**GCCHM Leadership Certification**

**Level VIII, Course #2**

**CELEBRATE DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN’S MINISTRY**

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**(Presenter’s Notes)**

**INTRODUCTION**

Every day, our classrooms, neighborhoods and communities become more diverse (or different).    People from different countries, cultures, religions and with unique abilities, religions and beliefs continue to spread out around the world.  Different skin colors, languages, physical abilities and clothes are some of the types of diversity that we experience every day.

Yes, for those of us leading children’s ministries, you will notice immediately that all these children who come to our Sabbath Schools, Vacation Bible Schools, Children’s Camps are all different! They come in all shapes and sizes, all types of skin colors, all types of personalities, temperament, etc. Thank God for giving us diversity!

**WHAT IS DIVERSITY?**

* The state of having people who are difference races or who have different cultures in a group or organization.

**DIVERSITY ENCOMPASSES PEOPLE FROM:**

* Different skills and professions
* different gender
* different ethnic groups
* Different socio-economic status
* Different physical abilities
* Different religious beliefs

The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect.

It means understanding that each individual is unique and recognizing our individual differences.  These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.

Diversity can be defined as people coming together from different races, nationalities, religions and sexes to form a group, organization or community. A diverse organization is one that values the difference in people. It is one that recognizes that people with different backgrounds, skills, attitudes and experiences bring fresh ideas and perceptions. Diverse organizations encourage and harness these differences to make their services relevant and approachable. The encouragement of diversity benefits our society and church.

**DIVERSITY IN AMERICA**

* Peoples from many countries—Russians, Brazilians, Indians, Jordanians, Vietnamese, Argentinians, Filipinos, Japanese, Chinese, etc.
* Peoples with different religions—Christian, Jewish, Catholic, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, etc.
* Peoples speaking hundreds of languages—English, Burmese, Finnish, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese, Thai, Korean, Norwegian, etc.

America is one of most diverse countries I have lived in. Just working here at the GC office allows me to rub shoulders with colleagues from so many nationalities and cultural groups – Russians, Brazilians, Indians, Jordanians, Ukrainians, Argentinians, Filipinos, Japanese, Yes, diversity is great thing!

**Mexican tortillas, tacos, Russian borsch, Chinese spring rolls, Italian pasta, Japanese sushi, Korean kimchi.**

Even within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, there is great diversity! As a worldwide church, we have 18 million members and they cover every continent. Look at Andrews University! What a diversity of nationalities and cultures and races on International Day when all the flags are raised all along the sidewalk on the campus! Yes, I have enjoyed Japanese sushi, Indian chapatti, Ethiopian ingera, Korean chopchay, Russian borsch and many more.

**Why a Lack of Cohesion?**

* Mistrust
* Stereotyping
* Prejudice
* Misunderstanding
* Lack opportunity to mix with cultures—cliquish

Studies show that the lack of cohesion between races, sexes and cultures is due to mistrust, stereotyping, and more within-culture conversation and language problems.

When these problems are not paid attention to, it may lead to an inability to endorse ideas, the inability to gain agreement on decisions, and inability to take united action.

**Stereotype**

**Illustration**:

When I was teaching in the St. Joseph County Jail in in 1973-75, I found myself right smack in the middle of diversity stereotyping. The first day when I went to the jail to teach Social studies, the inmates, ages 18-30, looked me over and asked if I was a Chinese. Yes, of course. Immediately they asked, “Do you know Kungfu?” I never expected that. Of course, I said “NO”. They didn’t believe me. They wanted me to teach them Kungfu. They all wanted to be like Bruce Lee, the expert Kungfu master in the ‘70s. Every day they would pester me to teach them. What stereotyping! Not all Chinese know Kungfu! But my students in the jail thought so!

Often when people lack knowledge of things that they are not accustomed to they are quick to judge or stereotype and make ignorant decisions.

**American Psychological Association**

* Research shows that negative stereotyping inhibits academic performance.
* Negative stereotyping threatens how students evaluate themselves, which alter their intellectual performance (Steele, Aronson and Spencer’s studies)

**Benefits of Diversity**

* Helps us grow outside our boundaries and learn something new about other cultures.
* Helps us learn to understand different points of view, thus eliminating prejudice and bias.
* Creates curiosity to learn how things work better in another group than ours.
* Enriches the educational experience when we hear different opinions from other cultural groups
* Diverse groups are more innovative than homogeneous groups.
* Better at solving complex, non-routine problems—interacting with individuals who are different forces group members to prepare better, to anticipate alternative viewpoints and to expect a concerted effort to reach consensus.
* Promotes personal growth and a healthy society.

**What Does the Bible Say Abut Diversity?**

*“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ... For by the Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, and have all been made to drink unto one Spirit for in fact the body is not one member but many.”*

1 Cor. 12:12-14

We as Christians are one body, a very well-oiled machine, but not just a machine. We have the breath of life given unto us by God the Father himself which we can find in genesis. That thought alone is quite the thought. Our importance is greater than any machine. We were created to rule with the Father through His Son, Christ. When we were put together to be part of such a powerful body we see that things just don’t happen by themselves. It is not supposed to. As Christians we need to come together as one voice with Christ as our head, we will be able to take care of anything.

**Galatians 3:26-29**

“All of you indeed are children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Judean nor Greek (that is neither Jew nor Gentile), there is neither slave nor free, there is not male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

As I read accounts of the New Testament church, no characteristic stands out more sharply than [diversity]. Beginning with Pentecost, the Christian church dismantled the barriers of gender, race, and social class that had marked Jewish congregations.

Paul, who as a rabbi had given thanks daily that he was not born a woman, slave, or Gentile, marveled over the radical change: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

One modern Indian pastor told me, "Most of what happens in Christian churches, including even miracles, can be duplicated in Hindu and Muslim congregations. But in one area only Christians strive, however ineptly, to mix men and women of different castes, races, and social groups. That's the real miracle."

**Ellen White, *Desire of Ages, p. 403***

“Caste is hateful to God. He ignores everything of this character. In His sight the souls of all men are of equal value. Without distinction of age, or rank, or nationality, or religious privilege, all are invited to come unto Him and live. “Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference.” “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free.” “The rich and poor meet together: The Lord is the Maker of them all.”

**Diversity Must Matter in Ministries!**

* Diversity comes from God—created a variety of flowers, animals, people, etc.
* Diversity reflects the heart of Jesus—reached people across all social, ethnic and economic lines

**How Can We Foster Diversity in Children’s Ministries?**

1. Select children’s leaders and volunteers from various ethnic and cultural groups.
2. Be culturally sensitive and aware of the needs and responses of children from diverse cultures.
3. Value differences in the children:

\* learning styles

\* personalities

\* ethnicity

\* languages

\* abilities

1. Utilize the children’s different back-grounds, skills, attitudes & experiences for fresh ideas and perceptions.
2. Discover what the different cultural groups have in common—games, customs.
3. Celebrate and honor special days of different cultural groups – Martin Luther King Day, Cinco de Mayo, etc.
4. Pair children of different ethnic groups to work on projects together.
5. Be totally involved with the children in gospel outreach and service.
6. Reflect diversity in media and print resources we produce – books, videos, CDs, posters, brochures etc.
7. Sing songs in different languages.

**THE FRIENDSHIP RAINBOW: POEM**

Once upon a time the colors of the world started to quarrel.

All claimed that they were the best. The most important.

The most useful. The favorite.

**Green said:**

"Clearly I am the most important. I am the sign of life and of

hope. I was chosen for grass, trees and leaves. Without me,

all animals would die. Look over the countryside and you will

see that I am in the majority."

**Blue interrupted:**

"You only think about the earth, but consider the sky and the

sea. It is the water that is the basis of life and drawn up by the

clouds from the deep sea. The sky gives space and peace and

serenity. Without my peace, you would all be nothing."

**Yellow chuckled:**

"You are all so serious. I bring laughter, gaiety, and warmth

into the world. The sun is yellow, the moon is yellow, the stars

are yellow. Every time you look at a sunflower, the whole world starts to smile. Without me there would be no fun."

**Orange started next to blow her trumpet:**

"I am the color of health and strength. I may be scarce, but I am precious for I serve the needs of human life. I carry the most important vitamins. Think of carrots, pumpkins, oranges, mangoes, and papayas. I don't hang around all the time, but when I fill the sky at sunrise or sunset, my beauty is so striking that no one gives another thought to any of you."

**Red could stand it no longer, he shouted out:**

"I am the ruler of all of you. I am blood - life's blood! I am the

color of danger and of bravery. I am willing to fight for a cause.

I bring fire into the blood. Without me, the earth would be as

empty as the moon. I am the color of passion and of love, the red

rose, the poinsettia and the poppy."

**Purple rose up to his full height:**

“He was very tall and spoke with great pomp: "I am the color of

royalty and power. Kings, chiefs, and bishops have always chosen

me for I am the sign of authority and wisdom. People do not

question me! They listen and obey."

**Finally, Indigo spoke, much more quietly than all the others,**

**but with just as much determination:**

"Think of me. I am the color of silence. You hardly notice me,

but without me you all become superficial. I represent thought

and reflection, twilight and deep water. You need me for balance

and contrast, for prayer and inner peace."

And so, the colors went on boasting, each convinced of his or her own superiority. Their quarreling became louder and louder. Suddenly there was a startling flash of bright lightening, thunder rolled and boomed.

Rain started to pour down relentlessly. The colors crouched down in fear, drawing close to one

another for comfort.

**In the midst of the clamor, Rain began to speak:**

"You foolish colors, fighting amongst yourselves, each trying to dominate the rest. Don't you know that you were each made for a special purpose, unique and different? Join hands with one another and come to me." Doing as they were told, the colors united and joined hands.

**The Rain continued:**

"From now on, when it rains, each of you will stretch across the sky in a great bow of color as a reminder that you can all live in peace. The Rainbow is a sign of hope for tomorrow. “And so, whenever a good rain washes the world, and a Rainbow appears in the sky, let us remember to unite together. Let’s appreciate one another.

**Let’s Love One Another: Let’s Celebrate Our Diversity!**