

Reflection:

Before I share my NFAAUM convocation experience in San Jose just this past July I would like to thank our brothers and sisters in the Japanese and South Asian caucuses for adopting participants from other sub-ethnic caucuses. If not for them I would have had to bear most of my travel expenses to the convocation by myself and further strained my already delicate personal resources. This is truly Christian sharing. It recognizes no bounds.

The NFAAUM convocation in San Jose was a refreshing, inspiring and great learning experience. It was sheer joy to meet Asian-American United Methodists of various ethnicities and hear their stories. And I shall say more about this matter of individual stories. Reportage of events, particularly in periodicals, usually focus on the formal aspects, like what the various speakers say while providing snippets of what participants think.

The whole program was superb indeed though I hope innovations can still be done in the future. For me there was never a dull moment, from the speakers to the workshops that I was able to attend. I learned a lot even of things I thought I already knew quite well.

I anticipated the food quite well and predicted even the sequence it was served (in terms of ethnicity, i.e. Filipino then Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese and finally, Chinese). The meals were all superb. Next time, I hope in the future we'll be served Cambodian, Hmong and Indian meals too.

I hope too that in the future there'll be more sharing in the plenary of the experiences of each sub-ethnic groups.

Informally, it is but natural for people of the same ethnicity to be mingling with each other during breaks and during meal times but I hope organizers in the future will be more intentional in making participants cross ethnic lines for socializing purposes. This occurred to me upon arriving at the hotel before the formal start of the convocation and participants were responsible for their lunch. The other Filipinos I met earlier went somewhere else and I was alone to look for a place to eat. I ended up at a Mexican fast-food (Karlita's, if I remember it right) and there I spotted a group of other participants, Sam (Cambodian), John (Chinese), and Van (Vietnamese) who were already sharing a table. I joined them. Four Asians, each one not previously acquainted with anyone else, gathered in a Mexican fast-food in the USA. That alone says a lot. At any rate, we had a lively conversation over lunch. The spontaneity and friendly atmosphere was such that while we arrived for lunch at different times we all left together at the same time. I probably learned more about what the others were doing, and aspiring for, in their respective sub-ethnic caucuses than in the formal gatherings.

But all these of course are hindsight and not taking away from the heroic efforts of the organizers, who incidentally were all volunteers. After all, the last such convocation was like 11 years before. I hope it will be more frequent than that and with the benefits of hindsight to guide future ones.

Finally, but by no means the least important, is the outstanding way the Wesley UMC (itself has a lot of great stories to tell) in San Jose hosted the convocation. True, I marveled at the functional elegance of its facilities but these were secondary to the warmth and helpfulness of its members. Their heritage as Japanese-Americans plus the friendly and calm setting of Japan Town San Jose may have something to do with it. Still, I believe future hosts will be just as outstanding.

Though concerns were raised in the convocation about the challenges facing the church, my experience at the NFAAUM convocation also gives me a lot of hope. We just need to be more intentional and make use of the gifts of our various ethnic heritages.

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