

## OUT of ORDER

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[ **DIVERSE** pursuits ]

### WHAT IT MEANS FOR LAWYERS TO LOVE THEIR NEIGHBORS AS THEMSELVES

by PAULINE E. HIGGINS

**W**hile some firms have come to see the value of diversity and inclusion from a business-development, bottom-line perspective, few lawyers consider the key spiritual element to which diversity and inclusion speak.

Many faith traditions embrace the concepts of diversity and inclusion. I speak out of Christian tradition, specifically as an Episcopalian and member of the Anglican Communion, but I believe the lessons I draw from my faith can resonate with attorneys nourished by other spiritual backgrounds.

In Biblical times, as now, humanity was divided. The powerful oppressed and marginalized the powerless, while some who considered themselves religious viewed sinners as outcasts. The wealthy ignored the poor, and some races condemned others. Against this backdrop, Jesus' ministry included all humanity, including those on the margins, the weak and the powerless.

Core concepts of diversity and inclusion appear

repeatedly in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus summarized the law and the greatest commandments as loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves. The book of James is filled with directives about how people must treat one other, especially the vulnerable. Galatians 3:28 speaks of how, in God's kingdom, there is "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

The great commandment — loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves — casts a wide net. Loving our neighbors doesn't merely mean loving those who

are similar to us in education, race, status or ability. It should be sobering for lawyers accustomed to the sometimes-rigid hierarchy of firm life.

In the Gospel of Luke, a lawyer asks Jesus who is his neighbor. Jesus answers in a parable about a good Samaritan who takes care of a complete stranger who was beaten by robbers. The main point of this

parable is that all persons, the powerless in particular, are neighbors and should engender compassion.

#### Apply the Lesson

Lawyers who claim to follow Jesus' teachings are compelled by his commands to respect diversity and



seek true inclusion. Diversity and inclusion are not simply profit-enhancers, producers of optimal client service, and smart policy, although they are all those things. Rather, they speak to fundamental spiritual values. What would it mean for a managing partner to

departments must provide equal access to learning opportunities to all associates rather than simply labeling some as lacking in legal skills. Diversity and inclusion means more than numbers and ethnicity. If in-house and firm leadership does not ensure that all associates are included, professionally received and provided equal opportunities to develop a sense of belonging, that breaks the commandment.

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be a good Samaritan when contemplating how to run the firm's finances in a difficult economy? How would a partner's feedback to an associate change if the partner realized that "all are one," as in Galatians 3:28?

If lawyers endeavored to make workplaces, discussions and decisions reflect the concept of loving their neighbor as themselves, the legal profession would achieve diversity and inclusion. It is especially important for corporate legal departments to do so, since they set the tone and requirements for diversity and inclusion that firms must achieve to qualify for continued legal work.

For example, when hiring an associate, a firm and a corporate legal department must enable that associate to learn, grow and thrive to the best of his or her abilities. That means equitably developing and providing for each associate, as well as recognizing that each unique human asset is coachable and trainable. Skeptical attorneys should recall that they once were beginners, helped by a range of people to become successful. What better legacy can a lawyer at any level leave than contributing to the success of a colleague, treating him or her with respect, and providing development opportunities?

Loving one's neighbor as oneself turns out to be good for business. A legal organization that does not train, develop and unconditionally embrace each associate compromises the future of that budding lawyer and robs itself of talent. Firms and legal

should take a hard look at their firm's or corporate legal department's pro bono commitment. Attorneys have been given much and should return much more to the community.

When will firms and corporate legal departments have meaningful inclusion and training of all persons and endeavor to give back to the community, especially with respect to adequate and free representation for the poor? When will lawyers on all levels embrace the concept of loving their neighbors as themselves so that the profession can really achieve diversity and inclusion? Charity begins at home and with each and every attorney. If not now, when? If not you, who? 



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