

The Co-op

Manuel Sanchez is a successful Filipino attorney in a prestigious law firm. His wife, Mary, has an MBA and is a realtor in a major metropolitan area. They are an interracial couple with three grown children. Manuel serves chairs their co-op board in an upscale high-rise. They are a much admired couple and attend the largest Episcopal Church in their city. Recently, Manuel and Mary, along with a number of their fellow congregants, attended an in-depth antiracism training with other ecumenical and interfaith groups in their city. Each gained valuable insights into personal blind spots and structural issues. Each saw potential targets for change in their professional contexts. Mary identified the need to address exorbitant insurance and mortgage costs for aspiring low-income and minority homeowners. Manuel decided to raise pointed questions with his law firm about lack of significant follow through on their firms stated pro bono defense objectives.

While each felt that their learnings had equipped them to pursue these targets for change individually, they also agreed to work together on some policies and practices of their co-op.

After doing an analysis of their membership and the criteria that allowed certain people to be members, they were appalled to discover that while there were no explicit exclusionary criteria, the fact was that the membership included no practicing Jews, Muslims, or persons from sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, it was clear to them that a majority of the membership was, in fact, center-right politically. Furthermore, Mary discovered that the chairperson of the “Welcome to our Co-op” committee included the names of only Christian churches in their information packet. At their last meeting, there had been an unusually frank discussion of the appropriateness of displaying an American flag in the lobby of their building. Manuel had been able to table this discussion by forming a committee to research what other co-ops had done about this and other similar subjects, as well as any legal implications that a change in their policy of no political ads, no explicit religious endorsement, or symbols, etc.

Manuel and Mary were in a quandary as they looked toward the next meeting, scheduled in ten days. While committed to raise some of the concerns they identified after antiracism training, they were not sure that the next meeting would be the best time to raise these concerns. While discerning their actions, they learn that the Consul General of an Islamic republic, a client of Mary’s, had applied for membership, with cash in hand to purchase a coop.

Mary stands to make a substantial bonus if the sale is consummated. The co-op board has hesitated deciding on the application.

Under the circumstances, what action, discussions, or additional research would you suggest to Manuel and Mary to increase inclusivity, consistently equitable policies and practices, and avert a discussion about the newest applicant that centers on his ethnicity or religion. How can they assure a reasoned discussion?

Questions for Discussion

What should Manuel and Mary do?

