



Taking Action To Be Leaders

“For all our flaws, we Americans have been, for hundreds of years, the people in the world who said welcome.”

—Mary Pipher, *The Middle of Everywhere*

As many of you know, issues of diversity are near and dear to my heart. The composition of our society continues to change. Every year, in Arizona alone, we receive thousands of immigrants, refugees and asylees. Many of them are fleeing governments that persecute their people on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, national origin or political ideology. Listening to their stories can provide powerful lessons for us as lawyers, and the role that we can play in keeping our society one of freedom and equality.

In my own world, I have been working with hundreds of refugees from the Sudan for four years through my church. Their own government attacked them ruthlessly. They managed to survive a horrifying holocaust, which has claimed the lives of 2 million people and displaced 4 million more.

They had no voice. The few courts and judges were puppets of the police state, treating them contemptuously because they spoke a different language, worshiped in a different faith, and were of a different race.

When I call on the lawyers of Arizona to stand up for judicial independence and our judicial system, I think of these refugees. They know, firsthand, the value of an independent judiciary, where the rule of law is applied impartially, with no influence from politicians or police. They admire the fact that the American justice system strives not to discriminate.

Yet they and others still struggle both to understand and to be understood. As lawyers we can play an important part in the assimilation of people of various backgrounds. We know how the system works. We can make it a point to represent people of different ethnic backgrounds, even though their language skills may be less than perfect, and their understanding of our legal system somewhat wanting.

We can serve on committees or on the board of nonprofits, volunteer for lawyer assistance programs, or even start programs where none has existed before. We can stand up for judicial independence and defend our judicial system against unfair and relentless attacks of misguided talk show hosts, politicians and pundits. If we don't help build the community we want to live in, we will be forced to live in the community that others build for us.

Working with people who have fled from failed legal and social systems teaches lessons that apply to the internal structure of the State Bar, as well. We know already that more

than one-third of our community is Hispanic, and that in another decade or two it will be one-half. To this will be added swelling numbers of refugees and asylees.

We don't need a history book to see what can happen to societies whose leaders don't value diversity. It would be a grave mistake to ignore the needs, customs and cultures of the increasingly multicultural community that we serve.

To remain effective and relevant, the leadership of our Bar needs to become more diverse. Women hold only two of the 25 voting positions on the Board of Governors; minorities hold only five. Minorities and women are substantially underrepresented in the leadership of Bar sections and committees, and in the ranks of the Bar's certified specialists.

One of my hopes for the Bar is that we will foster the leadership skills and provide more leadership opportunities for minority and women lawyers. To that end, we have been encouraging talented women and minority attorneys to volunteer their time for Bar committees and sections. The State Bar is a perfect incubator for developing the talent that will improve the profession and our ability to serve our increasingly diverse community.

Eleanor Roosevelt said success was “to cultivate and express one's talents and powers to the utmost and to use those powers for the good of the community.” Lawyers have a long and distinguished history of volunteer service and have contributed importantly to the climate of volunteerism that is at the heart of American values. We have the obligation, the talent, the skills and the opportunity to lead.

We are responsible for making sure that our increasing diversity makes us stronger, that it is treated as a unifying force and as an opportunity for learning. I hope that you will join with me this year in fostering lawyer leadership, valuing diversity, and standing up for the independence and integrity of the judiciary. 



Helen Perry Grimwood