used by Filipinos themselves). This means they are hypersensitive to opposition, adversity, and criticism. They tend to take everything personally. They become especially sensitive when you address some issue, or if you bring it to their attention. They will hold a grudge, sometimes for a long time, but that depends on the person. You will notice that hypersensitivity is more common among first-generation Filipino immigrants, not so much with younger Filipinos who immigrated to the U.S. when they were little and those born in the U.S. Younger Filipinos, or Filipinos born in the

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<sup>91</sup> Edward P. Wimberly, *Recalling our Own stories: Spiritual Renewal for Religious Caregivers* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

U.S., are more likely to expect adults to act like adults and to solve conflicts in a more loving way.

When you ask Filipinos how conflicts are resolved, they may say parties should meet and discuss the issues so they can explain each other's side of the story. Then, the person who caused the hurt should apologize and both parties should compromise if necessary. But unfortunately, that is not how conflict resolution really happens with Filipinos.

As a suggestion, when a Filipino is MATAMPUHIN, go after him or her, the "lost sheep," apologize if he or she is mad at you (even if you did not cause the hurt), do all you can to a fault to bring the person back, and give them time to heal but also keep in touch. If the person is mad at you, inquire around to see what you find out why. Even after doing all that, the person may still be mad at you and will not give you a chance to get things resolved, but at least you tried. In my experience, one of the hardest things for me to accept as pastor of Christ Redeemer was the fact people got mad at me and simply stopped attending church and would not let me minister to them. While a majority would come back and act as if nothing happened and reenter the life of the church, there was one person who was MATAMPUHIN for the duration of my time as a pastor of Christ Redeemer and never again allowed me to minister to her. One day I simply gave that up to God and stopped pursuing her. That is, I "let her be" in order to sort out her personal and relational conflicts. After I was reassigned, some months later, I was told that after the Service was over on a given Sunday, this same person grabbed the microphone and started saying bad things about people in church, the pastor, and God knows who and what else and announced she was leaving the church. Nobody cut microphone

off and after that person finished speaking, someone in the congregation simply stood up and said, “OK, let’s go eat,” and that was it.

It is important for those who minister to and with Filipinos to take into consideration that the *modus operandi* of many people amongst the Filipino congregants is to get overly emotional over issues of the church in relation to their personal expectations, disrespect each other in their conversations, engage in back stabbing and constant bickering, and so on and so forth. I suggest providing a forum for conversations that will lead people to self-discovery, accepting God’s grace and forgiveness, and consequently to life transformation. Patton alludes to “transformational knowledge,” and the pastoral practice that “involves the capacity to encourage change.”<sup>92</sup> All this takes risks. But keep trusting that God is leading the way.

I applied De Bono’s<sup>93</sup> method and approach to conflicts at Christ Redeemer. De Bono designed a system for approaching group discussions and individual thinking that involves six colored hats. It is a simple, constructive method for thinking about “what can be” rather than only thinking about “what is” with the emphasis on designing a way forward. It allows for parallel thinking, meaning at any given moment everyone is looking in the same direction. Hats are symbols that indicate roles. At different points in the conversation, everyone wears the different hats when directed. The Six Thinking Hats are White, Red, Black, Yellow, Green, and Blue. The White Hat is neutral and objective, concerned with facts and figures. The Red Hat is emotional and approaches the matter through feelings. The Black Hat is careful and cautious, or the “devil’s advocate” hat. The Yellow Hat is sunny and positive, concerned with finding ways

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<sup>92</sup> John Patton, *From Ministry to Theology: Pastoral Action & Reflection* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 69-71.

<sup>93</sup> Edward De Bono, *Six Thinking Hats*, rev. ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1999).

for ideas to work. The Green Hat is associated with fertile growth, creativity, and new ideas. The Blue Hat is cool, the color of the sky, above everything else – the organizing hat. The challenge was to keep everyone in the conversation wearing the same hat at the same time because very often people around the table would put on a different hat at any time in the conversation. You can try this method with your church leaders. The Six Thinking Hats method saves time and money and produces great results. With this thinking method, behaviors can change.

### **TIME AND...FILIPINO TIME**

In the Western culture, people are time-conscious; that is, they strive to be on time for appointments and activities. Filipinos, on the other hand, are known for being late to everything, including Worship services. They may be 30 minutes to one hour late, so expect tardiness to be the norm. A young Filipino man who was born in the U.S. one day told me, “We like to take our time. I always heard it as, ‘Filipino time is an hour after the official time,’ but I think it was a joke.” This young person also said, “Maybe Filipinos like to be fashionably late. We do not enjoy being the first to show up, or just have an understanding that others will be late so why be on time? I really cannot explain this phenomenon, but I know it does not apply to all Filipinos.” Or, perhaps, this is only a really good excuse, as this young Filipino would say, “It’s not me, blame my Culture!” Interestingly enough though, depending on the activity and the parties involved, Filipinos can be on time.

Brazilians, Hispanics, and Africans also tend to be late for their events. In my experience with African Cultures, I have learned that, being “fashionably late,” means you have a rank of high importance, like a celebrity, and therefore you can be late. Once we held an African wedding anniversary at Christ Redeemer, and the whole church was invited. That meant people from all the different Cultures represented in our church would show up. An African pastor would come to preach, and I was there to assist and lead the overall Service. Since the preacher was late, we started the service late in order to give him extra time to arrive. The service went on and we were all getting nervous, waiting for the preacher. As the African pastor still failed to arrive, the bride and the groom begged me to share the Scriptures and a prayer, so I did. The Service was almost over when the African pastor and his wife showed up, dressed up in their beautiful cultural clothes. He had the look of someone who did not understand what is going on, because the service was about to end and he had just arrived. The couple then decided to let him speak a few words and the Service ended.

As pastor of Christ Redeemer, I noticed it was very common for Filipinos to come to worship late. The Caucasians arrived early, around 9:45 a.m. The Worship Service started at 10 a.m. sharp and lasted for one hour and fifteen minutes to one hour and thirty minutes. Our greeters, however, came in late, even after the service had started. Also, we often asked the choir director’s son to be the acolyte because she and her family were the first ones in church, whereas our acolytes were never on time. Some people would arrive fifteen minutes after the Service started while others arrived thirty minutes later, and there were those who came at the end of the Service. How did I deal with that? Though it was very frustrating, I decided from the



very beginning of my appointment that this would be a battle I would not pick. I was happy to see them in the Service and for the fact they came to church at all.

Virgilio, one of the church members from Christ Redeemer, mentioned that he sees some cultures as “more relaxed than others.” He had an opportunity to go to New Orleans one Summer and spoke to a local Caucasian man about their lifestyle there. The man told him, “It is acceptable to come in late for work, to take longer breaks, and to relax at work.” For Virgilio, New Orleans felt like “home” because the “vibe” in the culture there felt so much like the Filipino Culture to him. He believes Spanish influence may be the culprit. Virgilio mentioned that his time in New Orleans has changed the way he understands time and his perception of what is acceptable, depending on context.

Argentines normally take a “siesta” (nap, a rest period) after lunch, somewhere between 2-4 hours, or longer. When I was on a Mission Trip in Cordoba, the businesses closed their doors around Noon or 1 p.m., and reopened them around 4 or 5 p.m., depending on the area, remaining open until 8 or 9 p.m.

## **CALENDARING**

For many Filipinos with strong North American influence, a calendar is something one must keep. Many Filipinos will say calendaring is necessary, so appointments will not be missed. Many will say it is nice to know about scheduled events ahead of time to be better prepared, but even then they maintain that calendaring should be flexible. For many, calendaring means “adulting.” For younger Filipinos growing up in the U.S., calendaring is a means to be organized,

to stay ahead of things, and not have overlapping or competing events. Also, many Filipinos favor weekends for events over weekdays. In addition, yearly, traditional Filipino celebrations should be observed in the United States and should not be dismissed.

I have observed Filipinos struggle with organization, at least from what I have observed in church. Many of them live from one week to another, or even one day to the next. Many church meetings for the following day are scheduled the night before via email. Nonetheless, they expect you to have read the email and that you will act upon it. In his book, *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge describes the intricate, interwoven connectedness between the parts and the whole, and how one individual affects the homeostasis of the entire group (or family, or organization). Senge also talks about how choices and a clear focus will determine outcomes, as well as the tension between personal vision and the vision of the congregation, and between what is ideal for leaders and reality.<sup>94</sup> All that also helps me understand the dynamics of the Filipino Culture.

## **EVANGELISM**

The understanding of Evangelism among Filipinos varies. Many affirm that Evangelism should be taken seriously by the congregation because Christians need to share Jesus Christ with others. Others say there should be no limits when it comes to Evangelism, and that Christians should always “be on fire” for Jesus. However, these same people say that, because

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<sup>94</sup> Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 130-forward.

Filipinos are naturally shy, sometimes it is hard for them to share their faith in a public setting. Many say the word “Evangelism” makes them cringe when they hear or read it. Many say their actions as followers of Christ should be evident and, if they have to use words, then their actions do not reflect Jesus within them. On the other hand, there are Filipinos who believe Evangelistic words should be used along with witnessing through actions and relationship building.

### **USE OF EMAILS, PHONE, TEXT MESSAGES, SOCIAL MEDIA**

Filipinos understand the use of emails and social media as good tools for communication as long as they are used wisely. From the standpoint of older Filipinos, younger generations are expected to teach them the “how-to’s” at the same time be patient while their parents and grandparents learn the intricacies of the digital technology available today. Depending on the age, older Filipinos will use new digital technologies just enough to get by. Filipinos also can get carried away at the keyboard as they get passionate about something they believe is “right,” while on Facebook, for instance. Younger generations believe phones are an extension of themselves at this point and use them for just about anything, including reading their Bibles and devotionals.

## **WHAT FILIPINOS WOULD LIKE PEOPLE OF OTHER CULTURES TO KNOW ABOUT THEM**

Filipinos want the world to know that they are loving, warm, accommodating, kind, generous, hospitable and friendly. Filipinos are not good communicators and they will ignore you to avoid saying “no.” They usually do not acknowledge receiving a message, so the other person is left wondering if they received it or not. Filipinos are willing to open their homes and host people, especially out-of-town guests. Most Filipinos are reliable, especially in a work setting. Their spirit of communal unity, work and cooperation is strong particularly in achieving a goal. Filipinos come from 7,641 different islands and they do not think alike. Filipinos have been colonized by three different, powerful nations who changed who they are, and how they think and act, which has caused them to lose their sense of identity as a people and as a nation.

Generally, people born in the Philippines lack the comfort, opportunities, and economic standing when compared to people living in United States of America. That is the reason many Filipinos have a deep sense of pride when they are successful. They celebrate the victories they have and take pride when their children succeed in school and in their careers. Occasionally, Filipinos will put someone else down in order to get ahead.

Filipinos will brag about ties they may have with someone notable as a matter of pride, and also because it is rare. It is also a hallmark of Filipinos to feel instant kinship with another Filipino, in America or anywhere in the world, even when the other Filipino is a stranger. As a point of consideration, many second-generation Filipino children born in America display a sense of embarrassment towards their Filipino heritage, growing up as minority and often mistaken for a different nationality. They are still proud in some ways, but distance themselves

in others. They are proud of their delicious food and of their parents for making it in America, but not so proud of the ways they keep tearing each other down.

### **GENERAL TOPICS ABOUT FILIPINOS (BASED ON OBSERVATION AND CONVERSATIONS)**

When you visit a Filipino home, you will see lots of shoes by the front or back door. Unless specified otherwise, go ahead and take off your shoes and leave them by the door you enter through and then walk around the home barefooted.

A Filipino gathering means there will be food to be shared with guests. Towards the end of the gathering, you will see some women in the kitchen placing leftovers in bags or containers and they may offer food for you to take home. As a matter of fact, they will insist you take leftovers home. Accept the food and tell them how much you appreciate it.

Keep in mind Filipinos may have their personal opinions on a given topic, but an individual will defer to what the group or majority believe is the consensus. That is because Filipinos do not want to lose face. Filipinos by nature are non-confrontational and they do not want to be the odd one out.

Filipinos gravitate toward each other no matter where they are in the U.S. or any country abroad. At Christ Redeemer, they always clustered together and did not mix with the other Cultures around them. On top of that, as mentioned in another chapter, they often complain because people from the other Cultures “do not invite” them to their gatherings or involve them in their activities.

Filipinos have veneration for their pastor-figure and will call their pastor “pastor” and not by the first or last name only. They will vow loyalty to you and the mission of the church with passion, but will also back-stab you often, and back-stab each other on a regular basis.

Watch your tone of voice with Filipinos since, in general, they are emotional people. Take every opportunity to reaffirm them. That helps them with their confidence and trust towards you. Avoid putting them on the spot or making them feel intimidated. Put them at ease.

Show some genuine interest in their language and learn some of it, at least to get by. As with any Culture, people appreciate your efforts to speak their language. Also, try to eat their food. I liked most Filipino food. At least make an effort to try their food and, perhaps, acquire a taste for it. Learn their customs and traditions as much as possible, and as fast as possible. Because the religious background in the Philippines is Catholic, many Filipinos uphold Catholic traditions they brought with them when they immigrated to the United States. So, welcome these traditions, try hard to understand them, respect them, celebrate them, and create space for them to express their traditions in the life of the church. These traditions give them a sense of identity as Filipinos, drawing them together in unity as they, together, remember their life back in the Philippines even as they are now living in the United States. Second-generation Filipinos who immigrated to the States while they were very young, or those who were born in the United States, may or may not deem Filipino traditions as important as their parents and grandparents do.

Another very important element in the relationship with Filipinos, or any Culture other than your own for that matter, is to pay attention to yourself in the midst of it all. How you respond to conflicts will affect the homeostasis of the congregation.

Part of my findings have to do with how I responded to conflict in the congregation. During our conversations in our class on Conflict Transformation at Perkins, SMU, something new emerged for me: The concentric circles Dr. Gilliam, our professor, went over with us. The concentric circles present the different possible approaches to people involved in a system. The first, outer circle is to CORRECT and DISCIPLINE. This circle tells us we will be spending more time disciplining people. The next circle moving inwards is to TEACH/PREACH. This circle tells us we want to fix things by teaching and preaching. The next circle is to LISTEN. This circle tells us we need to listen as we ask the question, “Why do they do what they do?” and ask others “Tell me about your family generations, etc.” The fourth circle will ask the question, “How have I nurtured the relationship with that person/people?” The fifth circle is PEOPLE OF INFLUENCE. This circle will encourage the question, “How have I nurtured the relationship with the people of influence, that is, the leaders of the church?” And the last circle, at the center, and the layer that should come first, is based on Buber’s<sup>95</sup> “I-Thou” and “I-IT” relationships.

Looking at the concentric circles, I noticed many times I functioned at the first and second layers of the circle, that is, the Discipline and Teach positions. One of the reasons for this was I sometimes felt mad and frustrated with programs or ideas not moving forward. Another reason was the fact I also felt hurt over what a few church members said or did

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<sup>95</sup> Buber, *I-Thou*.

regarding my ministry with them. I did do a lot of listening. I did nurture relationships with people and our leadership, but maybe that was not enough for them. I noticed most of our leaders in church were able to respond to the Vision and Mission of the church, while a very few others wore their black and red hats the whole time.<sup>96</sup> Maybe I could have nurtured my relationships with the black and the red hatters, which would probably have prevented conflicts in the long run, but I am not sure of that. My guess is that I avoided the black and the red hatters to some extent because every time we engaged in conversation the only thing they had to say was negative and charged with emotion. The “Six Thinking Hats” method helped me in my approach to the dissenters, at least to some extent. Fortunately, after some time in ministry at Christ Redeemer, I was able to see that even the voice of the dissenters - the black hatters and red hatters as I call them - had something to teach me and draw my attention to in the life of the church.

I also observed, from the concentric circles, the need to pay attention to the center of the circles, the “I-Thou” position and the “I-It” position in order to regulate myself. It is very easy to relate to others on the basis of “I-It” position, especially when the scenario of black hats and red has been repeated over and over again. When I am relating in the “I-It” position, I am already tired from the same people always complaining and pointing fingers at other church members and at me and not providing any affirmation of the work being done for the betterment of the whole church. In his book, *Where Angels Dare to Dance*, Gilliam points out a snapshot of reactive and responsive congregations<sup>97</sup> that has served me well. In addition, Dr.

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<sup>96</sup> De Bono, *Six Thinking Hats*, 71-86. The Black Hat means careful and cautious, and the Red Hat means emotions.

<sup>97</sup> Gilliam, *Where Angels Dare to Dance*, 24-25.



Gilliam gives us a list of ways we can be proactive towards preventing getting caught in the anxiety system.<sup>98</sup>

I agree with Fisher and Ury, Wheatley, Buber, Lederach, De Bono, and others who write about the need to recognize emotions, theirs and ours, and the need to value the other person on the basis of an “*I-Thou*” relationship. But this does not come easily. It is something you have to be deliberate about. In the beginning of my appointment to Christ Redeemer, all this conflictual behavior in church, and especially amongst the Filipinos, drove me nuts. I could not figure out why Filipinos were unable to address an issue without getting all riled up. I felt my buttons were being pushed all the time and also noticed conflicts escalated easily. That is why it is important to recognize our own emotions, as well, for, as Lederach reminds us, “[the church] is, after all, a place where we journey toward each other and toward God.”<sup>99</sup>

Tillich’s book, *Love, Power and Justice*, helped solidify my understanding of the possible source of my frustrations at this church, at least sometimes. Tillich says, “Man strives to reunite himself with that to which he belongs and from which he is separated.” Tillich continues, “The fulfillment of [these] desires is accompanied by pleasure. But it is not the pleasure as such which is desired, but the union with that which fulfils the desire. Certainly, fulfilled desire is pleasure, and unfulfilled desire is pain.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Gilliam, *Where Angels Dare to Dance*, 17.

<sup>99</sup> John Paul Lederach, *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians* (Harrisonburg, Virginia.: Herald Press Herald Press, 2014), 105.

<sup>100</sup> Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice*, 29.

From the very beginning, when I started my appointment at Christ Redeemer, I had an idea of how this church might move along toward growth. The idea came from my initial observations of the church's dynamics. As I saw it, the future held a picture of what the church could be. I worked at the basics with our leaders and church members. And the basics involved a lot of pastoral care, too. However, there was no follow-up and carrying out by the responsible parties involved, which led to little or nothing being accomplished. That drove me insane. I was never able to establish a platform from which the whole building would be built. I felt I always had to go back to be basics, over and over again. That disgusted me and discouraged me from thinking I would be able to accomplish much in the life of this church. I felt there was no or little accomplishment as the months went by. I felt the picture of "what the church could be" and the "real" picture were never going to be reunited, thus creating "pain" and discouragement for me and a number of church members. So, it is important to pay attention to how you are affected and how you respond.

## CONCLUSION

Pastoral Leadership in a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural, Conflict-Driven Congregation: A Filipino Case Study emerged from my experiencing Christ Redeemer and their conflicts. It is an attempt to understand why conflicts happened so often at that church and why those same conflicts never seemed to be resolved but turned into different, new issues that generated new conflicts.

In my thesis, I have reflected upon my experience as the pastor to Christ Redeemer and have gleaned some understanding of the Filipino Culture and their inter-relational dynamics. My findings show that cultural clashes often happen on extra personal levels when people interact with people of a culture other than their own. Furthermore, I came to see that many of the conflicts at Christ Redeemer were common among Filipinos in their relationships, and that most of the conflicts at Christ Redeemer came from the dynamics at play within Filipino Culture and when they engaged the other Cultures present in the life of the church and beyond. Most of all, conflicts at Christ Redeemer predominantly arose from the personality traits of individual Filipinos who regard their own church experience as learned in the Philippines and in the United States, as well as from their personal and communal expectations regarding church life in general, as normative.

Writing this thesis has helped us explore some layers of the dynamics at play in a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural United Methodist Church where a Filipino population was the dominant

group. We verified that those dynamics at play generated conflicts that definitely sidetracked the mission of that congregation.

The findings of this thesis can provide non-Filipino and Filipino pastoral leaders with a deeper level of understanding of Filipino culture that may enhance their ministry with Filipinos. The findings of this thesis can also offer lenses through which a non-Filipino and Filipino pastoral leader will be able look into Cross-Cultural, Multicultural congregations, perceive their specific contexts and dynamics more clearly, and increase their awareness and understanding while providing extra Multicultural tools to better engage in ministry with cultures other than their own.

As I served Christ Redeemer, a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural church, with a majority of the members being Filipinos, I tried hard to adjust and learn their way of life as much as I could. I tried to see the world through their eyes for a better understanding of the Filipino Culture. During my tenure as the pastor to Christ Redeemer, I went to the Philippines twice and was immersed in their Culture. I learned some of the language and learned to eat their delicious food. I listened to them. I walked their pace. I offered the best pastoral care I could give them. I offered training in different areas of ministry, Bible studies, prayer time, and anything you can think of in order to help them in their discipleship with Christ. At the end of the day, I always felt like a stranger in their midst, never really accepted and very often disrespected as their pastor and as a person. I always felt like an outsider, and the same happened with my family. Trying to minister to them always felt like “a moving target,” in that whenever the thought “I got it now” crossed my mind, something happened that proved I had not. My wife and I became emotionally ill towards the end of my tenure at Christ Redeemer. We were more than

ready for a new appointment, and we know some church members were ready for us to move along, too.

I provided a lot of pastoral care to the congregation. I really took care of them. On my last Sunday as their pastor they asked me to stay in the Sanctuary, sitting in a chair, in front of everyone who wanted to stay behind. And then, one by one, they stood up and shared with everyone present how I had touched their lives as their pastor for four years. Many said many different things. The greatest consensus was on the pastoral care they received and how deeply they felt cared for. One thing I will never forget from that day was what they said, "Pastor, you survived us! You survived us!" I believe no pastor should ever have to hear something like that from their congregation. Ever.

Remember Aunt Reynante? Two and a half years after I left Christ Redeemer I received the nicest 'thank you' card from her. The card came in around the time of the anniversary of the death of Aunt Reynante's mother. She wanted to express her deepest appreciation and gratitude for my being present for her mother and her family throughout the time her mother's health was declining and when she breathed her last. The card was beautifully handwritten and filled with love. I immediately wrote Mrs. Reynante back to let her know how much it meant to me to receive that card from her and to offer a word of support. There is so much more to learn about Filipinos and even more about Cross-Cultural, Multicultural congregations.

Upon reflecting on my experience at Christ Redeemer and writing this thesis, my conclusion is that pastoral leaders in a Cross-Cultural, Multicultural context working with a Filipino population will serve best mostly by being in solidarity with the people they serve God

with and not so much by attempting to resolve their conflicts. And that is because there is no set of rules for approaching conflict among Filipinos that will work best and, very often, “letting them be” to sort out their own personal and relational conflicts can be the greatest offering of pastoral sensitivity that embodies solidarity with the people as they serve God together.

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