

Guided by God: An intercultural journey

Rev 7:9: After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

Have you ever wrestled with a scripture verse?

For three years? Members of the denominational Intercultural Study Committee spent three years with one verse: Revelation 7:9. The journey of the committee during those three years is one that can simply be described as being guided by God—and what an awesome journey it has been.



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The story of this journey begins with names of those being selected for the committee on the Annual Conference ballot. Even the way in which the names got on the ballot was without doubt “a God thing.” The first meeting of the study committee in Elgin, Ill., brought together members from five different cultural backgrounds and from different walks of life: pastors, academics, laypersons.

Each person brought his or her own perspective, own cultural background and lens, own language, own experiences, own faith walk. We each had preferred ways of working

we knew we had just heard God’s voice. And there were real celebrations, rejoicing and praising God. I recall that we spent one whole morning of our precious time together in Bible study, and God led us to the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10. We realized how God would open our eyes time and time again to understand scripture in a different way, guiding us as we worked through the writing of the final report.

Revelation 7:9 became a verse that we would almost live, eat, and breathe for three years. It became part of us. With such in-depth study came a way of seeing in a different way—seeing God’s way, a way no longer as colored by our own experiences or agendas.

The process culminated in our presentation of the final paper, “Separate No More,” to the Annual Conference body in Cleveland. The presentation itself was guided by God, with the singing of “Fluye, Espíritu, Fluye” at the beginning. The words so aptly described our journey: “Flow, Spirit, flow.” The power of God’s presence was palpable as we sat on the stage listening to affirmation after affirmation from the delegates and witnessed the paper pass nearly unanimously as written with no changes.

As we hugged each other backstage and thanked God for his guidance, we truly felt as one, despite all the many differences that could have kept us apart. And then we realized it. We were of different languages and different tribes, and we were praising and worshiping God together—we were experiencing Revelation 7:9 in the here and now. Mere words cannot begin to describe the holy joy and awesome power of


God in that moment.

The journey is not over. In many ways, it’s just begun. God is calling all members of the Church of the Brethren to be open to God’s guidance. We as a com-

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mittee believe that God is speaking to us—as individuals, as a denomination—in many ways, including through the words God gave us in the “Separate No More” paper.

We experienced the heavenly joy that comes from worshipping and praising God together. We learned that our differences don’t keep us apart, but, rather, that our differences help broaden our experience of God, enriching our faith walk in ways we never imagined before. And we learned that what matters most in the end is our relationship with God *and* our relationships with each other as sisters and brothers in Christ.

Sisters and brothers, there is so much more that God wants to do for us and with us and through us: Are we ready for that journey? Are we ready to be guided by God? 

And so it was for three years: We prayed, discussed, and wrestled together over this one scripture verse and how God was calling the Church of the Brethren to respond. There were bumps along the way—frustrations, misunderstandings, discouragement, perceived setbacks. We prayed together and cried together. But there were also real joys, moments when

Darla Kay Bowman Deardorff served on the Annual Conference Intercultural Study Committee along with Asha Solanky, Thomas Dowdy, Nadine L. Monn, Neemita Pandya, Gilbert Romero, and ex officio member Glenn Hatfield. She is a member of Peace Covenant Fellowship Church of the Brethren in Durham, N.C. For a copy of the “Separate No More” paper, go to www.brethren.org/ac_statements/2007MultiEthnic.pdf.