

Hola Amigos!

When I moved to Humboldt County 20+ years ago I came from Zürich, Switzerland. Now you may think Switzerland is monochrome—lily white and wealthy: a country dominated by white males and rich bankers—not far from the mark. In fact, when I moved to Switzerland there was still a Canton that did not allow women the right to vote; that has since changed. But the job *I had* in Switzerland was the most ethnically diverse and international I've ever experienced. I was a pastor at the International Protestant Church where we had persons from every continent and about 30-40 countries. When we gathered at the communion table we were literally red and yellow, black and white, speaking dozens of different languages and from every social and economic level. I loved it. Not that it was easy, but we had a diverse body of people who were held together by something greater than our differences.

To make a long story short, we decided to move back with our kids to our native California and searched for a place in northern California. Little did we know California stretched this far north. When we moved to Humboldt I was excited to return to Mexican food and the mighty Pacific Ocean. Our ocean is massive and beautiful, but in 1993 I was disappointed by the meager supply of good Mexican restaurants. Happily, over the past 20 years the number of Mexican restaurants has gradually increased—and so has the quality of the food! Not only are there more Mexican restaurants, there are more Hispanic people in Humboldt County. I think that's a good thing; I welcome our new neighbors from the south and this is why.

1. They bring problems, but they also bring solutions. If there were no Latino immigrants America would actually be losing population. Countries cannot flourish when population declines over prolonged periods.

2. Many of them bring a strong work ethic and a willingness to do jobs that Gringos no longer want to do. Countless agricultural, restaurant and construction jobs, would not get done if it were not for recent waves of Hispanic immigrants.

3. They bring a bright and colorful culture and another language. Americans are lazy when it comes to language: we expect everybody in the world, wherever we are to speak English. I have watched Americans overseas get miffed when the people from that country were not speaking perfect English. Do we speak perfect Spanish, French or German? No---but we should. Every California pupil should be learning a foreign language at an early age.

Some say, if we lose English as our only language we will fracture into many countries. Well, Switzerland is an older Republic than we are and they have three official languages, and countless dialects. Show me a country in the world that is more united and prosperous than Switzerland!

Finally, the immigrants from the south bring strong religious practices with them; and again, for that I am appreciative. We have a growing number of worshippers renting parts of our church who speak Spanish and worship with enthusiasm and sincerity. They are but one example of the huge wave of renewal that is sweeping through the churches of Latin America. And by the way, when I am invited to eat with them, I rarely pass up an opportunity to share table fellowship with my Latino brothers and sisters del Sur.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment