

William M. Kondrath, *God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2008), 285 pp.

God's Tapestry is an invitation to journey with others through an on-going transformative process. As Kondrath states, "real, significant transformation happens because of ongoing connection." Kondrath's autobiography of his transformation through ministerial engagement with the issues of racism, oppression, and cultural differences provides the passion and realism for *God's Tapestry*. Real transformation occurs via vulnerability, relationship, spiritual practice, and honesty. In the preface, he states that he "thinks of this book as a roadmap for transformation." "On-going connectedness" is the mantra which resounds through this book as the underlying theme connecting each chapter.

Each chapter provides communities of faith with resources to view and celebrate the tapestry of differences which bind them together. In Chapter One, he presents "guidelines for recognizing and valuing differences," a tool

302 BOOK REVIEWS

he learned from his on-going relationship with VISIONS, Inc. I personally used these guidelines to lead a church "town hall meeting," which opened members to a new level of sharing as to what they value in liturgy. Readers are challenged to imagine what life could be like by "trying on" other ways of viewing reality. Chapter Two, focusing on "power and differences," is rich in challenging the place of privileged and dominant groups. Kondrath provides a wealth of easily usable charts, models and questions, to aid any congregation engaging in the hard conversations around power, oppression, privilege, and powerlessness.

Clinical pastoral education supervisors and pastoral counselors will welcome his chapter on the affective life in the relationship to transformation. The struggle for these professionals with empowering 'emotional literacy' receives strong support from Kondrath. Connecting with feelings provides a foundation for personal and community transformation, which begins with engaging our imaginations (chapter four) to consider new ways of "thinking, behaving and feeling."

Principles of relational theory (chapter five)—developed over many years by Janet Surrey, Stephen Bergman, Jean Baker Mill, Judith Jordan and Irene Stiver—sets up the theoretical basis for a new transformation in congregations, which requires men and women to work together for the Kingdom of God. In chapter six, Kondrath tackles the on-going struggle within institutions to understand gender differences and their impact on the healthiness of faith communities. No longer can the differences among men and women be explained or seen in a binary fashion. The differences in attitudes, behaviors, perspectives are as much within gender as between genders.

"The Rhythms of Transformation" (chapter seven), in which Kondrath creatively considers change and change theory, was my introduction to *God's Tapestry* when I used the prepublication version for my course on studying congregations. It is a chapter that field education professionals will find very

useful in classes that focus on congregational systems and analysis. My students have consistently found that this chapter has awakened them to new ways of understanding change and also a way to engage congregations in facing change as part of the rhythm of their life together.

A strength of *God's Tapestry* is the variety of resources for ministry and personal living. The appendices are rich in resources for engaging groups in multicultural awareness and understanding. The wisdom and knowledge of *God's Tapestry* are portable, and the resources connect with church members and seminary students. Kondrath brings to our awareness resources (people, models, processes) that have contributed to his personal transformation as an ethnic white male who has discovered over a lifetime the importance of valuing and celebrating differences. It's a journey to which we, as practitioners and members of the Body of Christ, no matter what our ethnicity, are all invited. *God's Tapestry* is both an enjoyable and informative reading, and it may just transform your understanding and celebrating of differences.

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