

A Distinctly Dordt Vision

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A DISTINCTLY DORDT VISION

Faculty, staff, and students craft a biblically based vision for what racial and ethnic diversity might look like on Dordt's campus.

Adam Adams first knew he was called to cross-cultural ministry when his aunt, uncle, and cousins packed up their belongings and moved to the Philippines to become missionaries. Growing up in a small, rural community, Adams hadn't considered what it would be like to interact with different cultures until his aunt and uncle moved away. By the time he professed his faith at the age of 12, Adams was sure he'd become a missionary, too.

"I've always been drawn to and interested in meeting people from other cultures and learning how to effectively share the gospel," says Adams.

He spent three years overseas working with an unreached people group before

returning to the United States to attend seminary, focusing on church planting and cross-cultural ministry. After graduating, he was involved in a church plant in St. Louis with Bhutanese Nepali refugees. Eventually he taught English as a Second Language at a university in St. Louis for four years.

When he was a child, Adams thought he had to leave the United States to experience cross-cultural ministry. What he found post-college was that there were plenty of cross-cultural ministry opportunities in local communities—including in Sioux Center, where he and his family now live.

"In the mysterious ways that God works, I'm now involved in international

enrollment here at Dordt," he says, smiling. "As Director for Global Education, I want Dordt students to have connections to believers from all over the world, and college is a great place to make those connections."

Dr. Mary Beth Pollema, an education professor, is also interested in multiculturalism—particularly within Hispanic communities. Pollema learned to speak Spanish as a child and, when she chose to study at Dordt, picked Spanish and elementary education as her majors. She taught Spanish at the high school level before earning a Doctor of Education degree with an emphasis in culture, languages, and literacy from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

"I see my role as a teacher as that of a guide for my students. My primary goal for teaching is to equip my students to make a positive impact on culture, specifically to become teachers that will truly make a difference in the lives of their students by guiding them to become followers of Christ," says Pollema.

She feels called to connect with the Hispanic and Latino population in Sioux County. Pollema became involved with Salir Adelante, an Iowa State University Extension and Dordt partnership program for Latino families who want to get ahead and learn about educational opportunities. In her work with Salir Adelante and in the classroom, Pollema says she catches glimpses of what the new heaven and the new earth will be like.

"When experiencing Christian communities from other cultures, you get a reflection of what it will be like in the final restoration before the throne of God, where every people, tribe, nation, and tongue are together, praising God," she says. "It is joyous to have that commonality and faith, and to have brothers and sisters in Christ who speak other languages and have different customs and cultures."

Director of Emerging Markets Eric Tudor has lived in Sioux County since graduating from Dordt in 2012. During that time, he's watched the Spanish-speaking population grow; according to the U.S. census data, more than 11 percent of Sioux County residents are of Hispanic descent.

"At Dordt, we said years ago that we want to increasingly look more like the schools that we enroll from in the region," says



"There have been at least 50 people who have contributed to the statement, including the Board of Trustees, Administrative Cabinet, students, and the council," says Eric Tudor.

Tudor. "And we've seen a shift among where our local students come from."

Dordt still enrolls many students from Christian schools near and far. But those looking for outstanding academic programs taught from a Reformed Christian perspective are coming from other places, too.

"Five years ago, we saw about 15 students from local public schools enroll at Dordt each year," says Tudor. "This year, we have 50 incoming students from public schools in Sioux County, and many of these schools are approaching the point where over 50% of their student body is comprised of racial or ethnic minority groups."

As Dordt looks at growing enrollment locally and continuing to engage with students who want a Christ-centered education, "we know we will have students from different backgrounds, and

we want to help those students envision themselves here," he adds.

Increasingly, Dordt's student body is becoming more ethnically and racially diverse. That's something Alex Vasquez noticed when he began his work as a student success coach. He wondered, is there a distinctly Dordt way to look at diversity—one that points toward Revelation 7:9, the final fulfillment of the kingdom of God that includes "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb?"

"This vision of the new heaven and new earth compels us to seek the same unity in the here and now," says Vasquez. "I believe that, at Dordt, we have the opportunity to redeem how we think about diversity and to be an example to the world. This vision inspires us to develop the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to love our neighbors as ourselves, sharing the love of Christ with those around us."

After all, from the beginning, diversity has been part of God's creational order, says Adams.

"Diversity reflects the creativity of God. We see beauty in languages, cultures, and expressions that come out with culture—all of this is beautiful," he says.

Yet, when it comes to diversity, "secular voices have been far too loud for far too



"This vision of the new heaven and new earth compels us to seek the same unity in the here and now."

— Alex Vasquez



long," says Pollema. "Those voices have shaped our understanding of diversity. Part of our role as Kingdom citizens is to have an active voice in tough conversations and to be able to speak the truth in love."

How might faculty and staff approach diversity from a Christian perspective, to better serve Dordt's student body and the local community and to live out the mission of equipping "students, alumni, and the broader community to work effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in all aspects of contemporary life"?

A VISION FOR RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY

The Imago Dei: Intercultural and Diversity Council was formed to help craft a vision for racial and ethnic diversity—a vision that looked beyond culture's interpretation of what "diversity" means and focused on a strong biblical view.

"Diversity is about honoring and celebrating God's creational structure, which he declared as good," says Vasquez. "God created all people – male and female – in his image and by his design. I believe there's a reason why there's a color of my skin and why I was born where I was born. That's all part of my story, and God has orchestrated it to be that way."

The 13 members of the Intercultural and Diversity Council represented nearly every office on campus, from



The Imago Dei: Intercultural and Diversity Council includes 13 faculty and staff members.

student services to faculty to human resources. The large group met initially to brainstorm ideas, read through related books and articles, receive input from external experts, conduct a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis of what a vision might entail, and more.

From there, much of the work was done by what Vasquez called the "envision team," which included Pollema, Adams, Vasquez, Tudor, and Professor of Education Dr. Barb Hoekstra.

The group worked to articulate a vision for why ethnic and racial diversity is important. They discussed many reasons, including to reach those with backgrounds that might not be considered within Dordt's traditional constituency.

"I think in the past Dordt has had a reputation of not being racially and ethnically diverse, so people from diverse backgrounds sometimes shy away," says Pollema. "I've heard Latino families say, 'Well, I don't know if Dordt is an option for my child because everybody's Dutch and white there,' which isn't necessarily true. For people to see that, we have to say, 'This is who we are. We recognize and value diversity; it's part of God's created order, and we want to acknowledge that.'"

Creating a vision for racial and ethnic diversity sends a message to the broader community, adds Pollema.

"It says, 'We've thought about this, we have a vision for who we are and how we want to become more diverse, and we celebrate racial and ethnic diversity.'"

"We simply want any student of any background who wants a committed Christ-centered educational experience," adds Tudor. "We want them to be able to come to Dordt, to apply, enroll, and stay here."

But as Tudor and his team looked at statistics for who applies, enrolls, and retains at Dordt, they recognized that minority students are one third less likely to enroll than non-minority students.

That prompted Tudor to closely examine the recruitment, enrollment, and retention process to see where they were losing students.

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"Diversity reflects the creativity of God. We see beauty in languages, cultures, and expressions that come out with culture – all of this is beautiful."

— Adam Adams



DORDT'S VISION FOR RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY

"Dordt University aspires to be a diverse, covenant community created by the Father, identified in Jesus Christ, united by the Holy Spirit, and equipped for Kingdom service."

1. Created by the Father - Genesis 1:24-28; Acts 17:24-28; Colossians 1:15-19

We affirm that from the beginning, God ordered diversity within his creational structure, which he declared as very good. God creates all people, male and female, in his image and by his design; therefore, every person possesses inherent value. For this reason, we acknowledge and celebrate the diversity we witness in all that God has made.

2. Identified in Jesus Christ - Galatians 3:26-29; Romans 10:12; I Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:15

We profess that our identity is found first and foremost in Jesus Christ. While we also belong to various culture-sharing groups, all other affiliations are secondary to our identity under the Lordship of Christ, which brings us into covenant unity with him and his people. Tragically, God's divinely ordained diversity is all too frequently and sinfully used to devalue people based upon racial and ethnic differences, rather than being used biblically to celebrate the value of the created diversity and common unity that is found in image bearers of Christ.

3. United by the Holy Spirit - Ephesians 2:14-18; John 16:1-15; Acts 1:8; Romans 8:22-27

We desire to live in the unity, peace, and reconciliation obtained by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit's leading and empowering we lament and stand against discrimination, segregation, bigotry, and oppression. By the transformative and healing work of the Spirit, we instead strive to live in peace, unity, understanding, humility, and harmony with all people.

4. Equipped for Kingdom Service - Micah 6:8; Revelation 7:9-10; Mark 12:30-31; Acts 2:17-18; Philippians 2:1-4; Galatians 3:26-29

We yearn for the final fulfillment of the Kingdom of God where people of every tongue, tribe, and nation will gather united in worship to our Triune God. This vision of the new heaven and new earth compels us to seek the same unity in the here and now. Therefore, we strive to develop the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to love our neighbors as ourselves, manifesting the love of Christ to those around us. We will equip students, alumni, and the broader community to work effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in all aspects of contemporary life.

Soli Deo Gloria!

"Often it's 'I don't see people like me, I don't see co-curriculars for me to get involved in that affirm who I am or who I am becoming,'" he says. "There are countless different hop-off points from application to graduation. How can staff and faculty all come together to think

about, 'What is my piece in helping that student succeed?'"

Tudor feels that a vision statement could become a unifying force for Dordt's community.

"We want our students to go out and

love their neighbors," says Hoekstra.

"But if they're afraid of their neighbors, or they've never talked with someone who is different than them, they're not going to be prepared to have those conversations, and they won't even have the eyes to see who their neighbors are. We're leaning into our faith by being reconcilers and lovers of our neighbors, and then training students to do that as well."

So, how would Dordt's vision for racial and ethnic diversity be uniquely Christian? What should the vision say or *not* say? How should it be structured? These are some of the difficult questions that Pollema, Vasquez, Adams, Hoekstra, and Tudor mulled over.

One of their first tasks was to be specific about how they defined "diversity."

"We built parameters around the idea of diversity so that we could specifically talk about racial and ethnic diversity," explains Pollema. "Society would throw a whole bunch of ideas into what diversity means, but we wanted to focus specifically on racial and ethnic diversity."

They researched how 30 other colleges

JAMIN VER VELDE ('99)



"These are topics that we should be talking about as a church and as Christians, and our students should be equipped to speak about them as well," says Mary Beth Pollema.

and universities wrote similar statements, especially those from Christian schools. Although they liked some of what they read, they weren't overly impressed with what they found. In the end, they forged their own path, relying on biblical structures to build a vision.

For example, the first three phrases intentionally incorporate the Trinitarian structure.

"That structure came together quickly," says Hoekstra. "We saw the Trinity as central in that we are created by God, identified in Christ, and then unified by the Holy Spirit."

Adams appreciates that the vision acknowledges God first and "how we are a covenant community created by the Father." Pollema appreciates that the identity in Christ is central.

"To understand and appreciate differences, we first have to know who we are in Christ," she says. "It culminates in Dordt's mission—this vision is a tool to help us become equipped and to help us equip our students to 'work effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in all aspects of contemporary life.'"

The Holy Spirit is crucial as well, says Vasquez.

"It's part of our biblical mandate to explore a creational view of diversity and understand how the Holy Spirit prompts us to be able to work together to be the hands and feet of Jesus."

"'United by the Holy Spirit' acknowledges the racial brokenness, the ethnic misunderstandings, and the lingual barriers that are inherent in our communities and society around the topic of diversity," says Pollema. "It acknowledges the fall, and it recognizes that we need the power of the Holy Spirit to bring healing and shalom."

The emphasis on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit grounds the statement, "and then the fourth section of 'equipped for kingdom service' propels us forward. Knowing this truth that's grounded in Scripture, how now shall we live in a diverse world?" says Pollema.

The fourth section, "equipped for kingdom service," is Hoekstra's favorite.

"It is rooted in a vision of a new heaven and new earth, the already but not yet,"



JAMIN VER VELDE (99)

A student-led club, MOSAIC hosts events throughout the year where students and faculty learn from one another, celebrate differences, and grow together in Christ.

she says. "And it also applies the idea of convicted civility, where you ground yourself in a strong faith and in firm beliefs, and you say, 'What do we agree on, and what can we work together on?' And focus on that instead of on disagreements."

The statement is also built on the biblical themes of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. To Tudor, it was critical

of racial relations, but we need to begin by viewing the issue through a Scriptural lens: by first celebrating God's creational intent for diversity, then acknowledging the sin and brokenness around us, and then finally inviting our campus community into God's redemptive work."

What excites Adams about the vision is its brevity and depth.

"It's concise and profound. It can be memorized," he says. "If this is going to be something that makes an impact at Dordt, it needs to be simple enough that we can communicate it over and over. I'm hopeful that the Dordt community will memorize it, because it'll become part of our community rather than being a white paper or a statement on our website that no one looks at," he says.

Tudor, Adams, Pollema, Vasquez, Hoekstra, and other Imago Dei: Intercultural and Diversity Council members were not the only ones to speak into the vision for racial and ethnic diversity. There were many supporters and editors, including student Susan Wang. She sees the vision for racial and ethnic diversity as a way to help Dordt students from a variety of backgrounds feel valued during their time at Dordt.

"I think it's God's intention for Christians to treat all ethnicities equally in his image and to be transformed as we learn to celebrate differences," she says. "Ultimately, vision drives and affirms what we value, and it reminds us to act

“Many Christian colleges and universities’ vision statements read more like apologies of past shortcomings than of motivations for life-giving futures.”

— Eric Tudor

that they begin at the beginning: with creation.

"Many Christian colleges and universities' vision statements read more like apologies of past shortcomings than of motivations for life-giving futures. We, of course, must address the fractured state

out the belief that we have formed into words.”

A phrase that stands out to her is “our purpose is to promote the ideals of belonging, unity, and reconciliation among Dordt University students.”

“It really confirmed Mark 12:30-31: ‘and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.’ Now and then, the meaning of love can be obscured, whereas belonging, unity, and reconciliation really summed it up clearly enough to guide Christians to love one another well,” says Wang.

The Board of Trustees and the Administrative Cabinet also contributed to the vision statement, adding in more theological depth and nuance. Both groups recognized that, done well, a vision statement tells everyone and reminds the organization about where it is headed and what’s driving decision-making.

“It helps create strategy. For years, the university’s strategic plan has included goals to deepen and broaden our engagement,” says Chief of Staff and Dean of Chapel Rev. Aaron Baart. “This includes who we are called to serve and where our alumni are sent. In many

ways, this statement isn’t new; rather, it’s an articulate reflection of what we already believe to be true. Now we’re saying, ‘Hold our feet to the fire.’ This is who we believe God is calling us to be. Let’s hold each other accountable in transforming our vision into reality.”

EVERY TRIBE, TONGUE, AND NATION

So how does Dordt’s vision for racial and ethnic diversity differ from that of other universities and organizations?

“It is an attempt to reflect God’s vision for diversity,” says Baart. “Founded in the creative act and culminating in the wedding supper of the Lamb, the Bible reflects God’s vision for a racially and ethnically diverse people that looks distinctively different than the world around it.”

In many ways, says Vasquez, developing this vision happened organically. “It’s something the students asked for, and if you read through it, you’ll see clearly that it’s grounded in faith.”

Vasquez is excited about the ways the vision is already making a difference on campus. Last year he started the Multicultural Leadership Program (MLP), which invites students into a two-year cohort experience to gain leadership skills, spark spiritual formation, and build community. The MLP leaders run

a student-led club called Multicultural Opportunities for Students Actively Involved in Community (MOSAIC), which hosts on-campus events for students and faculty where they learn from one another, acknowledge that their identities are found in Christ, and celebrate their differences. He says he had many students from all backgrounds approach him and ask to be part of MLP and MOSAIC.

Tudor says that he thought MOSAIC would appeal mostly to minority students, “but we’ve had an enormous amount of traditional, multigenerational Dordt students that want to be part of it,” he says. “Students who haven’t had many experiences outside of their traditional communities want to engage with God’s diverse creation. To me, that’s the vision coming alive in front of us. It goes beyond words on a page and into action.”

“I love the fact that Dordt is stepping up and saying, ‘We want to make sure that no student is falling through the cracks, that they know they’re deeply loved and cared for,’” says Vasquez. “When I talk to others about the vision and the other initiatives that are happening here on campus, I hear excitement and passion.”

There is a political narrative around the idea of diversity today, “but we are concerned with what God says about diversity,” says Robert Taylor, vice president for student success.

Christians need to talk about diversity because it’s important to God, and it’s part of his created order, says Pollema.

“There are different definitions of diversity: there’s a secular view, and there’s a biblical perspective,” she says. “And Dordt is first looking at this topic through a biblical lens and is very careful to not buy into secular versions of where other people are coming from when talking about diversity. Again, secular voices have been far too loud for far too long, and that’s shaped our understanding of diversity. As Christians, we should speak the truth in love and be willing to have difficult conversations.”

This, she says, is what the vision for racial and ethnic diversity seeks to do. It’s a first step of many.

SARAH MOSS (’10)



“Like we seek to do in engineering, ag, education, and beyond, Dordt is striving to answer God’s call to redeem the time we are living in,” says Aaron Baart.