
Orange County Perspective

Time to Move on Race Relations Is Now

■ Chapman Panel Sees County at Crossroads and Urges Residents Go in Right Direction

The rioting in Los Angeles last April didn't spill over into Orange County, but its impact did. Wisely, some residents are determined to learn some lessons from Los Angeles' violent urban history.

There have been meetings since last spring. The latest gathering was several weeks ago at Chapman University where a panel discussion on race relations in Orange County was sponsored by the Interfaith Peace Ministry of Orange County and the university's Albert Schweitzer Institute. It sought to encourage viewing ethnic and cultural differences as assets rather than liabilities.

The need now is to move that approach out of the meeting halls and into everyday practice.

Orange County has its own unique identity and is not exactly like Los Angeles. Although the competition among the county's Latino, Asian,

black and Anglo residents for jobs, affordable housing and government services is ever present, the tensions and animosities existing in neighboring Los Angeles are not so evident here. But to ensure that such tensions are addressed in the future before they become a problem is the challenge in Orange County's increasingly diverse urban environment.

The county is growing, but the trick is to grow together, not apart. The county needs to create a sense of community and acceptance, rather than robbing minority and less affluent residents of their sense of belonging.

At the Chapman University gathering Rusty Kennedy, executive director of the County Human Relations Commission, warned that the county was at a "crossroads" and would have to decide whether to embrace its ethnic diversity or grow

toward isolation.

People cannot afford to ignore the concerns voiced by Kennedy and others. Don Will, director of the Peace Studies Program at Chapman, said we must address "some of our own problems before they explode here."

Along with its growing multicultural makeup, Orange County is also seeing more poor people, more homeless, more gang activity, more Asian-bashing and more hate crimes.

To try to promote more understanding and brotherhood, the Interfaith Peace Ministry is sponsoring a "Race Unity Day Picnic" Saturday at W. O. Hart Park in Orange. It's a start. A picnic in the park is good. We have to bring people together—in the schools, the neighborhoods and the workplaces—or one day they could be meeting in the mean streets as they did last April in Los Angeles.