



Choices That Matter
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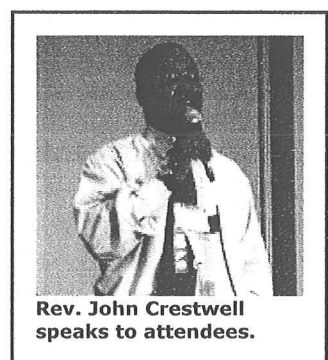
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The Culture of Celebratory Worship

General Assembly 2007 Event 4039
Presenters: Rev. Sofia Betancourt, Rev. John Crestwell, Rev. Jason Shelton, Rev. Leslie Takahashi Morris



This workshop focused on cultural appropriation and misappropriation, especially as seen from the perspective of minority cultures. The Rev. Sofia Betancourt began by defining the words.

Cultural appropriation happens when a group of people use customs, folklore, or traditions from another group of people. This definition is neutral; it carries no judgment.

Cultural misappropriation happens when there is a danger of the appropriation being misrepresented, or is done without a willingness to engage in the struggles or pain that may lie behind the custom.

The panelists emphasized this is a complex issue. Incorporating different traditions is complex and making sense of them is never easy. Furthermore, there are important differences between the dominant culture and minorities, between the privileged and those who are less so. For example, when someone misunderstand or misinterpret Bach's music, the pain caused will be relatively small, even to lovers of Bach. However, when the dominant culture misuses music that is rooted in the pain of slavery, it can evoke far more intense pain. A key test is: are people willing to engage the issues? And even if people are, the result can still be a painful experience for people who have felt oppressed.

There are no easy answers; questions lead to more questions. People may have good intentions, and then someone says "Ouch!" At this stage people need to stop, acknowledge and understand the pain they have caused, and learn from the experience.

The Rev. Leslie Takahashi Morris described two experiences, one successful, one less so. A year ago, she led a Shinto New Year service, and in doing so felt deeply connected to her Japanese roots. Furthermore, she felt she was honoring her father who, when he emerged from an internment camp at the end of World War II, felt he should deny all things Japanese.

A less successful experience occurred when a committee adopted a slogan