

Conversation with CEMCA
October 5, 2019
Virginia Conference UMC

Present:

- Alfiado Zunguza
- Lyle Morton and Lori Valentine de Segovia
- YunHo Eo
- Mark Ogren
- Tammy Estep and Denise Honeycutt
- Yun Kim
- Kang Uk Lee
- Warren Harper
- John Bright
- Ted Smith
- Glen Rowley
- Ileana Rosario

- Lyle began the meeting with a reading from Colossians 4 and a prayer by Lori.

Lord in your Mercy for the ways of this World, and who we are called to be to serve in it. Protect the children we raise and those that are caught in the crossfire of racial hatred that scars more profoundly than any bullet wound. May we protect the children who are infected by the pestilence of racial hate at tender ages and may your healing grace *sanar estas heridas tan profundas del alma*.

- Lori read the original statement presented at Annual Conference.
(<http://www.vaumc.org/ncfilerepository/CEMCA/CemcaAC2019Statement.pdf>)

Lyle explained that Lori and he (co-chairs of CEMCA) represent the various Ethnic minority groups that have expressed dissatisfaction for the election of delegates process (as CEMCA co-chairs). CEMCA believes there is a need for bring healing in our conference and a need to be inclusive. The CEMCA chairs will continue to represent the under-represented voices at the table. Some are present here. Others are still not ready/able to come to the table.

CEMCA clarified for the purpose of the meeting and subsequent processes, the following terminology:

- ✓ Inclusivity- Multiethnic/ multicultural/ multilingual
 - ✓ Equity- all cultures, languages and backgrounds with equal voice and value
 - ✓ Privilege- Implicit biases we all have and function under (knowingly /unknowingly)
- Our facilitator explained the plan for today's conversation a 3-fold:
- 1- Understanding the problem, we are facing.

- 2- Prioritize the issues that needs to be addressed.
- 3- Develop a process or implementation plan to put in place solutions.

Discussion by various members expressed that this conversation is more than what happened at Annual Conference, but it has a broader context. CEMCA reminded us that the focus of this conversation is this current manifestation of decades old practice. This conversation about the underlying issues, not the election of a progressive delegation. Members of the conversation expressed shock at the final outcome of elections, which “never thought would elect the whole ticket”.

Here is a summary of issues shared:

1. Election of delegates to 2020 (process itself) how to make things better.
2. Exclusion of minority (lack of respect, lack of support)
3. Feeling the issues of concern to minority group(s) will not be addressed by General Conference (immigration) due to an absence of minority representation.

Justice is a starting point. What are the real issues affecting the Conference?

Specific talking points in relation to the events at and leading up to the Annual Conference election of delegates:

- By looking at the final list of nominees, who nominated themselves or were nominated by others. That's in itself is exclusion.
- There were other times in which valid candidates were excluded at varying steps leading up to, and during the election of the delegation, including limits to floor nominations.
- How will the elected delegates will embrace our concerns and authentically represent those concerns and issues at General Conference?
- Even when we are allies, we have implicit bias. How can we teach a lifetime of experience to someone who does not have much contextual understanding of what discrimination and persecution is? There were qualified folks from ethnic minorities who were qualified but not elected, even on the nomination list. It appears to almost all present that non-whites were traded for a different lens in this election process. We can cannot obtain equity when we do it through oppressing another. The urgency for justice expressed by a specific group in the actions that contributed to this election is very similar to the justice of those who have been living and working for ethnic-racial justice for more than ~~the past~~ 10 years in this conference. That is who was oppressed by the results of this election.

The issue raised is what was the intention or motivation to elect the delegation. If no law was broken, how can we motivate people to be more mindful of ethnic minorities in the future?

- In the Asian community, we have an elected delegate from our group. We are about 100 members, but we are quiet advocates. We had a retreat and a conversation about these

issues. The concern was that there were delegates elected from our group that were young with less than 4 years of experience as pastors. We felt they were chosen by another group but not by the group they represent.

The issue raised is how qualified the individuals elected to represent their ethnic groups. Is the consensus that someone with more experience would be better?

- Electing Latino delegates is very hard when the ministry is affiliated to Anglo churches. They tend to send white delegates to represent them which makes sense. In those churches the Anglo laity does not consider members of the Latino ministry as part of the church even if they are official members of the church.
- From our theological perspective, the elders have the collective idea and vision of the whole. Younger people have less experience and understanding of our culture, but they were elected because of their position in one issue. Election by emotion, is natural but there was too much emotion. The process did not give us a chance to be represented, to present our perspective. It felt like a political process, like a cartel-like in which a group monopolized the issue. The Clergy was elected with just two votes. The List was already made. It was really unfair for people with different kind of perspectives. They should be there not because their theological point because they have never experienced the Korean congregation and they have less than 10 years of service.

There is a cultural understating that wisdom comes with age. We want to know if the elected delegate can really speak on our behalf.

- It is very difficult to get candidates that are non-white. There are qualified delegates that are afraid of institutional ramifications because what you say is not popular. Many don't come to the table because they are perceived negatively or suffer when they advocate for what is needed. Many are not here today due to this issue. We also have minority groups and caucuses in formation that are not organized enough to have representation yet in our conference.
- As a conference commission or board, we have the opportunity to nominate only one candidate. Some people were not able to come to the district conferences. There was a slate in the laity side and the way it was elected caused much more hurt than people imagine. Some people will not come back. We need to heal that. What happened at Annual Conference shut them off.
- The "list" was not developed until March or May. They did not affect the district elections.
- The perception in some minority groups and allies is that at each step of the process, varying experiences made it appear that more was going on for longer. The "list" election at Annual Conference was the breaking point.

The same processes have different interpretations, people read it differently.

10 MINUTE BREAK

Lyle, CEMCA co-chair - Thank you for coming to our conversation today. Thank you for making it a priority. Let your groups know that is very important to have this conversation. This is not a one-time fix but a part of healing process that will not stop at this table. We need to bring it back to our constituencies so all can hear.

Lori , CEMCA Co-chair- Discrimination comes in many ways. CEMCA is the forum for those concerns to be expressed, we bring the opinions of those we represent. Sometimes there are obstacles and repercussions for them to express their concerns directly. We take the responsibility for those who can't- yet. There are those who will not step forward due to "institutional browbeating." This election for some of those groups was just another form of "institutional browbeating." Especially for those who reached out to the leaders throughout the election process and delegation leadership. Those were who asked us to speak as CEMCA when we went to the conference floor.

There is a relationship between an election and our Christian values.

However, an election is a political process that requires taking sides all the time. The challenge is how do we balance that process with the values we uphold as Christians. An election is a complex and political process but is also the way in which institutions makes decisions. The institutional response to that is to try to find a balance. Even during the election there was no intention or malice on what people did, but the end result created the perception that some were excluded. We cannot change the delegates because they were elected and there was not mismanagement, no rules were broken, but how do we balance with more compassion, more awareness and the sense that marginalized people feel excluded. This is our challenge.

How do we make sure that the delegates elected truly represent us, in totality, and become the voice of the Conference?

- Remember the general conference delegates are not responsible to represent the concerns of particular groups but to listen.
- However, many people in our congregations still see the elected delegates (Annual, Jurisdictional or General Conference) as representatives of their concerns. They vote for delegates that will represent their values.
- Even if the general/ jurisdictional delegates vote their consciousness, they are elected by whom it is perceived that they will represent, especially on the laity side.

How do we raise awareness about these issues? The perception of representation varies. How can we make sure the delegates advocate for those issues and hear those concerns and share with different groups the issues and concerns?

Group 1: Strategize about rules and election

Group 2: Strategize about creating awareness in the Conference about these perceptions.

We need understanding that we have a common ground. We need to name what we have in common because it gives clarity and enable us to view the big picture. We have different agendas and processes but there is a common ground where we can hear one another.

In response to an email statement Tom Berlin sent to CEMCA and the established Ethnic Caucuses:

- CEMCA has offered to be present in delegation meetings to monitor and provide feedback as legislation of concern is communicated to the board.

Mark Ogren provided a summary of the email that was sent to established ethnic caucuses:

1. After January we will have the 2020 General Conference resolutions. They delegation will choose the main issues that are to be communicate to the caucuses for their feedback.
2. Each caucus will choose 2 people as liaison to share information through the delegate assigned to listen to that particular caucus.
3. Every caucus will have an expert to present to delegation the issues that affects the Caucus if needed. Also, a representative willing to come to delegation meetings, sharing dates and letting people know when delegation meets.

The first impression to this document was negative.

- Some felt this proposal was still controlling the voices of those silenced in the elections, or asking formalized caucuses to inform the GC delegation of the work the elected individuals have committed to doing.
- Some members felt it was not fair to do the work of summarizing resolutions for the delegation without any guaranty that we will be heard. As explained, it seems that there is a commitment from the delegation to respectfully listen these issues from the caucuses point of view.
- In the past, the delegation has not discussed issues that are important for us, like immigration. Our caucus interprets silence about those issues as dismissal.
- The resolutions that come to General Conference are specifically written for issues; we don't choose the issues. We need to educate people for four years about these issues so when the election happens, the delegates have already heard and understand these issues.

- What we need is a delegation vested in learning about multiple issues. How do you package that for people who are not aware?
- How do we educate the delegation on legislative matters that are not available yet?
- Provide them multiethnic education and lengthen the training timeline/ preparation for election to the delegation. Maybe we can't in 2020 but, set up intentional mentorship so that by 2024, we are not in the same situation.

How do we have conversations before the election of a delegation? How do we prepare for the 2023 election? How do we educate the greater church about an issue, before we have an election?

- We need to find a way to bring all the caucuses to the public so anybody can hear. All delegates in Virginia should have an app where they can actually see the different concerns that will be discussed at General Conference.
- Something we can do is to invite the caucuses to lead worship in their language at the delegation meetings so the delegates can experience listening to translators. It could be done bilingually, led by differing ethnic groups (if willing and invited) or the delegation meetings could be simultaneously translated. It is a needed skill to become accustomed to for the General conference and the global stage.
- That will have to be a long-term goal because that can't happen in only 3 months.
- We know that the worship experience is always planned, that could be done on a short timeline.
- Through the Church Development Team (CLDDT) needs to connect with interested people and help them become a GC/SEJ delegate, maybe establish a 1-2 year process to help prepare folks for the 4 year commitment to being on the delegation, not just preparing for the election of it. CLDDT is a conference structure that could be utilized since all candidates there present their qualifications. Suggested SEJ/GC delegates could be suggested and mentored to create more new leadership.
- If there is real interest from the Conference in delegates from our caucuses there will be more motivation for them to be part of the Annual Conference system.

Marc Ogren provided an overview to the group of Tom Berlin's suggestion to help prepare the elected 2020 delegation:

- The delegation will identify top issues and will inform the caucuses for their feedback.
- The caucuses will have a team of Clergy/laity liaison to connect with delegation and give feedback.

- If your Caucus has a presentation they want to make, they can talk to Tom Berlin or Warren Harper and ask for time for a presentation.
 - How do we educate people in the next four years and encourage people to prepare themselves to become a delegate?
 - Every GC delegation meeting is open, and these are the dates:
 - Sat Nov 16, 2019
 - Sat Jan 4, 2020
 - Sat Feb 15, 2020
 - Sat March 14, 2020
 - General Conference 2020 - May 5 to 15.
- The delegates need to know when there are different points of view and not have an antagonistic attitude toward them but treat them with dignity. They are the good Shepherd, the delegates. It is not the time to express their anger. The leadership needs to show that respect.
- (Responding to question about translation) The Translation equipment at the conference is antique and not functioning properly. We have enough volunteers now that can translate. We can rent the equipment to have interpretation in different languages. If we know in advance, we can have translation.
- The written invitation from Tom Berlin was provisionally approved as a starting point. CEMCA will continue to work with additional suggestions about educating future delegates, creating awareness of minority issues, and empowerment of candidates to become delegates.

Second small group:

- Election of delegates is a process that starts at the local church level. Older folks come to AC because they can take the time off. We suggest going back to the old schedule for Annual Conference on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.
- Folks that wanted to be delegate can't take the time off for 2 weeks for GC and one week for Jurisdictional Conference
- CLDDT is trying to get greater diversity and even asking the question of minority but the lack of diversity of our conference is still a challenge. There are 94% Caucasian delegates. We have only 7 Latino delegates and 56 Asian.

- How do we train and orient the delegates about their role in Annual Conference? We should adapt policies and procedures that allow us the use of technology, so people do not need to be physically present to be elected as district delegate.
- In Virginia we have always have “the list thing” with its own dynamic. At times it gets people elected but the results this time call our attention.
- The concern of what happen at General conference was a turning point. The Annual Conference was responding to GC. It happened all across USA. We had always had persons suggested to be elected, but it has never happened before that all were elected at once.
- Agreed, but it looked different at each annual conference. Some delegations have all non-whites elected. Our Virginia delegation looks very different.
- Pragmatically by having to return the voting machines that same day, we set it up considering the time constraints.
- This was especially evident on the laity side, where the top names were read aloud instead of projected due to technical problems.

How do we communicate the clear picture to those we want to engage in constructive conversation?

ISSUES:

1. Nomination Process and roadblocks
 2. Multiethnic education and perspectives need to be intentional
 3. Background information to determine the ability of a candidate to address a range of issues at General Church level
 4. Trust Issues/ Historical Issues of repeated hurt/ Credibility
- The nomination process and the spreading of information might not address the trust issue and the historical issues. There is a relational gap we need to close. This is a start.
 - We need to report back to our groups, listen to their feelings and determine what are the voices we need to raise. Be intentional and passionate with transparency.
 - We are building relationship here. Remember that knowledge is power. If you don't have the knowledge you feel powerless and that's what happens to ethnic minorities.
 - What additional voices need to be raised and at the table?
 - GOALS for our continued dialogue: Passionate, Transparent, Conversation, Relationship

Report back to your caucuses and inform them to help change perceptions. Envisioning the future help heal the past.

How can we do it together? We can create programs that address the concerns.

The Institution needs to be sensitive to the needs of its people

→ Minority Sensitivity → Working Culture → Reconciliation