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Conference opens eyes to immigration

By Lisa Jo Bezner

On May 1, 2006, immigrants across the United States took to the streets in demonstrations that made many Americans aware that around 12 million immigrants are living in the United States.

Since that time there have been calls for more border security to keep the immigrants out, calls for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, and calls for a second sanctuary movement.

During the 2007 Women in the World conference on March 20-21, participants got a look inside of this issue and how it impacts the opportunities for mission.

Of the seven speakers at the conference four of them are immigrants: Rev. Dr. Gennifer Brooks, Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Tapia, Rev.

See CONFERENCE, page 8



Photo by Adam Randazzo

Dr. Kathe Darr, president of the Anna Howard Shaw Center Board and Hebrew Bible professor, introduces herself to participants at the 2007 Women in the World conference, "Christ's Word in the World: Immigration and Mission in Ministry." Dr. Hee An Choi, director of the AHSC, facilitates the introductions. This year's conference included seven speakers - three professors, three "Voices from the Parish" and an update by AHSC scholar, Rev. Laurel Scott, on the center's current study.

Center getting notice for multicultural work

For the last five years, the Anna Howard Shaw Center has raised the consciousness of a multicultural ministry and envisioned its ministry for 21st century ministry.

From the director As the first step, we had a multicultural biblical lecture and study series, "A Mosaic of Voices," from Spring 2004 to Fall 2004. As a result we published *Engaging the Bible*, which was edited by Kathe Darr

and Choi Hee An. The book is being recommended by the Massachusetts Bible Society as one of the best religious books of 2007.

As the second step, we put our passion for multicultural ministry into the Women in the World conference "Christ's Word in the World: Immigration and Mission in Ministry." We invited six guest speakers (Rev. Dr. Gennifer Brooks, Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Tapia, Dr. Dana Robert, Rev. Gabriela

Garcia, Rev. Loraine Cleaves Anderson and Rev. Vicki L. Woods) and heard six rich voices of Christ's word in the world. We learned how we could embrace our multicultural ministry in real immigrant and mission context and reach out for the world more intentionally and consciously.

As the third step, we are preparing to finish the research project

See DIRECTOR, page 7

'You know you have to take care of family'

By Lisa Jo Bezner

It was a fight with a boyfriend that brought Rev. Dr. Gennifer Brooks to the United States. The native of Trinidad decided to visit her oldest sister, who had already emigrated in the 1960s to become a domestic worker, and if she could be accepted into a school she would remain here.

The first thing her sister talked about was where Brooks would go to church and Brooks chose her church because there were several people from home there and they were involved in church here in the same way they had been in Trinidad.

Brooks said going to that church was "a piece of home." There was a kind of joy in being there, because when they were there it was like being back at home.

But coming to America meant surrendering her identity as a Trinidadian and becoming Caribbean instead.

"You know you have to take care of family" - that was the Caribbean ideal. If middle class you would send things back as a gift, but lower classes sent money back because families depended on it - for every dollar sent, it was multiplied.

Caribbean people knew they had a responsibility to help others - sister, brother, mother, father, cousin - pumpkin vine family - not related but you helped them. Sometimes the only connection was that they were born in the same island.

The sense of family meant the congregation gave enough money for children's trip that \$200 trip was paid for plus food for money.



Photo by Adam Randazzo

Rev. Dr. Gennifer Brooks, assistant professor of homiletics at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, presented "The Caribbean Connection: A Liturgical Community in Action."

Church was an incredibly important part of life for the new immigrant — when you got a letter from home you were asked: Have you had found a church?

At home they went from Roman Catholic to Anglican to Methodist Society - at night went to a woman's home who was Methodist by day and Baptist by night.

Getting into the churches meant having a family structure and situation - many of the women worked as live-in workers and on their day off would come into the immigrant neighborhood. When they came to visit they often wouldn't sleep because they needed to "drink in" the community.

For Brooks, the liturgy had to be high and the vestments fine. Immigrants were used to the canticles - she left Methodist church for awhile because she missed the chants. An American-born organist could not get the canticles right - the organist stopped but the people could do the chant without him.

The immigrants were changed by America because they were no longer known by their individual island identities and because "we all sounded funny to Americans. Having your accent made fun of meant you couldn't make fun of someone else's accent - we needed to stop that foolishness."

They brought with them into the church a sense of the seriousness of worship that helped the churches to grow and be enriched.

Bethany started food program because immigrants would buy houses and move away but continue to come to same church - people in neighborhood were poorer so the church provided food.

Started after-school program and summer vacation Bible School that they charged very little for so local children could come - have been in outreach to community and through churches in conference. Understand mission trips based on the family.

Tapia shares ‘talambuhay’ of immigrants



Photo by Adam Randazzo

Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Tapia shared seven “talambuhay” of women from the Philippines who are living in the United States. She ended her presentation with a “Ritual of Rice and a Litany.”

By Lisa Jo Bezner

Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Tapia was the first woman in her entire town to get a PhD and they were very proud of her, but didn’t know what to do with her when she became a feminist.

Tapia is one of ten children and has worked as a teacher and theologian in the Philippines for many years, has lectured in Switzerland and immigrated to the United States in 2006 when her U.S. born husband enrolled at Boston University.

“You are looking at the face of an illegal immigrant,” Tapia said and smiled because she is waiting for immigrant papers before she can begin working at Drew University as the director of global ministry..

Tapia thinks we need to look seriously at the role of churches in hospitality. and she pointed to Book of Resolutions #162, which says that “being an undocumented person is not a crime.”

In highlight the “push factors” or reasons people leave their home country, Tapia pointed out that Asia contains two-thirds of the world’s population with most of those people living with an income equivalent to one dollar per day.

She showed a picture of a garbage dump where people were trying to make a living from the trash dumped there. A visit to the dump made a student, who had previously thought they were poor, realize that they weren’t really poor - and that the church needed to do something.

Every day in the Philippines someone is being killed based on their political stance — 867 people have been killed since 2002. Those killed include journalists, student radicals, professors, church workers, union organizers, human rights workers - even working for ecology can get you killed.

See TAPIA, page 4

Ritual of Rice and a Litany

As rice is the staple food of Asians, we feel the grains of rice as we remember those who have nothing to eat and those who have much to eat. The Korean resistance poet, Kim Chi Ha said, “As we cannot go to heaven alone, we must share rice together”.

Silence....

As we feel the grains of rice, we remember those women and men who because of poverty and joblessness, or because of political repression, were forced to migrate and be separated from families and loved ones.

Silence...

As we feel the grains of rice, let us imagine Maria, Rebecca, Perla, Norma, Soledad, Jasmine and Lina joining us here. They cannot leave their work places to go to conferences. Some are reunited with families only after seven years or more.

But they are women of Responsibility, Integrity, Courage, and Enthusiasm (RICE).

They have a message for me, for us. We are sisters in Christ, we are co sojourners in life.

Smile... we offer this litany.

Changing face of global Christianity put in context

By Lisa Jo Bezner

Dr. Dana Robert began her presentation with a story about a pastor asking one of his congregation members to move to the front because the pews that had previously been full were now empty.

The man responded: "I have sat in this pew for 40 years, it's not my fault the people who used to sit in front of me have died or gone away."

Robert's presentation highlighted the demographic shifts that have been occurring in the United States. For example:

In 2003, 11.7% of American population was foreign born: 33.5 million people. The foreign born come from Latin America 53%; Asia 25%; Europe 14%; Other 8%

Asians are likely to become Christian when they immigrate here.

One of the wrinkles in immigration law is that it's easier to come here as pastors than any other occupation. Rather than the world becoming a more secular place, immigrants are working to reverse the march to secularism in the U.S.

"We may be sitting in the same pews as 40 years ago, but we've moved nonetheless."

Robert then focused on examples from Africa and how immigrants change the face of the churches we are accustomed to by bringing their own theological pri-



Dr. Dana Robert

orities and denominational loyalties; changing the composition of mainline denominations; being a worshipping and healing community accustomed to Pentecostal-style worship; changing patterns of mission and ministry: "Mission to and from all six continents."

While a historian and not usually into predictions, Robert did say that "given the decline of Western Christianity, we can assume the increase of power from the South."

Robert pointed to the issue of homosexuality that is currently tearing apart the Anglican community because many U.S. congregations believe in the ordination and blessing of same-sex marriages. But Africans did not want to vote because they knew how it would play out - Americans pushed for the vote, which tore the church apart.

Consecration of Gene Robinson in 2003 caused the lid to come off because South Africans called the American church immoral and unbiblical.

An American group is trying to dictate policy and being rejected because they don't have the numbers.

TAPIA

Continued from Page 3

There are 120,000 Pilipinas in Hong Kong working as domestics/nannies - they are professionally trained but can earn up to three times in Hong Kong what they would in the Philippines.

Tapia then shared the "talam-buhay" or life stories of seven women that she interviewed specifically for the conference. Six of the women live in New Jersey and one in Maine.

Tapia studied the women by going to wherever they would go - to weddings, to church, to restaurant and to karaoke after eating. These women range in age from 23-66 and from single to grandmother.

Her entry was through Flora, who had been a student of Tapia's in Philippines. Flora came to U.S. because she wanted to give her children a better life after observing at the Denver General Conference

Flora worked for \$6/hour, which was equivalent to one month salary in Philippines. She couldn't go home for 7 years, and now she opens her house to serve as hospitality.

These women find living in America lonely and rely on cell phones: "Just to hear the voices of my children is enough to get me going."

Tapia asked what is our mission in a globalized diaspora - what can we learn from immigrants?

They survive because they keep eating rice:

- R - responsibility
- I - integrity (honest work)
- C - courage
- E - enthusiasm

And because they don't eat problems three times a day - you have to celebrate. They celebrate

Voices from the Parish offer day-to-day insight into multicultural ministry practices

By Lisa Jo Bezner

A new addition to the Women in the World conference this year was the “Voices from the Parish,” which allowed pastors to share their practical experiences.

Rev. Gabriela Garcia of Christ United Methodist Church in Lawrence, is originally from El Salvador, the “Smiling Country,” and has been in the U.S. since the early 1980s when civil war tore apart the country.

Civil war was about hope for jobs, equality for all. In the middle of that, family was touched - weren’t political, just normal family - worked hard but didn’t have a lot of money. Government approached first, so her father became gave information to the government when the militia found out eight members of her family were killed in one night.

They traveled for seven days before being arrested crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Friends and cousins were able to get her out of prison after 28 days and \$3,500.

Her employer made her last six months without documentation painful but she was saved by the people at the church who advised her: “Don’t say anything until you get your green card.”

After years of factory and domestic work she finally got her green card and she jumped for joy; then her employer said “You’re free.” And she was able to go to school. She went straight to the pastor and told him he was going to school. The church paid for the first semester.

Rev. Loraine Anderson of



Loraine Anderson, pastor of International Community Church in Brighton, holds up a Burmese school bag she received from one of the many congregations at her church.

Photo by Adam Randazzo

International Community Church shared her experiences with being the host church for several congregations and how they navigate the share space.

In the 1980s, she helped plant New Life Fellowship, which hosted eight different churches with “soundproof” curtain between them - sometimes two services going on side-by-side and people with microphones. She learned how important it was to let the unimportant things slide off your back.

She finds herself constantly trying to break down the formality of the church building and does her best to share the space. Common rooms are in common - only closets, cabinets, office cubicles are private. If something is left in common space it can be used by anyone.

If you are hosting other churches, it is good to think through, pray through what your non-negotiable theological core is going to be.

When you work with people around the world you are going to step on some toes, but don’t smash the toes.

Rev. Vicki Woods of Wesley United Methodist Church in Worcester spoke about confronting privilege and racism in her ministry.

Her appointment was intentional by Bishop Hassinger, who made the decision that nobody who had not done racism training and white privilege training could be appointed to the church.

One of the shifts she has had to make was from being on the forefront of being a woman pastor to recognizing that she was white and could no longer draw on her lack of privilege as a woman.

It was through a conversation with Jerome del Pino that she realized she was holding onto power when she told him that if she gave up some of her power he wouldn’t give it back and he said “So?”

Retreat offers chance to relax with Spirit

Dr. Kathe Darr opened her home to eleven School of Theology students and Anna Howard Shaw Center board members for the annual women's retreat on Saturday, Jan. 20.

Board members Margaret Wiborg, Jo Ann Carlotta and Mary Todd prepared and served food including a vegetarian chili sent by Kristin White.

The students selected the theme "Experiencing the Holy Spirit" and volunteered to lead programs for the day.

The day began with a continental breakfast and tour of the Darr house, which included stories about furniture that had been handed down in the family.

Following the tour, the women gathered in the front room for a short worship service led by Lisa Jo Bezner, the service centered on Abraham's purchase of the field of Machpelah for Sarah's burial (Genesis 23:1-2, 17-20) and the Midrash that supplements it, which includes the reburial of Adam and Eve in the cave described as the entrance to the Garden of Eden. That reading was then connected to 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ."

The women then paired up and got to know each other while giving each other hand massages, which was initiated by Claire Hoffman.

Claire Donaldson facilitated a talking circle with questions designed to draw out personal experiences with the Holy Spirit. Each participant was given the opportunity to share while they held a Bible



Photo by Lisa Jo Bezner

Anna Howard Shaw Center board members Mary Todd and Jo Ann Carlotta, front, check on soup while Dr. Kathe Darr, board chairwoman, works in the background. The board provided food for the annual women's retreat, which was at Darr's house.

in their hands.

Personal reflection time followed this and some people went for a walk in the cool air while others colored mandalas or explored labyrinths that were provided in booklets.

We then enjoyed a delicious lunch of soups and stews that had

been made by Shaw Center board members.

The highlight of the retreat was watching the enjoyable, inspirational, and empowering movie, "Little Miss Sunshine"! We laughed, cried, and experienced many emotions as we shared the

See **RETREAT**, page 7

RETREAT

Continued from Page 6

ride with a family determined to get to California from New Mexico in a day to ensure the participation in a beauty pageant for “Little Miss Sunshine”!

The viewing of the movie was followed by discussions and personal reflections lead by Kudzai Mpunzwana, Emily Nye and Megan Burd-Harris.

It was a time of sabbath for us as we reflected on the past year and semester, endeavored to face the new year and new semester being guided by the Holy Spirit.

School of Theology retreat participants were Lisa Jo Bezner, Mary Bryant, Claire Donaldson, Megan Burd-Harris, Claire Hoffman, Amy Mareno, Kudzai Mpunzwana,



Photo by Lisa Jo Bezner

Katrina Skayne, Amy Mareno and Megan Burd-Harris, from left, chat and color mandalas during the time of personal reflection at the “Experiencing the Holy Spirit” retreat.

Emily Nye, Amber Pettit, Kelley Sherman, and Katrina Skayne.

Board members present were

Margaret Wiborg, Hee An Choi, Kathe Darr, Jo Ann Carlotta and Mary Todd.

DIRECTOR

Continued from Page 1

that we have done for last two years. This research project will be presented in two different places; American Academic of Religion 2007 and our own conference in 2008.

Anna Howard Shaw Center Scholar Rev. Laurel Scott and Director Rev. Dr. Hee An Choi proposed our research project as a panel and it was accepted by the practical theology group at American Academy of Religion. With other researchers and immigrant scholars, we will share the finding of our own research and discuss the current immigrant ministry responding to the presence of immigrants in the United States.

This panel discussion will focus on the present status of the immigrant church and how its theology

and ministry might be processed from the immigrant’s perspective. It will offer an understanding of immigrant churches and provide an interpretation of the ongoing praxis of the immigrant community and its people. Based on our research in the immigrant church and our individual and communal immigrant experiences from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa, the immigrant scholar panelists will demonstrate various immigrant situations and experiences of transition, how faith develops and how church takes a role in their lives. In this discussion, we hope to find a way to understand the meaning of multicultural ministry in the United States and envision a new mission of church to the world.

After we introduce our research in American Academy of Religion,

we will prepare another presentation for Women in the World 2008. We will illustrate our research and its results in a more concrete, practical manner to show our collective analysis and reflection. It will help clergy and lay leaders to understand the immigrant struggle and their faith in the dynamics of physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions including their socio-political struggles, cultural patterns of their faith formation, and their need/expectation of the church. We hope that this research provides rich resources not only for immigrant ministry but also for the church as a whole to cultivate a new way of creating healthy multicultural ministry. We pray that your wonderful support continues and embraces our vision for the multicultural global ministry.

CONFERENCE

Continued from Page 1

Gabriela Garcia and Rev. Laurel Scott.

Brooks spoke on the experience of Caribbean immigrants and how they found community in the United States through churches that connected them to home.

Tapia talked about her personal struggles with getting a work visa and of women from the Philippines who had moved to New Jersey and how church was important to them.

Garcia spoke about the night she was forced to flee El Salvador because eight members of her family had been murdered. And how her church supported her through the immigration process from “illegal” to “Rev.”

They were joined by pastors who have worked in multicultural churches and how they navigated the cultural differences. Rev. Vicki Woods talked about her experience at Wesley United Methodist Church and Rev. Loraine Anderson about the International Community Church.

Scott, AHSC scholar, updated conference participants on the “Women in Immigrant Churches” study that the center is involved with including the studies presentation at American Academy of Religion later this year.

The conference finished with Dr. Dana Robert providing insight into the shifting dimension of global Christianity and how that impacts our mission of ministry.

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