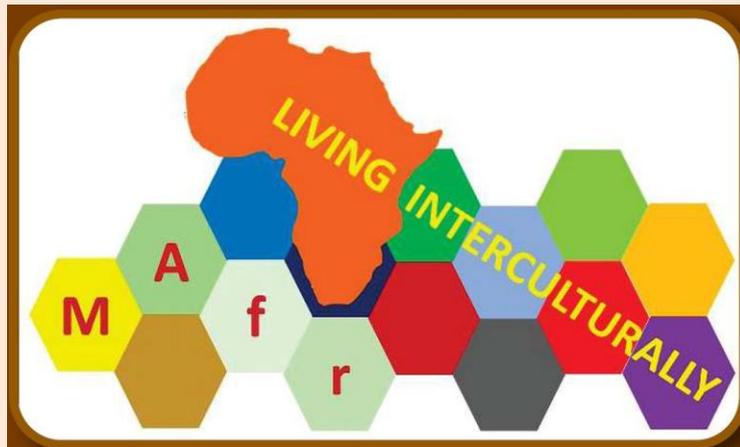


Solidarity Hospitality as the Spiritual Foundation of our Intercultural Communities

By Serge St-Arneault, published and addressed for all the members of the Society of Missionaries of Africa in the world.

Logo of the Intercultural Committee

PHOTO ANDREAS GÖPFERT



It is not so simple to conceive of Solidarity Hospitality as the spiritual foundation of our intercultural communities. At first glance, this notion seems too abstract. However, I have been convinced of its accuracy since my participation in the workshop “Living in Intercultural Community as Apostolic Witness Today” in Rome in 2019. “More than ever,” I wrote after the session in Petit Echo, “we

are taking into account our cultural diversity which is perceived not as a threat, but rather as richness. Our deepest desire is to bear witness to our unity in diversity. »

A Special Example: The Afrika Centre

The Afrika Centre opened its doors in 1988 in the basement of la Maison des Missionnaires d’Afrique in Montreal with the aim of promoting the integration and participation of Africans in their host society. Since then, many associations have collaborated in the vitality of the centre, which serves as a relay for newcomers to direct them towards the services they need thanks to a network woven over the years with other private, community and government organizations.

The groups that come to the Afrika Centre are very diverse. Some associations represent a specific African country; others are oriented towards forms of engagement. There are also dance groups and choirs. Experience shows that there is no real interaction between these different groups. To tell the truth, the Afrika Centre is above all a pleasant place of service decorated with African works of art which is very much appreciated. The quality of the welcome is particularly appreciated.

Change Needed

But we need to go further and build bridges. My dream is to encourage the development of a sense of belonging based on mutual help between individuals and associations through the emergence of a solidarity-based hospitality that will foster the acceptance of mutual dependence as a foundation of identity.

Thus, the Togolese association will not limit itself to the only Togolese living in Montreal to support a fundraiser for a school in Togo. All other associations will join this collective effort. Another day, we will attend a conference organized by an Algerian association. It will be the same to participate in a show organized by one of our choirs. We are looking for a framework

where plurality becomes the unifying cement of identity development that links individuals as well as groups.

The “Afrika Centre” Identity

I hope that the Afrika Centre will develop its own identity based on Interculturality compatible with a spirituality of communion. This must be a constructive approach that promotes complementarity. The groups that meet at the Afrika Centre do not threaten each other. On the contrary, they become a mutual gift. By enlarging our circle of fraternity, we have a chance to see one day the Afrika Centre become a place of hospitality and solidarity...



Afrika Center, un lieu de rencontre interculturel

Our Missionary Communities

The session that we experienced in Rome was addressed above all to our so-called international missionary communities. They are also interracial. This is an excellent opportunity to deepen our “missionary identity” within the framework of an intercultural spirituality. Can our communities become places of Solidarity Hospitality?

As I mentioned last year, we have been living hospitality since our foundation. Moreover, solidarity is already part of our way of life. It is largely enshrined in our constitutions. Can we then combine in a more creative way these two concepts that form the basis of Interculturality?

Our Limitations

My missionary experience has taught me that it is not so easy to talk to each other, to share our experiences among confreres. Certainly, we share the burden of our apostolic work, sometimes living in difficult or tense conditions. Fortunately, we support each other in our moments of prayer. On the other hand, what do we really know about our confreres?

As with any other human being, inevitably, our stereotypes and prejudices are based on cultural codes linked to our particular collective experiences, with nature, time, space, illness, death, power, historical trauma, etc. The variety of our cultural behaviour is almost infinite.



Missionaries of Africa and Msola from different nations gathering around Jesus

The Chance We Have to Be What We Are

From the very beginning, the European White Fathers had to face the challenges of “living together” beyond the devastating wars of the 20th century. To have experienced this myself, there is a real cultural clash between America and Europe, deeper in some respects than that between America and Africa. For three or four decades now, the White Fathers have been Africanizing themselves. In addition to them, our Indian and Filipino confreres are also joining them. What challenges!

Yet we have proved, beyond our mistakes and blunders that we can live in intercultural communities. Indeed, we have developed a unique family spirit inspired by our founder, Charles Lavigerie, who insisted on our famous “esprit de corps.” We can be justifiably proud of this.

What about us today?

Lavigerie did not speak in terms of Interculturality, because that word did not exist. What he advocated is nevertheless similar. Our spirituality is one of fraternal communion respectful of cultural differences. Being Disciples of Christ presupposes that we are all complementary to one another. How, then, can this be expressed concretely in our missionary communities, which are mainly composed of African and Indian confreres in Africa? How can they become places of Solidarity Hospitality?