



NEW TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

BY THE REV. ANNEMARIE E. KALKE DELGADO,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WYOMING INTERFAITH NETWORK

I heard a voice thunder from the Throne: “Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They’re his people, he’s their God. He’ll wipe every tear from their eyes. Death is gone for good - tears gone, crying gone, pain gone - all the first order of things gone.” The Enthroned continued, “Look! I’m making everything new. Write it all down - each word dependable and accurate.” Revelation 21:3-5 MSG

“Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood...”¹

I love the image I see when I imagine God moving into my neighborhood. What treasures would come out of God’s moving truck? How would the neighborhood adjust to include God? Would God be invited to the neighborhood Fourth of July party or just the Homeowner’s Association meeting? Would we make an effort to welcome God in a special way or assume God will figure out how to make things work?

The truth is God is already in the neighborhood among us! “The home of God is among mortals.”² God is part of the larger community to which we all belong - a community of all that is sacred. A wider, deeper, and greater community than we can imagine and includes the earth and all its people brought together in the Divine. As Christians, our challenge is how we best welcome God to the neighborhood and how we best welcome and respect all others in this sacred community of the Divine. I believe the key to the answer is understanding the practice of “respect.”

What is “respect”? When we respect something, we consider it worthy of high regard. The practice of respect is a “reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct.”³ As we practice respect with all creation, we get closer to living in harmony as part of God’s sacred community. This enriching concept is shared with almost all Native traditions as they “affirm the sacred nature of the Earth and all living things within the web of life. They stress essential values of respect for the Earth and for creation, respect for ancestors, respect for elders and responsibility for the community. Native religion teaches care for the Earth and asks people to consider how any developments might impact the following seven generations.”⁴ Therefore, practicing respect impacts the harmony and balance of the sacred community in perpetuity.

As I reflect on the verses of Revelation 21:3-5, I have a refreshed and intensified awareness of the care that I must take, that we all must take, in building relationships with others. In my daily life, that means reaching out to others to learn about their faith traditions and building relationships with all those who share the earth as their home. I am especially aware of reaching out with respect to people whose stories and lives have been ignored, discounted, and erased. In Wyoming, that includes building relationships with our Native American, LGBTQ+, African American, Japanese American, and immigrant siblings to name just a few. It means reaching out with respect to those people experiencing homelessness, food poverty, or disability. It means reaching out to citizens returning after incarceration and to those experiencing mental illness. Really, when it boils down to it, it means that we must listen, learn, acknowledge, and respect the stories, lives, and lifeways of all those in the sacred community. So, how do we best welcome and respect all others in this sacred community of the Divine? The simple answer is that we must respect and love everyone!

In the blessed community of the Wyoming Interfaith Network, people of several faith traditions join together to live faithfully in sacred community amid a world full of diversity and strife. As we engage in interfaith dialogue, we promote respect for others. As we work together to promote just causes, we develop a more cohesive community taking care of all the people in this place we call home. As we encourage each other and talk about our traditions, we learn from each other, recognize our many similarities, and become more accepting of our differences. As we pray together, we grow closer to the Divine, closer to living together as people of the Holy, in peace. This is how I believe Christians live into the second great commandment; how they express love for all their neighbors in a meaningful way. It is how we all can achieve peace and harmony in the sacred community.

With God's presence in the neighborhood, tears are wiped away and death, mourning, crying, and pain will be no more. God's "moving truck" is taking away the old for in God's neighborhood all things are made new.



“Affirm the sacred nature of the Earth and all living things within the web of life.”

¹ Revelation 21:3 (The Message translation)

² Revelation 21:3 (NRSVUE translation)

³ Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: Zed Books, 2012, 120.

⁴ Rajotte, Freda. *First Nations Faith and Ecology*. London: Cassell, 1998, 99.

Notes:

Native American Elder picture is from Native American Indian Center of Central Ohio Facebook page.
<https://m.facebook.com/4NAICCO/photos/something-good-to-post-today/1829396130515549/>