FROM SAMENESS TO MULTICULTURAL: LESSONS FROM THE JOURNEY

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ABSTRACT

FROM SAMENESS TO MULTICULTURAL:

LESSONS FROM THE JOURNEY

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With little effort anyone can easily recognize the drastic demographic shift happening in the United States. Children of different colors now sketch a nation permeated by the richness of various languages and cultures.

The United Methodist Church, however, has remained mostly oblivious of this reality, and while the population grows in diversity, church membership in the United States continues declining in sameness.

Some churches have embarked in a different journey.

This project focused on learning from the stories of three United Methodist churches in the United States that saw the growing diversity around them and made the necessary changes to be the Gospel story for their new neighbors. This research weaves together these stories from the perspective of the participants; stories that illustrate how these congregations overcame resistance and fear, and expanded their boundaries to include those with different languages, cultures and traditions. These churches moved from passively welcoming those from other cultures, to actively engaging with them and incorporating their cultures and their voices into the life of the church.

These stories also illustrate the challenges these churches faced. The movement from inertia to change was not a smooth one. These congregations shifted from being a place of comfort to embarking in a faith journey characterized by willingness to learn and change, and enhanced by new cultures and experiences.

This project combines the experiences of these churches into invaluable lessons for any church engaged in making disciples and building relationships with people of "all nations."

DEDICATION

To Andrea Noricel and Claudia Victoria, whose lives bring beauty to mine every day.

To my mom, Célida, who was born ahead of her time, and whose verses remind us every day about the beauty of life.

To Frank, whose kindness accompanies me in my journey.

CONTENT

ACKNOWLEDMENTS

To the One that created a world enriched with beauty of colors, cultures, and languages.

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To the colleagues near and far who dedicated time to provide advice and feedback during the research. Thanks, Jorge, Dottie, Mark, Betsy, Dalton and Edwin.

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INTRODUCTION

THE CHANGING CULTURAL REALITY IN THE UNITED STATES

As she drives through familiar streets, she realizes that her neighborhood is no longer a familiar place. The streets' names are the same but everything looks different; the smells are strange and somewhat offensive to her nose; the children happily playing look different; the cacophony of languages sound foreign to her.

But this is her own neighborhood; the community where she raised her children, where she walked daily to the stores, where her friends lived nearby decades before. However, children grew up and left; friends moved away; new people moved in. The stores now sell produce and products she does not recognize, let alone knows how to prepare. Although she considers herself friendly, this much change is more than she can manage. Instead she acquiesces and recoils, and moves from the familiar in her home to the familiar in her church, trying to ignore the unfamiliar in between. Her church remains the same; that sameness that gives her comfort, that reminds her of good times long gone.

The previous portrayal is fictional but it reflects many conversations I have had with churches located in communities with populations that had dramatically shifted.

Almost always these churches have remained homogeneous, incapable of crossing what separates them from their neighbors.[1]

It is undeniable that the cultural reality in the United States is changing rapidly. As of 2012 nearly 41 million immigrants lived in this country, which account for 13% of the total population.[2] The diversity of cultures these immigrants bring is complex and rich. In addition, post-immigrant generations are themselves a diverse group on their own; they have grown as part of two or more cultures that have profoundly influenced their perspectives, lifestyles and faiths.

Demographic reports show that in the United States the White-alone population's share of the total population has decreased over the previous 10-year period,[3] and the number of people who identify themselves as having two or more races has increased by about one-third since 2000.[4] Reports also show that about 353 of the country's 3,143

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[1] Virtually all conferences reach people of color less well than they reach Whites. This is part of a comprehensive report that uses data regarding the membership of the United Methodist Church for the year 2009 provided by the Office of Analysis and Research of the General Council on Finance and Administration. It covers the annual conferences within the bounds of the United States. "Lewis Center Report on Reaching More Diverse People in the United Methodist Church," *Wesley Theological Seminary* (2011), accessed December 19, 2014, http://www.churchleadership.com/pdfs/DiversityReport2009.pdf.

[2] Chiamaka Nwosu, Jeanne Batalova, and Gregory Auclair, "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States," *Migration Policy Institute* (April, 2014), accessed August 10, 2014, http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states-2.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Nicholas A. Jones, and Jungmiwha Bullock, "The Two or More Races Population: 2010," *US Census Bureau* (September 1, 2012), accessed August 15, 2014, https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-13.pdf.

counties, or 11%, are now majority-minority;[5] and in 2012, thirteen states and the District of Columbia had an under-5-year-of-age population that was majority-minority, up from five states in 2000. Additionally, in 25 states and the District of Columbia, minorities now make up more than 40% of the under-5-year-of-age group.[6]

Newer reports show more dramatic changes. A June 2013 article reported that the United States percentages of non-Hispanic Whites had hit an all-time low of 63%,[7] while a December 2014 projections estimated that the United States population will become "majority minority" in 2044.[8]

This is the context where the United Methodist Church exists in the United States. Once one of the largest Protestant denominations in the world, the United Methodist Church membership in the United States has been in decline for decades.[9] Regarding ethnic and cultural diversity, The General Council of Finance and Administration, which provides administrative resources to the denomination, reports that the United States membership was 90.32% White and 9.68% non-White in 2013; and 90.15% White and

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[5] "Census: White Majority in U.S. Gone by 2043," *NBC News* (June, 2013), accessed August 18, 2014, http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/06/13/18934111-census-white-majority-in-us-gone-by-2043.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Michael Walsh, "U.S. % age of Non-Hispanic Whites Hits All-time Low of 63%," *New York Daily News* (June 13, 2013), accessed August 20, 2014, http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/%age-non-hispanic-whites-hits-all-time-63-article-1.1371772.

[8] William H. Frey, "New Projections Point to a Majority Minority Nation in 2044," *The Brookings Institute* (December 12, 2014), accessed December 18th, 2014, http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/the-avenue/posts/2014/12/12-majority-minority-nation-2044-frey.

[9] "2011 Numbers Show U.S. Members Still Sliding," *The United Methodist Church*" (2012), accessed December 19th, 2014, http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/2011-numbers-show-US-members-still-sliding.

9.85% non-White as of 2014.[10] These percentages show a sharp disparity with the United States population, which is now over 35% non-White.[11] In urban, suburban and rural areas, a growing number of United Methodist churches are often homogeneous White congregations that sit in the midst of diverse and rapidly changing communities. Frequently these churches have aging members clinging to a church they hope will remain the way they remember, while the communities around them are quickly changing and thriving.

When reflecting about the rich tradition of the United Methodist Church, affirmations in the Book of Discipline, numerous resolutions passed, as well as the denomination's recognized motto *Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors,* all set the stage for a faith community ready to welcome the stranger. These words, however, seldom translate into action at the local level.

Purpose of the Project

In view of the rapid the changes of the population in the United States, a number of non-denominational churches have thrived in the midst of this environment of diversity by becoming multicultural congregations. Some reports have found that the number of multiracial faith communities has nearly doubled from 7.5% in 1998 to 13.7%

[10] "Statistical Resources," *General Council of Finance and Administration,* United Methodist Church (2015), accessed November 23, 2015, http://www.gcfa.org/data-services-statistics.

[11] "Census: White Majority in U.S. Gone by 2043," Ibid.

in 2010.[12] There are lessons to learn from these congregations, and there is no shortage of studies, books and conferences generating strategies and best practices.

Membership reports of United Methodist churches show a contrasting reality. As of 2014, of the 32,244 local churches, only about 54 of them, or 0.17%, had a membership where no one ethnic group comprised more than 30% of the total. This reality points to the need to learn from those United Methodist Churches that are bridge the divide and have become multicultural. Therefore, this project focuses on learning from three of these United Methodist Churches that have transitioned from majority White to Multicultural. The goal is to gather lessons from the journey that transformed their faith and practice into communities that embraced their neighbors.

Methodology

The first task involved developing a working definition of a multicultural church, and defining its parameters. For this project, a multicultural church is one that gathers participants from various cultures and ethnicities. Diversity around issues of income, physical or mental ability, and others are not included in the scope of this research.

More specifically, a multicultural church describes a church that:

- Reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the community around it;
- Has at least a 20% or higher membership and attendance of people with a different ethnicity and culture than the majority group. This membership and attendance does not include people receive services (i.e. food bank), but it

[12] Scott Thumma, "Racial Diversity Increasing in U.S. Congregations," *Huffington Post* (March 24, 2013), accessed August 20, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/scott-thumma-phd/racial-diversity-increasing-in-us-congregations_b_2944470.html.

includes those who are active in the life of the church (attend worship services at least twice a month and are involved in other church activities);

- Shows its diversity in the lay leadership of the church, in the clergy leadership of the church, and in those who lead and participate in worship;
- Shows its diversity in the content of worship (music, liturgies, stories, participation of laity, symbols, traditions) and in the content of other church programs.

This definition of a multicultural church does not include churches that have a juxtaposed model of worship services. This model describes a church that allows congregations that worship in different languages or are focused on a specific culture to share a facility, but that rarely interact with each other. This definition does not include either churches that rent space to congregations of other ethnicities and languages.

Through a narrative research approach this project focused on the experiences of these churches as shared and interpreted by those who were part of them. Through interviews, stories were gathered, which provided a glimpse of the lived experiences and the changes in thought and behavior of the participants. These stories revealed practices and principles others may learn from and adapt to use in their ministries. The narratives gathered aided in the understanding of the transformative process the churches went through. They stitched together a picture through the eyes of the insiders, and interpreted what elements overtly and covertly influenced the process the church undertook to become multicultural.

Individual and group interviews were conducted. The interviews included clergy leaders, lay leaders and members. These persons were recruited or invited by the pastors who sought to include those who were members or active participants before, during and after the transition. They included men and women, young and older members, recent and longtime members, White and non-White members, and those who were born and raised in the United States as well as those originally from other countries. They also included married and single persons, those who transferred their membership from other United Methodist churches or from churches of other denominations, as well as those whose church experiences had commenced in the church. Each interview lasted about sixty minutes, and in every case those interviewed were eager to contribute their perspective to the project.

Scope of the Project

This project does not include churches that have become multicultural out of the merger of two or more churches; neither does it include those that were started with the vision and expectation of being multicultural. Although there are invaluable lessons to be learned from these models, merged churches come with multiple dynamics that influence their evolving identity, and new churches do not have a shaped history, tradition and identity, which inevitably influence the way a church reacts to newcomers and to change.

Throughout my experience in the field of congregational development I have learned that there are key areas that steer the life of a congregation. These areas informed the questions that were asked during the interviews. These areas are:

- Pastor's ecclesiology, specifically on the identity of the church regarding diversity and inclusiveness, and its effect in teaching, preaching and leadership.
- Leadership skills needed to successfully guide a church through this process.
- Factors that influenced the transition.
- The role worship and rituals played in the process, and how they changed or stayed the same.
- The role of the lay leadership at various levels. Their involvement in decision making (boards, committees, etc.), and their involvement in the different aspects of the process, as well as their insights about the impact of the transition in their leadership and faith journey.
- Insights from new members/participants; reasons that compelled them to visit; components they appreciate from the church and how they have impacted their faith journey and growth.

This project focused on interviewing three groups of people in each of those churches: the pastors who guided the transition; the lay leaders and members who participated in the transition; and members who joined as a result of the church becoming multicultural.

Although this project is focused on majority White churches, lessons could be gleaned to be applied by other homogenous churches as they also transition to become diverse congregations.

Evaluation

This narrative research approach has two parts in its evaluation process: observing change and discerning transformation.[13]

During the stage of observing change, this research used the stories from those who were actively involved during the change of the church to compare the context of the church prior to the transition – when the church was majority White - with the context of the church after the transition – after it became multicultural. The research aimed to discover what originated the movement to change, what practices had been incorporated into the life of the church, what new programs, new traditions, new habits had been adopted, in the way they worshiped, in the way the church welcomed new people, and in the way new people became an integral part of the life of the community of faith.

The second part involved discerning what transformation took place; how the life and identity of the community of faith evolved, how the faith journey and practice of those involved in this community were affected. Furthermore, the stories also showed how the congregation effectively embraced the diverse community around it.

More than quantifying, this process involved a process of assessing the level of transformation that happened not only by who was sitting on the pews on Sunday morning, but also how their active involvement in the life of the church influenced the content and style of worship, the leadership during worship and of committees, the type of programs offered by the church, and the degree of integration now prevalent in the congregation as evidenced in the composition of small groups, and other group

[13] Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville, KY: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 123.

fellowship opportunities (i.e. United Methodist Women circles, Sunday school classes, small groups, youth groups, etc.).

Another area of evaluation was progress. As these churches transitioned to become multicultural, it was critical to determine if the changes in its composition, form and practice became an intrinsic part of the day-to-day life of the congregation; and how this transformation contributed to the health of the church.

The evaluation process sought to take into account the following perspectives.[14] A functionalist perspective that assessed what components in the life of the church (i.e. worship style) were changed and how that change affected the whole congregation. An ecological perspective that aided in determining the place of this church before, during and after the transition within its community, and how it was viewed by the larger community. A materialistic perspective sought to discern if there were any events outside the church that may have affected the transition or the way it was conceived, received by its members, and implemented. A structuralist approach aimed to detect what historical and traditional patterns in the life of the church were eliminated, reformed or replaced. A semiotic approach aimed to examine the new messages, symbols, and representations the churches incorporated into their community life, which communicates their new identity as multicultural churches.

[14] Perspectives from Savage and Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities,* 123.

CHAPTER 1

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The topic of culture is complex. It encompasses layers of contexts and meanings. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines culture as the beliefs, customs, expressions, of a particular society, group, place, or time.[1] Another definition of culture describe "socially constructed networks of meaning that divide one human group from another."[2] Others assert the astounding fact that no one is quite sure what culture is and that over a 50 year period 161 definitions of culture have been found in literature.[3]

Often, quotidian understandings of culture are restricted to its outward expressions, such as dress, music, language, and food, among others. Comprehensive definitions of culture, however, include a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form people communicate, perpetuate and develop knowledge about and attitudes towards life.[4]

The definition of culture goes beyond a framework of national origin or ethnicity. Each ethnicity and nation has subgroups with different cultures. From the cultures of communities across the proverbial railroad tracks, to cultures of rural and urban

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[1] "Culture," *Merriam-Wesbter Dictionary*, accessed on August 22, 2015, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture.

[2] Michael J. Kral, et. al., "Culture and Community Psychology: Toward a Renewed and Reimagined Vision," *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 47.1-2 (Mar 2011): 46.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 47.

communities, to cultures of certain self-defined groups such as gangs, these groups all hold perspectives and values that unite them. Although those cultures will not be addressed in this paper, it is important to be aware that they exist and thrive in the communities around the church, and it is therefore imperative for the church to find ways to positively connect and build relationships with them.

Rev. Dr. Eric H. F. Law, founder and executive director of the Kaleidoscope Institute, describes two aspects of culture: external culture and internal culture. The external culture is the part one can see, hear, taste and touch. The internal culture comprises the beliefs and values that someone implicitly learns. These are below consciousness and therefore are difficult to change. They includes the patterns that are accepted as normal, which condition the way one perceives and reacts to the world.[5]

Moreover, the topic of cultures is also intrinsically linked to the realities of slavery, immigration and genocide, confounded with issues of race, ethnicity, and identity, and among others, are linked to policies and expectations of integration, assimilation, and self-determination,

Definition of Terms

When articulating the coming together of diverse ethnicities and cultures, numerous terms are used: inclusion, assimilation, acculturation, hybridity, integration, diversity, pluralism, multiethnicity, multiculturalism, interculturalism, cross-cultural, and multiracial. Some of these express the reality of different groups coming together, while

[5] Eric H. F. Law, *Sacred Acts, Holy Change: Faithful Diversity and Practical Transformation* (St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2002), 36-40.

others attempt to convey the change that inevitably happens when different groups interact with each other.

The term inclusion highlighs the insider-outsider dynamics of any group or community. Law defines inclusion as,

> …a discipline of extending our boundary to take into consideration another's needs, interests, experience, and perspective, which will lead to clearer understanding of ourselves and others, fuller description of the issue at hand, and possibly a newly negotiated boundary of the community to which we belong.[6]

Inclusion is directed to the insiders; it challenges the natural tendency of any organization to exclude. An inclusive community is not a static group, but one that continues redefining its boundaries in order to accept and welcome outsiders as full members and incorporates their contributions as informing the direction of the community.[7]

Assimilation is a term used to describe the process of someone shedding her or his culture of origin to take on the values, beliefs, behaviors, and perceptions of another culture. In this process, the adopted culture is seen as more desirable by the individual, while the culture of origin is seen as inferior.[8]

Acculturation, on the other hand, is described as cultural modification of an individual or group by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture, while

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[6] Eric H. F. Law, *Inclusion, Making Room for Grace* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000), xii.

[7] Ibid., 16-18.

[8] Martica L. Bacallao and Paul R. Smokowski, "Obstacles to Getting Ahead: How Assimilation Mechanisms Impact Undocumented Mexican Immigrant Families," *School of Social Work, State University of New York*, 28 (2013): 2.

merging cultures as a result of prolonged contact.[9] Some authors point to churches as entities that handle the diversity of cultures through acculturation, by accommodating differences and promoting biculturalism.[10]

The term cultural hybridity is used to refer to previously separate cultures that merge and produce new and unique cultural forms and practices. The emergence of Spanglish out of the English and Spanish languages, for example, is a cultural hybrid.[11]

Alternatively, integration is mutually-agreeable contact, which leads to interdependency but causes little or no change in the partners in contact. Integration does not require geographical proximity, merging, or adjacency. Though integrated, the partners' essential constitutions remain intact, self-determining and unaltered.[12] Examples of integration may be churches where different language or cultural groups share a meeting space, but where each church's identity and way of worshiping remains unchanged.

Pluralism and diversity are other types of cultural encounters. Although they are sometimes used as if they were synonymous, diversity and pluralism are not the same. Diversity is defined as a social structure or group that could include participants from varying racial, ethnic, religious and family organizations, and is gender inclusive.[13]

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[9] "Acculturation," *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, accessed on August 22, 2015, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/acculturation.

[10] Bacallao and Smokowski, Ibid., 15.

[11] Michael Dear and Andrew Burridge, "Cultural Integration and Hybridization at the United States-Mexico Borderlands," *Cahiers de géographie du Québec* 49, no 138 (décembre 2005): 301.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Mary Beth Leidman and Bradley E. Wiggins, "Developing a Paradigm for Describing Diversity and Multiculturalism in Modern America," *Journal of Social Sciences* 6 (1) (2010): 56.

Pluralism, on the other hand, describes an engagement that creates a common society from diverse groups.[14] Thus, pluralism is not just the gathering of diversity, but the active engagement with that diversity. While diversity can, and has meant often isolation of various groups with little interaction, authentic pluralism requires participation and engagement.[15]

Furthermore, religious pluralism is more than the mere tolerance of differences; it requires knowledge of them. It does not expect to achieve agreement on matters of conscience and faith. It aims instead for a relationship of ongoing debate and discussion.[16]

In exploring the meaning of the terms multicultural and multi-ethnic, it is helpful to first understand how the terms ethnicity and culture work together. Ethnicity primarily refers to group identity arising from a common history, kinship and language. Multi-ethnic, therefore, describes a context in which members of various ethnic groups interact within a particular context.[17]

Culture, on the other hand, refers to the way members of a particular group relate to their environment and each other; it includes legends, laws, priorities, structures, customs and artifacts. Multicultural, then, describes the context where members of a

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[14] "From Diversity to Pluralism," *Encountering Religious Diversity*, The Pluralism Project, Harvard University, accessed August 22, 2015, http://www.pluralism.org/encounter/challenges.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Mark Naylor, "The Difference between Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Cultural," *Context Based Solutions for Ministry Applications*, Northwest Baptist Seminary, accessed August 20, 2015, https://www.nbseminary.ca/the-difference-between-multi-ethnic-and-multi-cultural.

variety of cultures interact while maintaining their distinct cultural practices and priorities.

Multiculturalism, by this definition, is inclusively cross-cultural and intercultural. For the purpose of this research, it is essential to differentiate multiculturalism as as public policy and public discourse from multiculturalism in other areas of interpersonal relationships. In each of these areas multiculturalism can be expressed in different ways. In the public arena multiculturalism is a response to diversity as an alternative to exclusion and assimilation. On the other hand, while some propose interculturalism as a public policy, because it emphasizes dialogue based on mutual understanding and respect, and supports diversity and equal dignity for all groups; others argue that there is no distinction between multiculturalism and interculturalism.[18]

Politicians across the world have deemed multiculturalism as a failed approach. While some who champion multiculturalism contend that when discourse and policy valorize and accommodate cultural specificity, members of minority communities feel increased connection to and engagement in the polity and society where they live, others claim that multiculturalism promotes cultural isolation and "parallel lives," which impede immigrant integration.[19]

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[18] Irene Bloemrad and Matthew Wright, "Utter Failure or Unity out of Diversity?" Debating and Evaluating Policies of Multiculturalism, *International Migration Review*, 48 No S1 (Fall 2014): S301.

[19] Some research shows that both immigrants and second generation in more multicultural Canada, for example, express a higher sense of ethnic salience than immigrants in the United States. This stronger ethnic identity, however, does not come at the cost of identification with Canada. In fact, generally non-White immigrants express higher identification with Canada than immigrants in the US. That ethnic identification is lower among second generation in both Canada and the US, but the decreased ethnic identification is higher in Canada than in the US. Some scholars also argue that hyphenated identities actually yield psychological benefits, in that individuals holding identities that integrate their inherited culture and an attachment to a national society demonstrate greater tolerance and personal assurance and well-being than those attached to one or the other. They contend that bicultural individuals show better psychological adjustment, as measured by higher life satisfaction and self-esteem, and lower alienation, anxiety, depression, and loneliness; and that a positive dual identity is easier to achieve in multicultural

Another important distinction that must be made is between multiculturalism and multiethnicity. Dr. Ssenid-Ssensalo argues that multiethnicity aims to gain intellectual knowledge of all ethnicities with the goal of creating an environment of mutual understanding and tolerance. A multicultural approach, he argues, aims to foster mutual enhancement, shared power, shared space and shared responsibility. In a multiethnic environment the vision is to create a colorless society, minimizing and even glossing over our differences, while in a multicultural community, differences are highlighted and celebrated. The aim of a multicultural approach is to unite around differences. Moreover, the increased interest on churches that gather people from various ethnicities and cultures seems to have been propelled by at least two factors: the increased post-1960 movement of immigrants into the United States, and the growing acceptance of mixing of races as part of life in the United States.[20] The terms multicultural and

countries. Some researchers have also concluded that immigrant-origin minorities living in more multicultural countries are more likely to engage in non-violent political activities than those in more monocultural societies and that activism is directed more at the country of residence rather than the homeland. However, regarding identification, attachment, or political integration, there is no evidence of a negative effect from multicultural policies and some limited evidence for a positive effect, but only in the first generation. When it comes to the second generation, the pattern is largely one of integration to the majority's level of trust or engagement, irrespective of multiculturalism. Bloemrad and Wright conclude that multiculturalism likely facilitates immigrants' sociopolitical integration and contributes to their sense of civic inclusion in a modest way, and that there are positive effect of biculturalism or hybridity in the area of education, something easier to achieve in places that embrace multiculturalism. Irene Bloemrad and Matthew Wright, "Utter Failure or Unity out of Diversity? Debating and Evaluating Policies of Multiculturalism," *International Migration Review*, 48 No S1 (Fall 2014): S321.

[20] Since 1967 when the US Supreme Court invalidated laws prohibiting interracial marriage, opinions have radically changed on this topic. In 1986 the public was divided about this issue. Nearly three-in-ten Americans (28%) said people of different races marrying each other was not acceptable for anyone, and an additional 37% said this may be acceptable for others, but not for themselves, and only one-third of the public (33%) viewed intermarriage as acceptable for everyone. However, by 2012 nearly two-thirds of Americans (63%) say it "would be fine" with them if a member of their own family were to marry someone outside their own racial or ethnic group. And, as of 2010 about 15% of all new marriages in the United States in 2010 were between spouses of a different race or ethnicity from one another, more than double the share in 1980 (6.7%). Wendy Wang, "The Rise of Intermarriage, Rates, Characteristics Vary by Race and Gender," *Pew Research Center*, Social and Demographic Trends (February 16, 2012), accessed September 4, 2015, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/02/16/the-rise-of-intermarriage/.

multiethnic are often used to describe these churches. There is not agreement, however, among scholars studying religious contexts about which term is the best descriptor of such a church, but the most commonly used are multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural, and interracial.

History seems to suggest that the preference for some of these terms is linked to perspectives, conceptualizations, and theological positions.[21] Although both Catholics and Evangelicals promoted the ethnic church model in the 1970s and 1980s,[22] the approach to tackle this new reality varies according to certain theological stances. Both Catholics and Evangelicals quote biblical mandates for unity and inclusion as the cause for their response to this issue. Among Catholics, however, the tendency has been to emphasize cultural diversity, while Evangelicals downplay the difference of cultures and emphasize the common identity they have in Christ. Kathleen Garces-Foley describes this contrast as color-conscious versus color-blind, or ethnic-inclusion versus ethnic-transcendence. Even though Catholics and Evangelicals are attempting to eliminate historic divisions based on race, ethnicity and culture, the terms "multiracial church" and "multiethnic church" are mostly used by Evangelicals, while the term "multicultural church" is most commonly used among Catholics.[23]

The efforts of each of these sides of the movement to create integrated churches are informed by certain theological principles: in the case of Catholics by principles of

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[21] Michael O. Emerson, "Why a Forum on Racially and Ethnically Diverse Congregations?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 47 No. 1 (Mar., 2008): 3.

[22] Garces-Foley, 18.

[23] Ibid.

inculturation and hospitality; in the case of Evangelicals by principles of evangelism and reconciliation.[24]

Inculturation describes the ongoing dialogue between the Gospel and culture and the belief that though the Gospel transcends any particular culture, it can only be encountered through culture.[25] Founded on this understanding, the Catholic Church adopted cultural pluralism as a policy, through which it supported the right of various groups to worship in their own language, and to incorporate their own styles and traditions. As new groups were formed within the church, however, they often functioned in isolation from each other. This reality made the church abandon the policy of cultural pluralism because it was not creating unity within the church, and the term multiculturalism was adopted seeking to create unity and cooperation among the diverse groups. In this framework, assimilation was still an undesirable expectation, and isolation of groups was unwelcomed. However, after years of trying to sell this vision, many parishes still operate as parallel congregations divided along linguistic and cultural lines.[26]

While Catholics focused on multiculturalism, Evangelicals focused on evangelism and adopted Wagner's Homogeneous Unit Principle,[27] which under the umbrella of faster growth, gave them a rationale to avoid integration.

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 19.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Dr. Donald McGravan's Homogeneous Unit Principle has been a guiding directive in the new church development field in the last decades. He defines the Homogeneous Unit Principle as "a section of society in which all members have some characteristic in common." He stated that people "like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers," therefore, in order to reach them, the Gospel should be contextualized in such a way that it communicates with them, and the church into which they are

Kathleen Garces-Foley argues that in the Evangelical tradition the concept of culture is not well developed, as it focuses on the common identity they have in Christ as superseding other identities, and it aims to build a Christian community that transcends cultural differences.[28]

This seems to be the rationale for Evangelicals who describe churches that include various ethnicities and cultures as multiethnic instead of multicultural. The term multiethnic downplays the diversity of cultures, and communicates a veiled message that those from other ethnicities and cultures are expected to assimilate to a certain degree to the dominant White, English-speaking, western culture.

Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research, makes this point when he states that a church can be multiethnic if it has people of different ethnic backgrounds who attend. But if they listen to the same music, eat the same foods, hang out at the same entertainment venues, and go to church together, that church is not multicultural. He argues that in this scenario the diverse groups have assimilated to a common culture, therefore this church may be multiethnic, but it is still monocultural. A multicultural church, Setzer contends, is a church that engages to some degree in the cultures of the various ethnic groups; it will intentionally engage in African-American cultural contexts;

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invited must itself belong to their culture sufficiently for them to feel at home in it. It is when these conditions are fulfilled that men and women are won to Jesus Christ, and subsequently that churches grow. "The Pasadena Consultation: Homogeneous Unit Principle," *Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization* (1978), accessed on December 10, 2014, http://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-1.

[28] Garces-Foley, 21.

it will intentionally engage in Latino cultural contexts; it will intentionally engage in Asian cultural contexts, and so on.[29]

In situations when communities experienced drastic population change, some denominations developed ways to handle this change. When facing "White flight" and urban communities were transitioning from white to black, for example, The United Methodist Church in the United States developed processes to lead a church to also transition from white to black and still remain in that community. This process included assigning a Black pastor to the white church, with the expectation that the church would eventually transition from majority white to majority black. Any multi-ethnicity and multicultural stage was a temporary one, and was not expected to last.[30]

The diversity of terms, uses and definitions demonstrate the complexity of this topic. It is unquestionable that there is no satisfactory way to describe the gathering of people from different cultures brought together by a common faith and practice into a living body seeking to demonstrate its faith in tangible ways in its community. Despite this fact, the word multicultural seems to be the term that best describes the positive interactions of cultures within the context of a church. Multicultural interactions inform the community of faith, celebrate the various cultural backgrounds as it share powers and welcome new voices and perspectives to shape its theology and its future.

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[29] Ed Stetzer, "Hard Truths about Multicultural Churches," *Facts & Trends* (October 7, 2014), accessed September 1, 2015, http://factsandtrends.net/2014/10/07/hard-truths-about-multicultural-churches/#.VdZKZpfsCUE.

[30] Alton Hornsby Jr., *Southerners, Too? Essays on the Black South* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004), 92.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

The mission of the Christian church is grounded on the iconic "great commission," the charge Jesus gave his disciples to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28). This divine assignment came after three years of witnessing Jesus living and teaching a new paradigm between God and humanity.

This new paradigm was modeled through the many transforming encounters between Jesus and the outcast of his time. Contrary to the expectations of his culture, Jesus defied social norms and crossed boundaries to relate with outsiders. The Jesus of the Gospels heals and touches the untouchable; he sits at the table with a crook, violates the holy day, and breaks protocol by praising the faith of a gentile.

In John 4 Jesus breaks social and religious norms by approaching a woman from a culture he had been raised to despise - a Samaritan. His unsuitable request opens a conversation about faith that not only transforms this unnamed woman, but compels her to become the unthinkable, a spokesperson for Jesus in a town that would otherwise have rejected him. The courageous witness of a once muzzled voice opened the door for many to believe (John 4:39).

Other transforming encounters are described in the Gospels: with a soldier of the occupying army, with a sick woman impure by religious standards, with many sick and maimed who would not have been otherwise recognized, touched or even seen. And it

was a Samaritan whom Jesus used as an example when asked by a Jewish religious scholar how to inherit eternal life (Luke 10).

At the end of his time on earth, Jesus gave his disciples an assignment that included the phrase "all nations." Although there is considerable discussion about what this phrase means, most are in agreement that it means all people, all nations without distinction. Matthew is returning to the blessing promised to Abraham and through him to all people on earth (Gen 12:3), which is now to be fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah and through his followers. This phrase refers to much more than just making disciples of people; it refers to the challenging task of including those who had been excluded before.[1]

These words made real to the disciples what Jesus had already shown them: that they were to take the Gospel message to those from other ethnicities and cultures, and to the outcast of their society; that they were to do what was not accepted or comfortable for them to do: to cross cultural and ethnic boundaries to share the Gospel message.
In Pentecost this message is once more revealed. The emerging church is to be diverse and united in its nature. This unity is not based on ethnicity, phenotype, language, culture or socioeconomic class; it is not based on personal preferences or affinity; it is founded on the peace acquired by Jesus Christ who formed a new humanity reconciled in the cross (Eph 2:11-22).[2]

The early disciples did not readily embrace this directive. Violent persecution pushed them out and into uneasy encounters that forced them to start to understand the

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[1] Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), VIII: 596-597.

[2] David E. Stevens, *God's New Humanity* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2012), 136.

wide range of God's vision. From baptizing a gentile on the side of the road, to receiving hospitality from a roman soldier, to agreeing circumcision was not a universal requirement for a disciple, the early disciples took slow and painful steps to grasp what the mandate of making disciples of all nations entailed.

This struggle is particularly poignant in Peter's disconcerting vision on a rooftop, when he was asked to eat that which went against the religious laws he had been taught to strictly obey, and in the process he realized the bigger lesson: that God's mandate went beyond the food; that God wanted him to put aside the restrictions set by his society and culture and share the message with someone he despised: an enemy soldier of the occupying army. And in this outrageous encounter the Gospel message was not only shared but lived, and transformation happened.

The early church continued to evolve in the understanding of the task entrusted to it. The Book of Acts describes the congregation in the city of Antioch, with an ethnic diversity that included Syrians, Romans, Greeks, Arabs, Persians, Armenians, Parthians, Cappadocians, and Jews.[3] Its leadership reflected the diversity of its community: a Jew, two gentiles, a gentile educated in Rome, and a Jew from Tarsus. They were from Asian Minor, Africa, the Mediterranean and the Middle East (Acts 13).

The congregation in Corinth also gathered a diverse congregation. It had both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 18), as well as slaves and free (1 Cor 7). These communities of believers were no longer separated by their cultures, ethnicities or status; they were brought together as "one body and one Spirit" (1 Cor 12).

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[3] David E. Stevens, *God's New Humanity*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 133, quoting Rodney Stark, The Rise of Christianity (Princeton, University Press, 1996), 156-158.

The early church struggled with this identity. Cultures clashed and human frailty brought its best and worse into the mix. The church struggled to live into this new paradigm that was part of God's vision from the beginning: that all nations would know God (Isaiah 66:18; Revelations 15:4); and that the church will cross boundaries of culture, ethnicity, language, status and class to share the Gospel message.

The letter to the Colossians articulates more fully the identity of the body of believers (Col 3:9-11) when it describes the contrast between the new self and the old self (Col 3:9-11). This list of behaviors that characterize the new self and the old self, is often interpreted through the lenses of individualism. However, to reduce the understanding of the old/new man to an individualistic nature renders the affirmation in verse 11 nonsensical. A more accurate understanding teaches that the relational affirmations of verse 11 are a reality in the new man, which is the collective new man – the church - for whom Christ is all and in all. Just as the old man is the entirety of humanity alienated from God and within itself, the new man is the entirety of humanity reconciled to God within itself. Through the redemptive work in the cross, believers of all ethnicities are identified as the new man, and the new humanity, which is the church (Eph 2, Eph 4, Col 3).[4]

However, not long after the birth of a church that had outrageously brought together enemy peoples, the church deviated from the original vision and subscribed to the practice of sameness – the belief that being with those like us was more important that living out the Gospel of the One that ate with the outcast of society; the belief that being

[4] Ibid., 161.

comfortable was more important that sharing Jesus' message with "the other". And the church is still buying into that belief today.

This belief is fed by the erroneous assumption that God's grace is limited and scarce. The community of Christ's followers, however, have been given a divine grace that is abundant and immeasurable (Eph 2:4-9), that urges Christians to move toward extending boundaries and sharing God's grace with the stranger and the outcast.[5]

Grounded on this theological interpretation, it is imperative for the church to leave the segregated model behind to embrace the fullness of its identity as the body of Christ; a body that welcomes all not as guests but as an enriching and essential part of the body; a body that dismisses boundaries and embraces differences. In order to do that, church leaders – clergy and lay - can learn from the experiences of churches that have responded to the call to "all nations" and have taken the courageous steps to successfully welcome their neighbors from other cultures, and become churches where people from diverse backgrounds and experiences can grow together in communion with God and with each other.

[5] Eric H. F. Law, *Inclusion, Making Room for Grace*, 35-36.

CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTION OF CHURCHES

Determining which churches to research was a challenging task. Various people have different definitions of what a multicultural church is, and often churches identified as such by denominational leaders could be better described as homogeneous churches with a sprinkle of diversity.

Through my professional networks, I put out a call for referrals of multicultural United Methodist churches. Several colleagues offered names, and made formal referrals to pastors of churches that fitted my working definition of a multicultural church. I then checked the churches' websites, contacted their pastors, and inquired about how their diversity was reflected in their lives as communities of faith. The information I obtained in the process helped me chose three churches that are in the journey of becoming multicultural.

Culmore United Methodist Church, Church Falls, Virginia.

This church is located in one of the suburbs of Washington DC. Members are originally from Sierra Leone, Ghana, Eritrea, Brazil, Mexico, Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, Korea, China, and Iran, as well as White and African Americans from the United States.

This church has an average attendance of 100 in worship and it has a vision to be "a house of prayer for all nations, where all God's people are welcomed to the table, nurtured, and transformed to be Christ to others in the world."

Culmore UMC participants represents a socio-economic spread that is heavier towards the middle/lower-middle class. Most if not all of its members have finished high school, and have completed an undergraduate degree or a job training program beyond high school. Less than 20% have post graduate degrees.

The church offers one worship service in English, which includes elements from other cultures. This service could be described as traditional Methodist. Filipino Vespers are also offered on the first Sunday of every month.

When visiting the church, the altar did not include any distinctive features, but the piano plays a unique and central component. It sits on the left of the sanctuary and the choir, which is majority Filipino, sits next to it. The Filipino subgroup is the most explicitly organized. Other ethnic/cultural groups do identify with their own affinity groupings, but are not organized in the same way.

The church is very well connected with the community. It has hosted the neighborhood association town hall meetings, has been involved in providing a monthly food/clothing distribution, and has served as a shelter for homeless women during the winter season. Culmore UMC also has a long history of advocacy on issues relevant to the local community, including immigration reform, health care, and affordable housing, as well as support for day laborers and the homeless.

The church started transitioning from majority White to multicultural in the late nineties under the tenure of its lead pastor Rev. Stephen Rhodes, who is quoted saying "embracing an identity as an international church helped resurrect this church at a time when membership was low and financial problems abounded."[1]

[1] Maria Pia Negro, "One in the Lord, A Look at Three Multicultural Churches-and How They Got That Way," *Sojourners* (November 2014): 25.

Currently, the lead pastor is Korean-American and he is the third pastor since the transition started. Under his leadership the church is going through a period of redefinition and visioning to assess possibilities to use its buildings in ways that helps them fulfill their vision and generates the income needed to continue its ministry in the community.

The United Methodist Church at New Brunswick, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

This church is located in the heart of New Brunswick, an urban community at a commuting distance from Newark, New Jersey, New York City, New York, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The current UMC at New Brunswick is the result of three United Methodist Churches that in 1961 went through a discernment process and decided to become one strong church centrally located in New Brunswick. This church would offer worship and Church School for all ages, including a liaison with Methodist students in the University.[2]

Today the UMC at New Brunswick includes people from more than 30 nations, and describes itself as a "multicultural community celebrating the diversity of God's kingdom where everyone is welcome."[3]

Downtown New Brunswick is filled with high-end hotels, theaters and restaurants. It is also the home of Rutgers University, a 250 year old university ranked

[2] "Union of Three New Brunswick Methodist Churches," *The United Methodist Church at New Brunswick*, accessed October 12 2015, http://www.umcnb.org/about-us/our-history/union-of-three-new-brunswick-methodist-churches/.

[3] "All are Welcome," *The United Methodist Church at New Brunswick*, accessed September 12, 2015, http://www.umcnb.net/.

among the sixty world's top universities, and home of an internationally acclaimed faculty.[4]

The church is housed in a traditional building, filled with history and symbols. When I entered the sanctuary I could not help but notice the flags displayed all around the balcony, which provide a surprising welcoming atmosphere. The congregation proudly explains that the flags represent the countries where the church members come from. The look of the altar is very traditional, but during certain liturgical seasons it features various fabrics with distinct patterns and colors easily identified as African.

This church offers two worship services on Sundays: a contemporary, which is attended by a small group, and a traditional one attended by the majority of the church members.

The transition from a majority White church to multicultural started in the decades of the eighties under the tenure of Rev. Harlan Baxter (1978 – 1987). The pastors that followed him were: Rev. Larry R. Kalajainen (1987-1994), Rev. Dr. Sydney S. Sadio (1994-2008), Rev. Dr. Gregory B. Young (2008-2015), and Rev. Frank Davis (2015 to present).[5]

Garfield Memorial United Methodist Church, Cleveland, Ohio.

This is a large church located in the suburbs of Cleveland, which currently gathers about 600 people on two Sunday morning worship services. It offers two worship services in the main campus. The traditional worship service celebrates the traditions of

[4] "Who We Are," *The State University of New Jersey*, accessed September 12, 2015, http://www.rutgers.edu/.

[5] "Pastors since 1961," *The United Methodist Church at New Brunswick*, accessed October 12, 2015, http://www.umcnb.org/about-us/our-history/pastors-since-1961/.

the church and is enhanced by traditional choir music. This service is attended by a majority White and older participants. The multicultural praise and worship service is called "Mosaic, and it features a band, a gospel choir, and special artists. This service is more casual and people are encouraged to come informally dressed and with a cup of coffee in hand. This service is attended by younger and diverse participants from various ethnicities and cultures.

The altar and stage do not include distinct cultural components, but the words used on the website, bulletins, mission statement, values, slogan, and hospitality pieces were carefully crafted to communicate the church's multicultural identity.
The church's identity is shaped by its values, mission and its trademark, which is "widening the circle – one church - two locations."

Garfield Memorial UMC is situated in a wealthy area surrounded by a golf course. Its buildings have been remodeled to offer a secured wing for children and youth, as well as an open area especially that encouraged the gathering of people.

The transition from majority White to multicultural has happened within the last ten years under the tenure of its current pastor Rev. Chip Freed. This church is strong in its outreach efforts and is recognized by the outstanding way in which it welcomes its visitors.[6]

[6] "UMTV: Church Thrives on Diversity," *The People of the United Methodist Church* (April 24, 2013), accessed September 27, 2015, http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/umtv-church-thrives-on-diversity.

CHAPTER 4

THE JOURNEY OF CULMORE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Learning about the journey of Culmore United Methodist Church involved attending its Sunday morning worship service, interviewing the senior pastor, and interviewing members of the congregation. Some interviews were done individually, and some were done in a group setting. Some members have been part of the church for twenty or thirty years, some joined during the period transition to become multicultural, and some joined the church within the last three years.

Culmore UMC is located in Falls Church, Virginia, a suburb of Washington D.C. The city's population is 79.9% White, 9.4% Asian, 9% Hispanic, and 4.3% Black. They are educated (74.4% of the population in Church Falls has a bachelor degree or higher, compared to 35.8 % in the state) and a significant portion of them are foreign born (17.9% compared to 11.6% in the state).[1]

Nowadays, the diversity in this congregation is wide-ranging, in culture, race, ethnicity, and religious experience. When asked about their background, one member said that she was a long life Methodist from Virginia, other identified himself as a White non-religious Italian with some Catholic background, another as an African American Baptist raised in Mississippi, another as a Methodist from Sierra Leone, and yet another as a Peruvian woman who was raised Catholic.

[1] "Falls Church City, Virginia QuickLinks," *United States Census Bureau*, accessed January 2, 2016, http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/51/5127200lk.html.

The church membership includes Whites, African Americans, Africans, Asians, particularly from the Philippines, people from Latin America, and young adults of different ethnicities and cultures.

Learning about the story of this church is not complete without listening to the voice of Rev. Stephen Rhodes, the pastor who led the church during its transformation from majority White to multicultural. Although I was unable to interview him, his book, *Where Nations Meet,* provides his insights about the journey.

The Journey Begins

There was a time when Culmore United Methodist Church boasted a membership of eight hundred, but when Rev. Stephen Rhodes was appointed to the church, worship attendance had dwindled to just over eighty people with few children. He found a church that was struggling financially and losing members.[2]

Because of its proximity to Washington D.C., people from other countries settled in the area, and some of them joined the church. Rev. Robert Casey served the church during that period. He showed genuine interest in hearing the stories of the new members, and opened the space for them to grow as disciples. He even organized congregational dinners to give them the opportunity to share their stories.

Later on, Rev. Sam Espinoza, a first-generation Mexican immigrant, was appointed to the church. He had a deep commitment to evangelism and to reaching the community.[3] Following his lead, the congregation focused on visiting and inviting their

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[2] Stephen Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet, The Church in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove, Il: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 82.

[3] Ibid., 89.

immigrant neighbors, and offering them practical assistance. These efforts paid off and by the time Rev. Espinoza left, the congregation had become between 30 to 40% non-White. The connection with the community, however, hinged on the person of Rev. Espinoza, and when he left to serve another church, this connection was lost and the congregation went into a phase of rapid decline.

After Rev. Rhodes' arrival, the church went through a process of discernment, and arrived to the conclusion that the future of the church laid in reclaiming its identity as a multicultural church.[4] During his tenure, the church became primarily made up of immigrants. It became diverse in language, culture, race, class, educational level, theology, and worship style.[5] During that time, the two largest cultural groups were Latino and Filipino. In response, the church hired a Filipino pastor and a Latino pastor to directly serve those communities. The vision of the church, however, was that the whole congregation would worship together in English, but to also offer two vesper services, one in Spanish for Latinos, and one for the Filipinos, to provide space for these groups to grow in their faith within their own cultural context.

This period was not an easy one for the church. Some long time members left, but a significant group bought onto the vision and committed their gifts and support to make the multicultural vision a reality.

A Pastor with a Vision

Aware of the significant growth of the African population in the community, Rev. Rhodes approached the congregation to form a ministry to reach the immigrants from

[4] Ibid., 89-90.

[5] Ibid., 13.

Africa. The response to this request reveals a pivotal moment in the transformation of this church. The African church members responded with a perspective often overlooked by leaders and congregations. They stated that the reason most of the African members had joined the church was not because it had a ministry targeting them as Africans, but because the church had accepted them as individuals. They pointed out that they all had had the option of joining churches with people that looked and spoke like them, but they chose to join Culmore instead.[6]

Through much discernment and conversation, the church decided to start an outreach ministry to Africans that was to be multicultural, multi-tribal, and English-speaking. For this ministry to be successful, however, it was crucial to have the blessing of one of the elders of the African community. To attain that, the pastor and an African member of the church visited a prominent African woman to consult with her on whether the church should develop this ministry. By including her in the process, the church honored her position of authority in her community, and she gave her blessing to the new ministry.[7]

As is often the case, the pastor's first impulse was to meet the physical needs of this group. The African members led the church in another direction. They argued that the role of the church was not to solve problems, but to point people to Jesus.[8]

Throughout this journey, the church went through a process to transform itself from a church that was majority White with a sprinkling of diversity, to a church that

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[6] Ibid., 50.

[7] Ibid., 50, 51.

[8] Ibid., 52.

embraced its multicultural identity, and sought to express it through its worship, program and through its leadership.

Currently, Rev. Jung Pyo Hong is the senior pastor of the church. He has continued the process of leading the church in this journey. Some church members shared that receiving a Korean-American pastor has helped the congregation to continue on the path of becoming flexible, and understanding the changes happening within, and outside the church.

Factors that Facilitated Transformation

When asked about the factors that facilitated the transformation of this church, Rev. Hong said "you don't get a church to be multicultural; what you do is to throw seeds and guide the church to become open and accepting of all groups."

Rev. Hong points out that it is important to recognize that when families from other countries joined the church, many came from Methodist contexts that connected them with the Methodist brand. The majority White congregation did not actively sought them, but chose to passively receive them when they came. The community was radically changing, and the church, in the absence of options, grew, and 80 % of that growth was of immigrants.

Culmore is known and active in its community. It buildings are regularly used for family events as well as for community gatherings and government meetings. The programs they have developed connects them with the community. They offer English classes for speakers of other languages, boys and girls clubs, and a food pantry that feeds 190 people per month. One of the members shared that this openness has made such an

impact in the community that even Muslims come to the church to ask for help, and when they come, they are welcome and treated as part of the community.

The reputation of Culmore is well known. The church participates in events and projects in partnership with other churches, and the community is well aware of how much the church does to help its neighbors. This message is so poignant that it is not rare for someone to show up to mow the lawn or make repairs. When asked, they explain that helping this church is their way of giving back for everything the church does for others.

This congregation is undoubtedly aware that the movement toward being a multicultural church is an endless task. These members shared that they do not want to be in a church that splits, for that reason, they focus on working together toward being a diverse community of faith.

Worship and Rituals

Worship can be a divisive issue in a multicultural church. Including or excluding certain elements, or making any changes inevitably please some and offend others. The members of this church not only speak different languages, but come from different ecclesiological traditions and worship styles. Worship preferences run the gamut "from mainline Protestant to charismatic, liturgical to revivalistic, stoic to emotive, sedate to enthusiastic, passive to fully participatory."[9] Worship at this church is somewhat informal. They use the traditional United Methodist hymnal, and blend together traditional components and contemporary ones; the worship service is not quite completely traditional nor completely contemporary. The worship service is participatory. Different people with various accents are called to participate in various

[9] Ibid., 175.

ways. One member expressed that this seemingly inconsequential act has made a significant difference in those who are new in the church and new in the faith. Reading during worship helps new members feel more comfortable and empowers them as leaders. Hearing their own voices during worship gives them the courage to raise their voices in other settings.

A Latino woman shared that even though she had grown up in the Catholic Church, she comes to this church because is *sencilla*. This Spanish word describes a church that is unassuming, that does not aim to impress with sophisticated words or elaborate liturgies, but that is welcoming and open to all.

Some time ago, when trying to meet the needs of recently arrival immigrants, this church hired two pastoral leaders to serve the Latino and Filipino populations. They offered weekly vespers for each of these groups, which resulted in the formation of a Filipino fellowship and a Spanish worship service. Lack of funding, however, affected these initiatives and although the pastoral positions were eliminated and the worshipping congregations faded, many remained in the church to this day.

Leadership Formation

At the beginning of this transformation, although the congregation had become culturally diverse, White members held all the key leadership positions. There was some diversity in the composition of church committees, but all of them were chaired by White persons. In order to change that, the pastor took a first step and persuaded the church leadership to assign a non-White member to lead one of their fundraising efforts. After his successful performance, he became the first non-White person to chair the Finance

Committee.[10] After this first breakthrough, the congregation pledged to choose leaders that fully reflected their commitment to being inclusive; and to identify, mentor and promote young adults and non-White members into key leadership positions. This decision proved to be a major factor in the church institutional change. Rev. Rhodes identifies this change as the one with most far-reaching impact on the spiritual health of the congregation, as it solidified that they were a multicultural congregation and their leadership would come from all of the membership and not from a portion of it.[11] Today, this trend continues. The senior pastor is intentional about identifying, mentoring and assigning leaders that reflect the diversity of the congregation. Currently, the lay leader and the chair of the Church Council are Filipino, and the chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee is African.

Role of Clergy Leader

The pastoral leader played a critical role in the transformation of this congregation. Rev. Hong stressed that the leadership of the pastor must reflect his or her theological understanding of the role of the church and the role of the pastoral leader. Furthermore, the pastor must be keenly aware of the different ways in which various cultures view the role of the minister. Some cultures are more hierarchical, while others welcome various voices and seek consensus. It is crucial for the pastor to understand and respect these differences and use his or her voice and power with extreme care. The pastor must also find ways to incorporate various voices and opinions in the process. This

[10] Ibid., 92-93.

[11] Ibid., 94.

strategic practice will not only enrich the process, but it will develop leaders and shape the ministry to be meaningful to the range of experiences in the community.

Pastor Hong, for example, made a conscious decision to change the way church meetings were run. In the past meetings were conducted with the goal of making the best decisions in the shortest amount of time. In contrast, Rev Hong focuses on running meetings making sure all voices are heard and various opinions shape the decisions. He practices the technique of "mutual invitation"[12] with the purpose of equalizing the power and giving to all the opportunity to share their ideas and opinions. The practice of "mutual invitation" has changed the culture of the church. A few no longer dominate discussions and decisions, and all voices are invited to influence the choices the congregation makes.

The pastor's pulpit presence is also a central factor in this church. Several members identified the sermon as a key reason why they joined the church. Members shared that Rev. Hong "does not let you feel comfortable;" "his sermons teach about a faith; not about talking but about doing and producing change." Pastor Hong's sermons are relevant. They often address issues of justice, as well as other issues with which the community is grappling.

Challenges

In cross-cultural interactions people often approach one another with fear. This congregation in particular has faced challenges related to the inclusion of first generation

[12] Invitation is a way of giving power. Accepting an invitation is a way to claim power. Waiting to be invited is a way to take up the cross, mutual invitation is a process to function in groups that decentralizes power. Eric H. F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb* (St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 1993), 81, 83, 113.

immigrants. The church exists in the tension between affinity groups preserving their identities and practices, and embracing the different cultures to shape the identity of the congregation as a multicultural church, which involves strengthening those components that make it diverse and still united.

Members of this congregation shared that they are diverse in many ways. “We don’t do the same things; we don’t think alike. But you don’t have to think alike to be one. There are some things that we have in common, which unite us, and we want and choose to stay together as a church.”

Another challenge has been that even though this congregation gathers different types of people, they may not intersect with each other regularly. “A congregation may be diverse and not interact. We have some of that. Some of us stay with our own groups. We are not totally clickish, but we are not fully interacting with each other all the time. We are somewhere in the middle.”

Those interviewed identified as a major challenge the wide theological divide within the congregation. Many who joined the church did not grow up Methodist; they came from different Christian backgrounds that had differing understandings and practices. This reality causes the members of the congregation to not always be in agreement on its practices as a community of faith. The congregation, however, tributes the current pastor for addressing these conflict by encouraging an open dialogue about the theological and practical underpinnings of their practices.

Some church members also pointed out that their worship service is a growing edge. Their worship, although blended, is still dominated by the majority White culture.

Regarding the worship space, it does not visually communicate, except on special occasions, that the congregation embraces and celebrates diverse of cultures.

Presently, after thirty years of change from majority White to multicultural, growth has stalled and membership is declining. The congregation recognizes that, and is in a process of reimagining itself and its role in the community, and envisioning how to use its buildings and other assets in ways that bring new life to the church and to the community.

Personal Faith Journeys

A White member shared that her family joined the church because it offered key components that matched their values: a diverse community where they children could grow up among people from every place, the opportunity to make friends with people from different countries and learn from other cultures, an outward focused congregation, and an understanding of the Christian faith as active and involved in advocating for justice. She shared that throughout this journey, her faith has grown and her understanding of what being a Christian has expanded. She is actively involved in the church and the community, and she is still fascinated by the possibilities for Culmore UMC: the possibility of a new building, new worship services, and reaching new people in their community.

A woman from Latin America shared that the diversity of the church, and the way the church is involved in the community, are fundamental factors for her. She sees God's presence in the connections they are able to make in the community, and in the way the church is able to meet the people where they are.

What Brought New People

Culmore UMC grew because the new members invited their friends and family to visit. When family members were sponsored to come to the United States from other countries, they often joined their families in the community and also in the church. This was particularly significant for the Filipino community.

An African American member shared that for her, the traditional worship was a factor that attracted her to join the church. Another African member shared that when she visited, she was received with warm hospitality, which made her decide to stay.

A White woman shared that although this church did not offer all the programs she was looking for her family, it offered a feature that was very important for her: cultural diversity. "We come here because this is what heaven is going to look like." Many others shared that they had joined Culmore because of its diversity. "There is something about diversity. I like to hear different voices." "I like getting to know people from different cultures."

The diversity was a major factor that made a White young adult married couple stay at Culmore. They had visited several churches and when they came to Culmore, they found a relaxed environment. "The church did not feel stuffy. It is a comfortable place, and dressing up is not expected. We enjoyed the pastor's sermon, and we were affected by the way the pastor tied the teaching of the Scriptures with the real world, and how he challenged us to live our faith."

An African American member shared that she decided to stay at Culmore because the church offered her the opportunity to go deeper in the study of the Scriptures and to be enriched by the various perspectives of the diverse members.

A member from Sierra Leon, who had been familiar with the Methodist denomination joined the church because of the influence of the pastor. After a few years she moved 60 miles away, but that has not stopped her from attending Culmore. Despite numerous attempts, she has not found a church like this one anywhere else.

Best Practices

When asked, the members shared some best practices they credited for helping the church transition to become multicultural. A church must function based on the belief that all have precious gifts to give and to receive; all have assets to contribute for the building of the body of Christ.

In terms of the operations of the church, two factors that assisted in the transformation of this church were, streamlining the decision making process by reducing the number of committees, and incorporating new members into leadership positions. Regarding worship, when changes are implemented, when new components are added, it is crucial to always explain the theological rationale, and any other logistical reason for the change. Additionally, changes need to be given time to sink in, and be modified as needed. Even if a first attempt does not fully work, it might be worth attempting it again after being adjusted.

The journey of Culmore UMC continues. Whatever the future of this church may be, it is undeniable that for decades this community of faith has impacted its neighborhood through its determination to welcome all cultures, all languages, all ethnicities, all classes into a relationship with God.

CHAPTER 5

THE JOURNEY OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH AT NEW BRUNSWICK

Learning about the journey of the United Methodist Church at New Brunswick involved attending its main Sunday worship service, interviewing its senior pastor, interviewing lay leaders, longtime members, and members that joined the church after it started becoming multicultural. The majority of the longtime members are White, while the newer members are of various ethnicities, and come from different countries and backgrounds.

New Brunswick is a city in New Jersey known as "the Hub City" because of the concentration of medical facilities in the area. Rutgers University, and The State University of New Jersey's Robert Wood Johnson Medical School are also located there. This city is also known for its ethnic diversity,[1] and its extensive history dates back to pre-Revolutionary times.[2] Its population is 49.9% Hispanic, 45.4% White, 16% Black, and 7.6% Asian. 38.6% of the population is foreign born, and 57.4% of the population

[1] "New Brunswick, New Jersey," *Wikipedia*, accessed January 23, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Brunswick,_New_Jersey.

[2] "New Brunswick," *New Jersey*, accessed January 23, 2016, http://www.visitnj.org/city/new-brunswick.

speak a language other of English at home. Additionally, 20.5% of the population has a graduate degree or higher.[3]

The Journey Begins

Up until the decade of the 1980s the membership of the United Methodist Church at New Brunswick was majority White. Around the decades of the seventies and eighties the population in the community had started to change. Political unrest compelled clusters of families from Sierra Leone, Liberia and other countries in Africa to emigrate and relocate in the city, and some of them joined the church.

Many of these new members had grown up in the Methodist tradition, and when they relocated in New Brunswick they recognized the Methodist brand. Even though the church was majority White, the people from Africa felt welcomed when they first visited. Those times are described as exciting but also very turbulent. Many longtime members had a problem with the change, and some even complained about the changing complexion of the congregation. Some members left, and it was not rare to hear racist comments during Church Council meetings.

One of the strategies the church implemented to facilitate this transition was to organize opportunities for people to have dialogue about cultures – about the difference between African cultures and American cultures, and about different cultural traditions. The goal was to increase the awareness about the cultural differences and to open the space for conversation to head off any misunderstandings that may emerge.

[3] "QuickFacts New Brunswick city, New Jersey," *Census Bureau*, accessed January 23, 2016, http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/3451210,00.

One factor credited with laying the groundwork for this process, was a series of events the church offered during those years. Between 1982 and 1984 the Mission Committee offered mission studies about the continent of Africa. These studies were modeled after the United Methodist Women School of Christian Mission,[4] in which some of the church leaders had actively participated. These studies led the church in an intentional process of learning about various countries in Africa, and concluded with an African Festival when the congregation celebrated and enjoyed food and music from the region. The congregation credit these studies for giving the church members the knowledge, language and curiosity to genuinely engage the newcomers into conversations about their countries of origin.

Between 1987 and 1994 Rev. Larry Kalajainen became the lead pastor. His pastoral experience included pastoring churches in Malaysia, Europe, and in the United States.[5] Pastor Kalajainen had skills on cross cultural communication and had experience pastoring people from different nations. He worked well with Africans, which made him unpopular with the old guard. Longtime members saw him as a lightning rod for the change that was taking place.

During those tumultuous years, there were periods in the life of the church during which some of the progress that had been made under one pastor stalled under another pastor. A member of the church shared that there were times after considerable conflict,

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[4] Mission studies are yearly studies focused on a geographical, topical, and spiritual topic, which are designed to motivate, inform, and enrich the church's commitment to global ministry. "Mission Studies," *United Methodist Women*, accessed September 26, 2015, http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/mission-studies.

[5] "Island Heights United Methodist Church Welcomes New Pastor," *Toms River Patch* (August 6, 2013), accessed December 22, 2015, http://patch.com/new-jersey/tomsriver/island-heights-united-methodist-church-welcomes-new-pastor.

when the church needed time to heal. Sometimes, however, the church seemed to have stalled in the healing stage.

There were also times, when the pastor did not want to challenge the old guard. During those years the church lost its focus. There were no demands made on anybody; there was not a lot of commitment expected. During those years, it was easy to be a member and just come on Sunday mornings.

Later on during the decades of the 1990s The Outreach and Witness Committee developed a Sunday evening program that ran for three years. This program involved exploring for three weeks a region of the continent of Africa. It included guest speakers, drummers and dancers, and sampling the food at the covered dish supper that followed. One of the programs even included conversations about apartheid and divestiture. Presently, the church boasts a very diverse membership and worship attendance. People from thirty eight different countries participate regularly. Some of them drive up to one hour, from six different counties, to attend this church.

A Pastor with a Vision

Rev. Dr. Gregory B. Young retired in 2015 after pastoring the church seven years. Welcoming all was part of Rev. Young's upbringing. When he was young his friends included children with different skin-colors, different backgrounds and cultures.
Rev. Young strongly believes that the church should be a reflection and embodiment of the kingdom of God, which is for all people, all ethnicities and cultures. This is his ecclesiology: the body of Christ brings everyone together to cross boundaries, and in Jesus we find the one who brings all of humanity together.

Rev. Young believes that we must see humanity as a gift of God, and in the Christian faith "we are diverse in many ways, and we are to celebrate that diversity in unity." He also attests that this was at the heart of the teachings of John and Charles Wesley: that Christ's disciples are called to break down the barriers that the church has erected to isolate itself from the people from other economic classes, and be the body of Christ that includes all people. The mission of the disciples is then, to build bridges not walls. Rev. Young firmly believes that the United Methodist Church is particularly poised to develop multicultural churches because of its theology and its focus on social holiness.

Before coming to New Brunswick, Rev. Young pastored a church that was 50% White and 50% Black. His personal values and experiences particularly equipped him to lead the church in New Brunswick in its continuing journey to be a multicultural community of faith. He shared that during his tenure, he learned valuable lessons: that he needed to listen more and speak less, and that he needed to ask the right questions when he did not understand something.

Furthermore, his Clinical Pastoral Education taught him a key component: to realize that he needed to understand his own culture first, and the ways in which he projected his culture onto others, and he also needed to understand the expectations that he imposes on others because of his cultural upbringing. This learning process included learning to take the risk of being wrong and owning that, while letting the cultural context shape him without losing himself or letting the cultural context dominate him. This process required being flexible, being open, opening spaces for dialogue, and being patient.

Rev. Young said: "God has wired me to be very appreciative and curious about other cultures, about how other people live their lives and how norms are formed. My mother was a first generation immigrant. She helped me understand what it was like to come to a different culture." He admits he is energized when he is in a multicultural setting. This is part of who he is and who he is called to be; this is part of his conviction of who the church is called to be, and how the church is to function: a community where, following Christ's example, all are welcomed; where unity is not uniformity, and where diversity is sought and celebrated.

One of the White church members shared that Rev. Young brought with him a different philosophy of ministry. He believed that a disciple of Christ is to be deeply committed. "When people come to church, pastor Young expects people to become engaged and do things; he expects them to be in ministry. This view put him in conflict with some of the longtime members of the church."

Rev. Young had the approach that the church is here to be in mission. Endowments should be used for ministry, and not to be saved for a rainy day. His strongly held stance was that the church is here to reach out to people beyond the walls, and this view, once again, put him at odds with longtime members who controlled the leadership.

Before the arrival of Rev. Young, the same people dominated the leadership positions. A member shared that when Rev. Young came, the chair of the Church Council, the chair of Worship, the chair of Trustees, and the chair of Finance had all been in those positions for twenty or thirty years. Rev. Young introduced new leaders for all those positions, which made him unpopular with the longtime leaders. Part of his legacy

is that during his tenure the leadership changed completely, and today the leaders are younger and include persons from the various cultures within the congregation.

Being a White pastor of a very diverse and rapidly changing congregation was not easy. Rev. Young had to earn the respect of the Black and African members. This difficult process is exemplified in a story he shared: During the fourth year of his pastorate, a respected member of the African community shared with him that ever since he had become their pastor some of the church members had been waiting for him to make a racial slip from the pulpit. Rev. Young admits he had known that. He said: "I realized I come out of a White culture and I kept praying for those inherent prejudices not to come through. This woman basically told me that they were holding me accountable, and I took that as a compliment."

Factors that Facilitated Transformation

Through the mission studies the longtime members learned about African countries, their history and cultures. This new knowledge opened the door for them to become truly interested in getting to know their new neighbors and building relationships with them. Instead of reacting with fear of the strangers, this congregation reacted with faith and Christian love. One of the non-White members shared that "the White members showed that they were trying hard to learn how to understand people from other cultures and how to learn to become multicultural." This process was a slow one that still – to this day - requires continuous learning and negotiation.

Members identified the "Diversity Dinners" as one of the factors that facilitated the transition. During these events speakers from different countries shared about what it was like growing up, which opened doors for the congregation to start to understand the

stories to their new neighbors. Through these times of learning and fellowship, friendships developed among the longtime members and their new neighbors. They got to know each other around the table, which was a new experience even for those from different countries in Africa and the Caribbean.

The church members openly expressed how this church provided support to them when they went through divorces, surgeries, illnesses, disabilities, and the death of loved ones. They had become family and accompanied each other during difficult times. One longtime member shared that when she spent several weeks in the hospital, the nurses were puzzled about her family members who came to visit, who had unusual names and did not look like her.

In this congregation people not only worship together on Sundays; they have developed long lasting relationships. They socialize with each other, visit each other's homes, and are present for each other on important family events.

Children were an important influencing factor in the blending of this congregation. New families brought new children, and when conversations about getting all children together started, this idea was enthusiastically welcomed by all. To respond to the growing number of children, the church decided to offer a Bible Club, a Vacation Bible School, and other programs for children. These programs not only brought children together, but also brought their families.

Music was also a vital factor in this transition. One student from Ghana, who had grown up in the Methodist tradition, shared how on Sunday morning she could hear, from her dorm room, the familiar hymns that reminded her of home. It took one year before

she felt brave enough to visit the church making the music. The music brought her to the church and the hospitality welcomed her into the community of faith.

New Brunswick is a university town with diverse young adults including international students. In response to this, the church offered a program for the students through the Wesley Foundation, which included lunch, fellowship, and the opportunity to visit with the pastor. As a result of this, a significant number of young adults became involved in the church.

The United Methodist brand also played a role during those first years. One person shared the story of how a family from Africa had recognized the United Methodist Church name and logo on a street sign in town. When they decided to visit, they stood by the sign on a Sunday morning expecting someone to pick them up (as this was a common practice in their community). While they were waiting, a member of the church drove by and noticed them standing. He turned his car around and approached them. When he asked them if they needed a ride to the church, they responded positively, and this is how this family came to visit the church for the first time.

Rev. Young shared how keenly aware he was of the need for him to read the changing congregation, to sense what he needed to do to lead the church effectively, which included being visible, present and actively involved in the life of the community. The fellowship hour after worship could be seen as a gauging the gradual transformation happening in the church. At the beginning, members and visitors gathered for a brief time for coffee and cookies, but most new families did not stay. As the years went by, as people started to get to know each other personally, more people stayed. Today, the fellowship hour has evolved into an elaborate time when food from various countries are

regularly served, and when the majority of the congregation stays and socializes with each other.

During the interviews, members highlighted Rev. Young's ability to open spaces for people to unpack what they heard and how they felt. This required allowing friction to come to the surface so members could dialogue and learn from it.

Worship and Rituals

Worship is a key part of any worshiping community of faith. The style of worship, however, can be a unifying factor or a source of conflict and division in a congregation.

The new members from Africa, who came from an Anglican tradition, were used to traditional worship, which communicated to them a sense of comfort in a strange city. As time went by, the congregation changed, and so did its worship. With the influence of the African and Caribbean members, the worship service started getting longer than the customary one hour. This change became a source of conflict since for the White members a one-hour worship service was a major part of their tradition and practice. The church leadership tried various solutions, but these changes were not well received. This conflict dragged on, and despite the complaints of the longtime members, the length of the service extended to about one and a half hours. To handle the conflict the senior pastor did three things: he opened the space so those who absolutely needed to leave after one hour of worship would get all the main components of the service and could leave without shame or judgment; he moved the sermon to later in the order of service but within the first hour to ensure that neither those who arrived late nor those who left

after one hour would miss it; and he left open the possibility for the service to last as long as it needed to last for this changing congregation.

The church also opened the space for new things to happen during worship. A music leader was able to incorporate some contemporary music in worship, and in the last years the church has become more intentional about including world music and new components in the worship experience with positive results.

Furthermore, when the African members expressed their desire to celebrate a special service to express their gratitude to God, the church was opened for that to happen. Through this service the African members wanted to thank God for having brought them to this community of faith, and to this local church for welcoming them. This service was named "The African Thanksgiving," and it became their yearly offering to God and the church. This service has been celebrated every year for the last twenty-two years. It has become an anticipated event, and part of the tradition of the church.

The church has also been intentional about transforming traditional rituals to incorporate components from other cultures. The passing of the peace, for example, has been done with words and traditions from other cultures. This ritual has become a meaningful moment in the life of this congregation.

One of the longtime leaders, who had chaired the worship committee, shared that historically the same persons had planned and led worship, and the same few people always served communion. In order to change that, the pastor formed worship planning teams, and opened them to anybody in the congregation. These teams had the responsibility, together with the pastor and leaders, to plan each worship service.

The chair of the worship committee and the pastor also worked diligently to invite new people to lead the worship services, to serve communion, and to do the prayers. These changes were not easily received. Those who had always done these tasks had to give them up and they were not pleased. Particularly, the same three persons who had served communion every month for decades were very uncomfortable with the idea of letting other people perform such an important task. Nowadays, however, different persons serve communion, including children, older members, and even a member who is blind.

Leadership Formation

Incorporating people from different cultures into the life of this community of faith was not easy for this church. Although open invitations were often made to volunteer in one of the various committees, these invitations did not quickly cause a positive response.

Various reasons were offered to explain the reluctance of the new members to get involved. First, there was lack of communication about what was expected from the committee members. Second, as refugees and immigrants, many of the new members were focused on getting settled; they worked multiple jobs and even worked on weekends. Third, there was lack of understanding about the cultural barriers around being church leaders, and about issues of power sharing.

One of the members shared that on one occasion when there was a request for volunteers to count the offering, one of the new African members decided to inquire. When she approached those who were counting the offering, they rebuked her. She looked at them, turned around and walked out. The message received was that she was

different and she did not belong there. This incident became known in the congregation, and it took a longtime before anyone volunteered to do any task. .

The process of including new people into the various leadership teams has been a continuous one. Nowadays, the leaders have a better understanding of the issues that hamper the integration of new people, and are now better able to ask what they need to change to be more inclusive.

Rev. Young was intentional about leading the church council to grow in their understanding of culture. He used Eric Law's[6] iceberg model[7] to help the leaders learn that each person's culture includes implicitly learned concepts, which are difficult to change and often even hard to acknowledge. A multicultural congregation must always keep in mind this reality as they seek to be community to one another.

Furthermore, the leaders of the church have made a conscious decision to figure out ways to overcome their cultural differences. This includes adapting the way they lead meetings, handle conflicts, and make decisions.

Rev. Young encouraged old and new leaders to participate in conferences about diversity so they could learn about the different ways in which people from different cultures think, process, and make decisions.

Both, Rev. Baxter and Rev. Young, were intentional on leadership formation. Rev. Young identified those with potential gifts and leadership skills, mentored and encouraged them to participate in training opportunities, and even went with them to

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[6] Eric Law is the Founder and Executive Director of the Kaleidoscope Institute, which has the mission to provide resources to equip church leaders to create sustainable churches and communities. "Eric F. H. Law," *The Kaleidoscope Institute*, accessed February 28, 2016, http://profile.typepad.com/ehflaw.

[7] Law, *Sacred Acts, Holy Change*, 36.

those events. He also encouraged those who felt called to ministry. One of them, a woman from Sierra Leone, became the first African lay leader in the church, and later became a local pastor.

This process was not without struggles. One member shared that "the more the pastor tried to include other people, open things to everybody, and have diversity in the leadership, the more conflict it caused. There was a lot of resistance." All these efforts have paid off. Presently, the composition of the committees has changed, and their chairs and members now represent the diversity of the congregation.

The Role of Clergy Leader

The role of the pastoral leader was emphasized as fundamental in the transition to become a multicultural congregation. The pastor must articulate forcefully the theological foundation for welcoming, focusing on social justice, and celebrating diversity. Christian disciples grow in their understanding of their call when they understand how their theology informs and shapes who they are, what they do, and how they live.

Rev. Young shared that he came to realize that his preaching needed to be less didactic and more focused on story telling. Sharing stories helped him connect with the stories of the members. He also contends preaching must touch on issues of justice, which are affecting the life of the community. Sermons must reflect how well the church is listening to those issues that impact the lives around it. He explained how important was for him to acquire the tools to do an exegesis of the community as well as an exegesis of the biblical text. The pastor must be out in the streets, listening to the stories, so the church can respond to what its community is going through.

Rev. Young was deliberate about leadership formation. He took church members, longtime members as well as new ones, White and non-White, to training events where they could all increase their awareness about their own culture and learn about how to more effectively be a multicultural church. He was also purposeful about cultivating emerging leaders, encouraging them to take courses, such as the Servant Leadership Course,[8] in order to obtain the skills needed to lead. By the time Rev. Young ended his tenure, seven new lay leaders had been certified.

Challenges

The challenges of this congregation have evolved over time. Church members identified the concept of time as one of their major challenges that still, to this day, requires constant dialogue and negotiation. There was a period when African members seldom invited White members to their special family celebrations, because the stated starting time and the actual time the events start often differ by two hours or longer. Today, however, more members from different cultures participate in each other's family events. The importance of their personal relationship has taken precedence, and they have learned how to negotiate their various understandings of time.

When the church started changing, some felt uncomfortable. Members expressed how occasionally best of intentions did not suffice when trying new things. On one occasion some leaders, who wanted to incorporate various cultures in worship, received a grant to purchase musical instruments and provide music lessons. This group, however,

[8] "CLM Overview," *Discipleship Ministries*, accessed March 4th 2016, http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/clm-overview.

failed to coordinate with the pastor and the music director to ensure they would embrace this idea. Even though the funds were available, this project did not thrive.

In a multicultural church the complex context is amplified by the variety of backgrounds and traditions church members come from. In the case of this church, some members come from a traditional, Anglican influenced, Methodist worship style, while others would welcome a service that is more charismatic and participative. Those who come from a strong traditional background, for example, have not welcome efforts to include media in the worship.

It is undisputed that conflict is inevitable in any congregation. In a multicultural congregation, however, conflict is complex. It is important to be keenly aware that different cultures have different ways of handling issues and solving problems. Being in a multicultural community, therefore, requires continuous negotiating. The focus cannot be on following Robert's Rules of Order,[9] but on making sure all voices are heard, and issues are understood clearly. When conflicts arise, it is important to be open and use the resources available to address them in healthy ways.

Another challenge this church faced was that on certain periods of time one pastor may have focused on one cultural group more than on others. "During that time," one person said, "race was a contributing factor for some to join the church and for some to leave. During this period the church was not for everyone."

The composition of the church paid staff has been a source of discussion in this church. While some have argued that it is crucial for the staff to reflect the make-up of

[9] Robert's Rules of Order is a set of rules for conduct at meetings that allows everyone to be heard and to make decisions without confusion. "Introduction to Robert's Rules of Order," *Robert's Rules of Order*, accessed March 4, 2016, http://www.robertsrules.org/rulesintro.htm.

the congregation, the Staff Parish Relations Committee had been slow to concur. This viewpoint, however, is slowly changing. A year ago, the church's staff was 75 % White and the only non-White paid staff was the custodian. This year that ratio has drastically changed and 75% of the staff is people of color.

The population of the city of New Brunswick has continued shifting. One of the indications of this change is that currently almost 100% of the children attending the preschool housed at the church are Latinos. The church, however, has not made any intentional efforts to reach out to the families of these children. When church members questioned this, the response they have received has been: "our mission is to Africans and African Americans."

A longtime member recognized that this church, as many others, struggles with reaching new people. She said: "I don't think we reach out enough to the community beyond our walls. It is a struggle to spend our energy reaching out to people rather than making it nice for ourselves."

One of the church members shared that despite the long journey this church has been on, there is still some resistance to change, and just raising the topic can be very contentious.

Pastoral changes are also difficult for any church. This church has gone through four pastoral transitions since it started becoming multicultural. Members shared that previous pastoral transitions were not handled well. The conference leadership failed to provide a space for the congregation to ask questions and grieve with the departing pastor. The latest pastoral transition, however, was managed in a healthier way. One month before the pastoral change the conference provided a one-day event to prepare the

congregation and its leaders for the transition. This event provided time for the congregation to have closure, and the opportunity to meet the new pastor and share their expectations.

Personal Faith Journeys

Being a multicultural congregation has stretched the discipleship journey of longtime members and new members alike. Living their faith in a diverse context has challenged them to overcome barriers in order to be one multicultural community of faith.

The stories of Jesus and the early church have been particularly poignant for this congregation. They have provided the theological foundation for their faith and practice. One member expressed how, despite being very shy, becoming part of The UMC at New Brunswick not only nurtured her faith but also empowered her to become actively involved in the life of the church, become part of the leadership team, and eventually become the chair of one of the church committees. Now, she is one of the certified lay leaders who periodically preaches not only at her church, but also in other churches in the area.

What Brought New People

For many who joined this church, the United Methodist brand was a factor that encouraged them to visit; and when they visited, the music and the familiar worship style welcomed them home. A White woman shared that she visited and stayed because of the diversity of the church. She said “it is much more interesting to worship with people who are not like me.”

Welcoming children and providing for their growth and well-being created a hospitable environment for families to thrive in their new community. The congregation created an atmosphere that engaged children from different cultures, backgrounds and skin colors, which strongly communicated to their parents that this community of faith was truly one that welcomed all.

Members unequivocally identified the pastors as factors that made them stay in the church. Their preaching, their willingness to dedicate time to provide pastoral care and to get to know the new neighbors, and their intentionality in engaging them in the life of the church, modeled to the rest of the church what it meant to offer radical hospitality.

Best Practices

One of the key factors that influenced the transformation of this church was its clergy leadership. The pastors of this church modeled and led the congregation in this transformation. Each of them contributed a different piece. Their performance was grounded on their theology of the church as a Body of Christ for all.

A leader of a multicultural congregation must be a strong preacher who has the skills to effectively communicate across cultures. He or she must not only have strong theological and biblical knowledge, but must have the ability to listen, read the congregation and community, and wisely guide the church in how to thrive among diversity.

The members of this church underlined that a congregation aiming to be multicultural must learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. The congregation needs to realize that things will not work just as they did when they were homogeneous, and that community life will not go smoothly all the time.

In actuality, a church in this process will always have the tendency of moving back to being homogeneous. Therefore, sustaining diversity requires a constant effort toward strengthening the church's multicultural identity.

One of the key factors that sustains this effort is dialogue. It is vital to open times and spaces for conversation to happen. This requires asking questions instead of making assumptions. Church leaders need to model how to ask questions about others' cultures, values and practices, and focus on listening and learning.

Members shared that it is easy to be superficially multicultural. "There are issues under the surface that we haven't addressed, which would take us to deeper relationships. We are very polite to one another, because we are afraid of offending."

Leadership formation is a key area in a church. Church leaders must be aware of different understandings of leadership in different cultures. What strong leadership is in one culture may be perceived as blatantly rude in another culture. This knowledge will aid the leaders and the congregation not to judge someone's leadership potential or skills based one's culture.

An authentic multicultural church needs to be proactive about identifying and forming leaders from the diverse laity. Members underlined this strategy as one that has been effective for their church.

Worship in a multicultural congregation must include components that reflect its diversity. It needs to include rhythms, musical instruments, and original music from other cultures, as well as various voices, symbols, stories and practices.

The worship space must also reflect visibly the diversity of the congregation. The flags in the sanctuary at the UMC at New Brunswick are a public declaration of who they are, and a statement that people from different countries and cultures are welcome there. The congregation must also be open to accepting proposals that come through other voices; and in order for this to happen, it is often necessary to change the structures and processes through which decisions are made. When trying new things and new ways, however, it is vital to always and continuously explain the rationale and the theological underpinning for them.

CHAPTER 6

THE JOURNEY OF GARFIELD MEMORIAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Learning about the journey of Garfield Memorial United Methodist Church involved attending two worship services in the main campus, interviewing both its senior pastor and associate pastor, and interviewing longtime members as well as members that joined the church after it started transitioning into a multicultural congregation. The longtime members are majority White, while those who have joined within the last ten years, are of various ethnicities, ages, and contexts.

Garfield Memorial UMC is located in Pepper Pike City, an affluent suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. The population in this area is 85.1% White, 6.5% Black, 5.5% Asian, and 1.4% Hispanic. A high percentage of the population has a bachelor degree or higher (71.6% compared with 25.6% in the state); and 13.5% of the population is foreign born (compared with 4.1% in the state).[1]

The Journey Begins

The journey of this church started about ten years ago when Rev. Chip Freed was appointed as the senior pastor of this church. At that time the church had an attendance of about 200 in worship, and included some African American families, as well as few

[1] "Quick Facts, Pepper Pike City, Ohio," *United States Census Bureau*, accessed January 2, 2016, http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/POP645214/3961686,00.

families with children. Although the church was still financially viable membership and attendance had been in decline for some time.

A Pastor with a Vision

After his arrival Rev. Freed saw the potential on this church offering absolute radical hospitality and welcoming the diverse population in the Cleveland area. His vision was to lead the church into a process not only of growth, but more importantly, of embracing those who are different than they are.

Rev. Freed was very clear and focused when, shortly after his arrival, he started to articulate to the congregation that they needed to reach new people, diverse people, and younger people. He determined that the church needed to make three macro adjustments. Rev. Freed contends that minor adjustment on issues of race and class are no longer effective in the American church. Macro adjustments are needed to gear the church toward significant change and growth, and these macro adjustments had to do with going back to the fundamental beliefs. He strongly insists that people invest in what you believe more than in what you do; therefore, the congregation needed to clarify the foundations of their faith before moving on to specific strategies to reach new people.

This first macro adjustment involved seriously reflecting on what the Gospel is. The American church, Rev. Freed argues, has a deficient understanding of the Gospel. The twenty-fifth verse of the sixteenth chapter of the Letter to the Romans clearly explains that the inclusion of the gentiles is a core part of the Gospel. This inclusion is not about a person but about a community that had been considered outsiders by the people of God. He explains, “when we simply preach an individual Gospel in the absence of community, we are preaching half a Gospel.”

The second macro adjustment had to do with the fact that the church needed to consider who its neighbors are. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) is not about helping someone who is down. The story is the answer to the question "who is my neighbor?" The original audience would have understood the stereotypes Jesus was using: the Levite, the Priest and the Samaritan. In one of his sermons, Martin Luther King Jr. explained that fear was the reason the Levite and the Priest did not stop to help the wounded man. The Levite and the Priest may have asked themselves, 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' The Samaritan, the antithesis of a Jew, asked a different question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"[2] Rev. Freed expands this point by proposing that the next question we need to ask ourselves is, "if I do not stop to help this person, what will happen to me? What will happen to my soul? How will it change me?" In the parable we learn that the biblical neighbor is someone you might collectively hate; someone you have learned to despise. A neighbor, Rev. Freed continues, is that person who is very different from you.

The third macro adjustment had to do with measuring success. The American church rates success in dollars, buildings and numbers. If this is what the church should measure, Chip Freed explains, then Jesus was a big failure. The macro adjustment required the church asking itself "do we reflect this community? Do we look like the Walmart in our town?"

Rev. Freed was purposeful about preaching and teaching the theology that would drive their transformation as a church. He used his sermons and other opportunities to

[2] Martin Luther King Jr., "I've Been to the Mountain Top," *Martin Luther Jing Jr, And The Global Freedom Struggle* (April 3, 1968), accessed October 10 2015, http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/ive_been_to_the_mountaintop/.

steer the church toward that direction. He led his leadership team to spend time developing clear core values, which would become part of the identity of the church and guide its work.

This process included evolving into a church that focuses on evangelism and offers absolute radical hospitality; a church that is multiethnic, economically diverse, and culturally diverse. This transformation required changing the staff, and changing the worship. This process was not easy, and although some of the longtime members left, the majority committed to this vision and stayed. While the pastor was taking the church through this process, he was also focused on making active and committed disciples. He would say: "if you want your nose wiped and your hand held, don't join this church."

The congregation had to learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. This became evident when some members were uncomfortable with the way African American members vocally expressed themselves during worship. When they approached the pastor about this issue, he asked them if they wished for these persons' experience with God to be repressed and hindered. With this question he helped them realize that experiencing God and expressing that experience was more important than someone else's sense of comfort.

The transition required a clear vision, but it also required clergy leaders who truly loved people and who were bold in the way they led. The church's Executive Pastor, an ordained female Deacon, embraced the vision and faithfully leads the church towards it. Rev. Freed also stated that for this kind of transformation to happen, it must start with the pastor. You cannot pass on what you don't have. A good leader must genuinely love the people and lead boldly and with energy. He describes a good leader as someone who:

- Takes responsibility
- Shares the vision simply
- Casts the vision convincingly
- Repeats the vision regularly
- Celebrates the vision systematically

Factors that Facilitated Transformation

The senior pastor of Garfield Memorial UMC is a pioneer in leading a financially stable mainline majority White church to become a church that is multiethnic and multicultural. After his arrival Rev. Freed clearly communicated to the church that the only way they would grow was through diversity. His vision for the church was to grow, to celebrate diversity, and to find effective and healthy ways to connect with each other and with the community.

During its process of transformation the church made a distinction between what was core doctrine and what were methods, and they adopted the following values:

Safety – The Church must be a place where people feel safe to share their deepest hurts, hopes and dreams.

Authenticity – The Church must be a place absent of pretense, where people can meet a Real God in a Real World.

Growth – The Church must be a place where growth happens… Growth in numbers of people encountered and growth in spiritual development.

Diversity – The Church must be a place that reflects the community around us and the Kingdom of God.

Forgiveness – The Church must be a place where forgiveness reigns.[3]

These values are part of the identity of the church, and the church lives by them and expresses them in all aspects of its life.

The core value of safety was mentioned by most of those interviewed. One young adult explained: "People are often afraid of church. Many have experienced the church as judgmental and intent on making people feel guilty. In this community, however, the word is out that this is a safe place to come."

For this church embracing diversity means more than merely cosmetics. They set out to embrace diversity of ethnicity, income, culture, as well as political inclination. People with opposite opinions worship together side by side, and together they to make a richer community.

This congregation is continually seeking ways to demonstrate that they are welcoming, open and safe for all people. One of the newer members said that when she first came to the church, she had been going through a very difficult time in her life. She shared that the first time she visited "the church made me feel like they had been waiting for me."

This church is also very intentional about being present in the community. They participate in festivals that celebrate the various cultures in Cleveland. One African American young adult member shared her experience when she noticed the church's booth in a community event. She had actually grown up in Garfield Memorial UMC. Her family was one of the few African American families that had belonged to the church at that time. She noticed the booth promoting the church at the festival, and she thought it

[3] "Core Values," *Garfield UMC*, accessed October 9, 2015, http://www.garfieldchurch.org/#/who-we-are/core-values.

had to be another church with the name same name, because the Garfield Memorial she knew would never have participated in such an event nor would it have people so enthusiastically inviting others to visit. Curiosity made her inquire, and to her surprise she found out it was the same church of her childhood. This encounter made her decide to visit the church, and when she came, she felt welcomed and included; and for sixteen straight weeks she brought family and friends with her.

One issue that this church carefully thought through was how to use its facilities in ways that would communicate a welcoming message, show radical hospitality and promote relationship building among the people. As a result of this process, they remodeled its buildings and designed intentional places for people to congregate and build relationships.

The buildings in the main campus were renovated to offer:

- An openness in the entry to the sanctuary where the Heritage Service is held with clear signs so that even first time guests can easily find their way around.
- An enclosed courtyard between the sanctuary and the fellowship hall/gym that welcomes people to mingle while sipping a cup of coffee from the commercial quality coffee bar.
- They also created a secured space for children and youth, with state-of-the-art sound and technology.

The vision of Garfield Memorial UMC is not merely to be a place where people of various ethnicities and cultures worship together, but to be a community where diverse people grow in their faith, worship together, and become community for one another.

This church also nurtures people to embrace others just as they are. One African American woman said: "they make you feel like you belong here."

Young adults shared that when they visited invited by friends, they were impressed with the radical hospitality they received. The people at the church were passionate but "not on your face; they were not trying to recruit you."

Garfield Memorial strives to offer something for every part of the body of Christ, for different ages, and stages in life, and for people with different gifts and talents. But the focus is not on events or programs, but on opening spaces for people to connect. The church's mission statement drives the ministry to widen the circle so all can be welcome. They focus on being a congregation that lives Christ, and on being better servants of God. In order to achieve this, the church constantly offers opportunities for people to engage in the life of the church and serve the community in meaningful ways. The contemporary service is marketed to a portion of the community that is young and ethnically diverse. "You can see people of different colors and ages enjoying each other's company. This kind of environment sets the stage for new people and longtime members to build relationships."

Members and pastors identified the eight-week study, *The Multi-Ethnic Christian Life Primer*, as one of the key factors that guided this church in their process of transformation. This study is designed for people in the pews and aims to guide their conversation so they can grow in their understanding of the biblical mandate to make disciples, and steer their journey to be a community of faith together in diversity.[4]

[4] Oneya Fennell Okuwobi and Mark Deymaz, *The Multi-Ethnic Christian Life Primer* (Transcend Culture, 2015).

The pastors recognized that in a diverse congregation such as theirs it was important to address the issue of race in such a way that facilitates dialogue an understanding. Toward that end, they offered a "Conversation about Race" on Sunday afternoons, which was well received and well attended.

Small groups were also identified as key part of disciple making in this church. The church offers various small group opportunities on different topics and focus. One of the most important characteristics of small groups is that they form a community that cares of its members. When someone misses a meeting others notice and offer care. Members also shared that this church is aware and careful in the way they welcome new people. There are many people who have been damaged by a church, and the congregation is eager to welcome all whoever they are and wherever they are in their journey, without judgement.

Multiplication is part of their vision, which guided them to take on a declining White congregation in a nearby community to revitalize it and establish it as a second campus of Garfield Memorial. This second campus offers a traditional service, as well as a contemporary service that features the live webcasted sermon from the main campus. Garfield Memorial is now a thriving congregation. The main campus gathers around six hundred people in worship on Sundays, who are very diverse, are involved in the life of the congregation and engaged in the life of the community.

Worship and Rituals

One of the first areas on which the leadership focused was on transforming the worship services so that, despite the style, they would exude energy and not be boring.

There is a ritual that sets the environment for each of the services. In her weekly welcoming words, the Executive Pastor says: "wherever you are in your journey, you are welcome here; if you have questions, you are welcome here; if you have no faith you are welcome here; if you have a different faith, you are welcome here." These words set the atmosphere for new people to find a loving and safe environment.

The church currently offers two worship services in the main campus: the traditional service is called "Heritage;" it features a chancel choir and is less diverse. The contemporary service is called "Mosaic;" it features a multicultural praise band, guest artists, and is more than half non-White.

The diversity of options has been a key component in this church. A new member said: "One of the things I love is that there is something for everybody." In the Mosaic Service the praise band is diverse. Worship includes diversity of music and styles, including Soul music and Gospel. Young adults describe this service as "fun, weird and non-churchy."

One African American woman shared that although she really liked the church, she missed certain aspects of her culture, specifically Gospel music. The pastor encouraged her to do something about it, and as a result, she started a Gospel choir. Later on, the church hired a piano player and a Gospel choir director, and incorporated the Gospel choir into the contemporary worship service. The congregation welcomed this new addition, which drew more new people in.

The sermon is the central part of the service. It is not judgmental, insightful and inspiring. The pastor teaches instead of preaching. He is well-prepared, uses video resources to communicate effectively, and explains clearly what he is talking about.

A longtime Methodist who transferred her membership to Garfield Memorial, described the sermons as engaging. “The sermons stick with you. They make you want to know more.”

Leadership Formation

One of the factors that facilitate the formation of new leaders in this church is the *Strengths Builders Class*. For eight weeks the Executive Pastor leads this class, which guides participants to connect with God’s specific ministry dreams for their lives through their strengths, life experiences and faith. This class encourages people to use their gifts and serve, and one of the new members became a lay leader as a result of this process. A newlywed couple shared that this class ignited their passion and excited them to get involved. They found in this church a safe place, a healthier place where they feel valued, and a church that offer them the tools to be successful.

The church also offers various leadership formation components where people learn, connect and explore various ways to get involved in the life of the church. As the church has been growing in diversity, more African Americans have joined the church, and through these leadership formation strategies, some have begun to take leadership roles. An Asian woman describes that when she arrived to the church, she was feeling broken. After she participated in one of these classes, she was asked to lead one. Through this process she reclaimed her identity, skills and abilities. Participating in this class helped her to make the decision to go back to school, and now she works at a non-profit agency.

The pastor is open to new ideas, and the church has learned to welcome new ways of doing things. The leaders provide mentorship to emerging leaders, and equip them to make new ministries happen.

The church also offers a regular event named "Pizza with the Pastors," which is a casual time for new people to get to know the pastors. Through these opportunities pastors also get to know the new members, their passion and skills, and are able to guide them to get involved in the life of the congregation.

Role of Clergy Leader

In this church, pastors intentionally aim to "make sure all are welcome no matter who they are." Their vision is to include all regardless of race, culture, social status, life style. They lead to create an atmosphere that is welcoming and uniting, and consistently strive to plug people into the life of the church. They are facilitators; they are in the trenches working alongside with the congregation.

A couple who became members recently described the clergy leaders of this church as people who demonstrate having a relationship with God, who speak about their relationship with Jesus Christ, and who put God in the center of everything they do. A member said: "Rev. Freed challenges the members of this church in ways that make them feel uncomfortable, and this is a good thing." He challenges people to grow in their faith, and to get involved in mission outside the church building.

The sermons occupy a central role in worship. Members described the sermons as "awesome and on point." The senior pastor is skilled in communicating with all kinds of people. He is very charismatic and his preaching is deep and relevant. He invites dialogue not only about faith but also about issues that affect the community.

There is diversity in the church leadership. The senior pastor is White, and his wife, who is African American, is that staff person in charge of reception, hospitality and membership care. The executive pastor, who is an ordained Deacon, is a White woman. The youth pastoral team includes White and African Americans, and the worship team includes a Latino young adult woman.

Challenges

When Garfield Memorial started to grow, the church struggled. As the attendance increased it became more challenging for people to get to know each other. The staff also struggled. The senior pastor was taking them through unchartered waters, and his leadership was not what they were used to.

The church maintained their focus on new people, on incorporating them into the life of the congregation, and sometimes this focus caused conflict with longtime members. Despite attempts to solve these conflict, some people left the church. Some left because of theological understandings, and others left because they said the shouting of "Amens" was distracting.

Personal Faith Journeys

One member shared that being part of this church has changed him. He said that his faith journey has brought him to a place where his heart and his mind are more open. A new member shared that through her interactions with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures her faith has been strengthened. She said: "you always feel you are a better person when you appreciate others, their gifts, their cultures. We are better as the body of Christ when people from various cultures and backgrounds are welcome to the table."

A second generation Asian woman said that she owes to this church the transformation of her faith. When she visited Garfield she was going through a deeply painful period in her life. The church welcomed and accepted her, which helped in her healing process. The love that she and her family received showed them that there was a place for them in the church.

Small groups are a key component for people to learn about the Bible, to dialogue, to hear others' views and opinions, and grow in their faith. One of the newest members shared how important participating in a small group has been for her. These groups have provided a space for her to go deeper in her faith, to learn from others, and to create a bond with other people.

A new member applauded the opportunity that this church offers to talk about race. Issues of race are a significant part of the experience of this community, and being able to dialogue about it within a safe environment and within the context of faith, has offered an invaluable avenue for personal growth.

A man who joined the church shortly after the senior pastor came, shared that being part of this church has rekindle his relationship with Christ, and that being surrounded by diversity of races, economics, cultures, and seeing how God is moving in people's lives, has strengthened his faith.

What Brought New People

New people and diversity brought new people. Several members shared that they first visited the church because it was diverse. Young new members expressed that when they visited, they found the sermon inspirational, liked the diversity, and were pleasantly

surprised by the fact that this church seemed more real than others they have previously visited.

Some mentioned Pastor Freed's racially mixed marriage as a visual model of a loving relationship that crosses boundaries. A member pointed out that his marriage was a factor that opened the door for the church to become more welcoming.

Small groups brought new people to the church. These groups opened a way for people to get to know each other and build relationships based on trust, and since conversations are confidential, small groups are safe places to be and to grow.

A longtime Methodist shared that when she checked the church website, she liked what she saw. When she visited, she felt safe, she connected with the choir music, and she loved the diversity and the different opportunities to connect in mission. The message she received was that there was something she could do despite her limitations.

A new member shared that the diversity in the photos on the website enticed her to visit. When she did, she found an authentic congregation that looked like the photos. She felt welcomed but was not pressured to join.

An African American couple who joined within the last year decided to visit the church after receiving a flier that described its core values. One of the things that caught their attention was the core value of safety. The theme of "widening the circle" also caught their attention. When they visited, they found what they have read about in a flier and seen in the website. They encountered a congregation that offered them genuine hospitality, included everyone, was authentic, and where they felt inspired and uplifted. Through the time during the "Pizza with the Pastors," this couple found healing, felt safe and accepted, and found openness, authenticity, and transparency from the pulpit.

A person who joined the church within the last year shared that when she first visited, she felt openness and love. She felt welcome; her children felt welcome and they truly enjoyed the children ministries. This mother's goal is to raise global citizens who embrace diversity and who celebrate those who think differently, and she found in this church that kind of environment and openness for her and her children to thrive.

A young Asian couple shared that they had grown up in a conservative church with people just like them. They described it as a reductionist church where life revolves around conforming to certain rules in order to belong. When they relocated they decided to look for a congregation that was more open. The well-maintained website and the diversity compelled them to visit. When they did, they found a church that was inviting, a staff that was welcoming, and heard a sermon that was one of the highlights of their visit. An African American couple visited the church with their granddaughter. From the time they pull up in the parking lot, they felt genuinely welcome. Inside the church, they were received with hospitality and good coffee, and they liked the fact that you don't have to be dressed in a certain way to come to the church. They were pleasantly surprised when they were told not to give to the offering because they were visitors. This practice impressed them because in their previous church those who tithed were given preferential treatment.

Best Practices

The following best practices were highlighted, which these members credit for helping transform their congregation, and for the church thriving in the process.
First, they underscored that before trying to transition into multicultural, a church must first be healthy. This involves acquiring the skills to identify one's prejudices against

other races, cultures, classes, life styles, and to put them aside. This is life-long journey that opens the path to tear down barriers that hinder forming authentic relationships among people who are not alike. This could be a challenging experience for many, therefore, the congregation must learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable, and demonstrate with their words and behavior that they truly welcome all.

Second, it is important to recognize that churches often do not know how to adapt. The process of transformation includes distinguishing between core doctrine and methods, and being willing to change the methods, try new ways of doing things, and even discerning when to stop programs or activities that are no longer effective. This part of the transformation requires a deep commitment from both the pastor and the congregation to welcome new voices and new ideas to the table.

The vision of the leader is critical. The pastor needs to keep the church focused on the process of rediscovering its identity as the body of Christ where all are welcome. The leaders, however, need to earn the trust of the congregation. They must be bold, consistent, and not afraid. They should model what they want to see in the church, and be the first to lead in reaching out to the community.

The value of diversity must be repeated constantly so it becomes an inherent part of the identity of the church. This value must be visibly reflected in the congregation, and everywhere in the church space. The staff and leaders must be visibly diverse. There must be intentionality about hiring and assigning diverse leaders who are committed to the vision of being multicultural. Staff and leaders need to demonstrate their commitment to diversity not only in their church lives, but also in their personal lives. They must be

inclusive, authentic, show genuine love, and have personal relationships with people who are different than they are.

Hospitality is another crucial best practice. The church environment must be positive, and when visitors come, it is essential that the church ensures that people feel welcome. The congregation must communicate the message: "We are glad you are here. We want you to be back." This welcoming message must be conveyed through each and every aspect and area of the church, in the parking lot, in the lobby, in the pulpit, through arts, and even in the bathrooms. The church must create a comfortable atmosphere that exudes warmth and that welcomes visitors as if they already belong there.

The message needs to be that all people are welcome to come as they are; that they don't have to look perfect; that they matter; that they are important. Everything and everyone in the church must be focused on openly and genuinely welcoming people of color, and people of different incomes and lifestyles, and become community with them. This is especially important when welcoming new immigrants, who often have no community around them.

The value of safety is fundamental. The church needs to be a safe place where "the other" does not feel judged, where all are welcome, and diversity is celebrated. People need to feel safe to be there, even if they are dressed differently or look different. "Worship must be an experience, and it must touch people." When designing worship, it must be excellent. Music needs to include all variety of styles and rhythms, as they open the door for different generations to participate. Musicians and worship leaders must be diverse, and model the diversity the church embraces.

"The church needs to get rid of the formality, dress codes, assigned seats, boring services, and those traditions that are not helpful when welcoming others."

The sermons must be good, biblically based, and address what the community is experiencing. They need to inspire, challenge, and connect people with God. They should challenge the believers in their journey as disciples. They need to be focused, well-prepared, without judgement. Using technology, including videos, can be helpful to introduce new issues and to keep people thinking.

The church must create ways for people to connect and socialize with each other. The goal is not simply for diverse people to worship together, but for people to develop relationships and engage in each other's lives.

A congregation aiming to become multicultural needs to dedicate time and effort to engage with children and youth, and provide not just entertainment, but spaces and programs for them to explore and grow in their faith. Children of immigrants, particularly, often struggle with a sense of belonging while growing up within multiple cultures. The church can become community not only for them but also for their parents. A multicultural church thrives through recognizing the multiple and valuable gifts all bring. The congregation is richer because of them. Ministries, therefore need to be developed using people's strengths, so all find a place to serve and thrive.

Small groups can also provide safe spaces where people are welcome to share their doubts, ask questions, and even disagree. They can offer a healthy and safe atmosphere for people to grow in the faith.

Leaders must provide the congregation with tools to study the Bible. The Book of Acts is particularly helpful, as it can help a congregation reflect on how the early church handled being multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual.

The church needs to have excellent and authentic web presence that communicates openness and portrays a faith community that welcomes all. All marketing needs to reflect authentically the growing diversity, as just this factor will attract many who are looking for this type of church.

In order to have an impact, the church needs to be constantly present and involved in the affairs of the community, and join in the events of the community.

As the congregation progresses in this journey, it should celebrate, and celebrate often. Celebrate growth; celebrate small and big achievements, and celebrate being multicultural and multiethnic.

CHAPTER 7

LESSONS FROM THE JOURNEY

The interest for this research emerged from fifteen years of meeting with church leaders across the United States who are looking for strategies to breach the cultural divide between their churches and their communities. The journeys of these churches offer these leaders the lessons learned during their transformation from homogeneous majority White churches to churches that chose to embrace their neighbors from other cultures. This process was not an easy one. It required rediscovering their identity as the Body of Christ, and deeply shifting their methods. These lessons are no formulas, but they provide principles other churches can contextualize and implement in their search to bridge the divide.

The journeys of these three churches are as varied as their constituencies, yet there are significant threads in their stories. Two of the churches became multicultural in response to drastic demographic changes in their communities. The third church is located in a community that has remained majority White and affluent, but the church recognized the opportunity in the diversity around it and made the choice to embrace it. When populations shift in a community, church leaders often jump into developing new programs to provide services to their neighbors. There is, however, a prior step often overlooked. Without this step, programs become shallow attempts to change the output without a substantial change in the way the congregation thinks about itself and others, and how it behaves. This step entails taking time to reflect on the fundamentals of the

Christian faith, that is, the complete meaning of the Gospel, the comprehensive call to discipleship, the far reach of the mandate, and the recovery of the identity of the church as the body of Christ for all of humanity. These foundations shape the values of the church, the way the church worships, the kind of hospitality it offers, the way it is staffed, the way leaders are identified, mentored and assigned, and all areas of the life of the congregation.

The Continuum

Becoming a multicultural church is a continuous journey. A congregation seeking to gather people from different ethnicities, cultures and contexts needs to be in a constant process of adaptation. As new generations are born, and new waves of immigration impact the community, the church has the extraordinary task of being the community for new and diverse people, and sharing the Gospel story through renewed methods and strategies.

Multicultural congregations, accordingly, need to focus on continuous learning and adjusting as their communities change; and as people from diverse cultures join, there is potential for continuous transformation and for making further changes in the life of the congregation, which then attracts more diverse people to visit and join.[1]
This journey, however, needs to start not out of desperation for survival or fear of dying. The journey needs to start out of the theological conviction that the Christian church was conceived with the vision of being a community that is multicultural, multilingual and multinational, which crosses all boundaries to be the body of Christ for all.

[1] Michael O. Emerson and Rodney M. Woo, *People of the Dream* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 64-65.

A congregation needs to spend the time learning about this biblical truth and incorporating it to every aspect of their life as a church. This process sets the stage so that when new and diverse people visit and join the church, the members of the congregation offer genuine hospitality and are open to make the necessary changes to welcome the contribution of the newcomers. This stage cannot be stressed enough, because if many in the congregation resist becoming multicultural, this opposition may be enough to keep new and diverse people away.[2]

A church can then continue the journey to become multicultural at various points. A church may take the next step, for example, by focusing on transforming the worship service, or on recruiting and equipping clergy and lay leaders, or on special programs for learning or celebration, or on children and youth, or on young adults. Whatever focus the church undertakes at the beginning, it needs to continue moving on and making changes on other areas of the church, and making progress toward the vision, to avoid the ever-present risk of getting stuck in one area after initial adjustments are made.

Multiple changes are needed. Simply changing one aspect of the church is not enough to overcome organizational inertia common in many churches.[3] Leaders, therefore, need to remain focused on guiding the church in a process where change is constant.

Churches also need to be aware and prepared for the fact that this will be a difficult and messy journey; changes will rarely go smoothly, and the tendency to reverse the progress made will be a constant companion.

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[2] Ibid., 65.

[3] Ibid., 64.

The journeys of these churches teach us also other valuable lessons.

The Lead Pastor Leads with a Clear Vision

In each of these churches, the pastoral leader played a pivotal role in leading the church from majority White to multicultural. These pastors were focused and, grounded on the theological foundation, clearly communicated to the church the vision to become a congregation that embraces the diversity around them.

This vision took them from inward focused to crossing barriers of culture, language, class and ethnicities. The driving force of this transformation was the conviction that the role of the church was not to be an exclusive community for the comfort of those inside it, but to build relationships with people who were not like them. For these churches, evangelism was not a rehearsed set of words and abstract invitations, but it was intrinsically linked to building loving relationships with their new neighbors. Each of these pastors discerned what changes were needed. They dedicated time to teach a deeper understanding of the Gospel and to guide the church to realize that the Gospel unequivocally compels the church to get out of its walls and embrace those who are not like them. This process encompassed seeing the possibilities and developing the strategies to making these happen.

A pastor, however, cannot lead a church in this path unless he or she is already on it. The values of embracing and celebrating diversity, and the theological conviction that the community of faith is not complete unless it includes all, needs to be an intrinsic part

of the pastor's personal life and faith journey. His or her example is one of the most effective ways to inspire others to develop cross-cultural relationships.[4]

A pastor of a multicultural congregation is also on a journey to keep acquiring new skills to effectively lead a multicultural congregation. Part of this journey includes a commitment to increase his or her cross cultural competence skills, including becoming increasingly aware of the idiosyncrasies of one's culture, enhancing the knowledge about the values, peculiarities, customs and traditions of other cultures, and learning to communicate positively and effectively across cultures.[5]

The pastor also needs to be keenly aware of the dynamics of the changing community and the changing congregation, and make the necessary changes to shift his or her leadership skills to reflect these dynamics. By adapting his or her preaching style, sermon topics, leadership formation systems, and worship content to the diverse and changing community, the pastor begins to serve the emerging diversity of the congregation.

This process needs to be undertaken with intentionality because the majority White church stands on a long history and solid foundation that informs who they are. All its systems are aligned for it to continue the same way. Transforming into a multicultural church requires a paradigm change that will be inevitably difficult and often uncomfortable if not painful.

When trying to determine effective strategies to use with homogeneous churches located in communities that have drastically changed ethnically and culturally,

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[4] Mark Deymaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2007), 172.

[5] Ibid., 96.

denominational leaders frequently conclude that a pastor who has affinity with the changed community will be able to successfully guide the homogeneous congregation into embracing its diverse neighborhood. A contrary proposal is worth considering. Rev. Young, former senior pastor of The United Methodist Church at New Brunswick, argues that if the task is for the pastor to facilitate a church's transition from homogeneous to multicultural, it is a mistake to assign to a church a pastor of the ethnicity and culture of the changed community around it. He contends that such a pastor will first face the uphill challenge of earning the trust of the homogeneous church and being accepted by them as their pastor. This process takes considerable time and could likely render him or her ineffectual.

On the other hand, assigning a pastor of the same culture as the homogeneous church may facilitate the path toward transformation. This pastor can more rapidly claim his or her place of leadership because he or she has a cultural affinity to lead the congregation to a process of transformation from within. The pastor helps the congregation understand the theological foundation of who they are called to be as a church, while modeling what it means to build relationships with those who are different than they are.

Words Have Power

The vision to become multicultural needs to impregnate all the words used in the church. Church leaders need to carefully craft them, grounding them in theology, and use them to communicate the values, strategies and steps to be used, and to saturate every message transmitted to the congregation and the community. The result of this process will be that those messages will become part of the identity of the church, and all in the

congregation will speak a common language of welcoming. These messages will influence the way they think about themselves, influence how they think of those who are not like them, and will shape the way they welcome others.

Some recommend writing a document that clearly articulates the purpose of embracing the vision for multicultural ministry. Addressing the issues involved openly and honestly will pave the way for people in the congregation to invest in the vision to become multicultural.[6] Emerson and Woo describe this process as "institutionalizing the goal." They recommend putting together a group of people who will take the time to research and discern words to be used in the crafting of the vision, and communicate it to the church. This vision would be visible exhibited, memorized and repeated to become part of the very character of the congregation.[7] It is also recommended putting together a diverse team with the task of discerning what changes are needed in worship, teaching and ministry, to include and celebrate the various cultures in the community and congregation.[8] This team would also continually assess the transformational progress, keeping it on course, and determine any issues that need to be addressed.

Garfield Memorial UMC is an example of how to effectively institutionalize the goal. The congregation dedicated time and effort to develop and commit to core values that were successfully articulated and woven into the fabric of the congregation. They are published on the bulletin, newsletters and electronic media. These powerful words

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[6] Ibid., 169.

[7] Emerson and Woo, 66-68.

[8] Deymaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation,* 169.

became part of the language and identity of the church, shaped the life of the community, informed its decisions, and set the direction.

Worship Shapes the Community

Worship is a key part of any Christian congregation. The style and content of worship defines and forms the faith community, and because it is so central, it can become a source of conflict. The way a congregation worships expresses more than tradition; it expresses its spirituality. A multicultural congregation gathers people from diverse cultures, who have various stories, symbols, music, arts, and ways to experience the divine. Authentic multicultural worship takes into consideration these various expressions, and is innovative in incorporating them into worship.[9]

When designing worship liturgy, it is important to be mindful about not developing a self-serving ritual that makes insiders feel better. A multicultural liturgy is fed by the dialogue process within the congregation, and must be fully inclusive. Prophetic liturgy avoids becoming the sacred object that communicates the same message, and instead incorporates the different ways in which diverse people express their faith, and the new perspectives learned from them.[10]

Rodney Woo argues that when believers focus too much on their own racial expression of worship, their worship flattens out and they lose their potential racial

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[9] Gerardo Marti, *A Mosaic of Believers: Diversity and Innovation in a Multiethnic Church* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005), 127.

[10] Eric H. F. Law, *The Bush Was Blazing but not Consumed* (St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 1996), 121-122.

harmony. Instead, the church demands the fullness of all the races to enrich the harmony of the heavenly choir.[11]

Multicultural worship is multilayered. To be culturally sensitive, inclusive worship takes into account the various ways in which people from different cultures experience God. Some, for example, express their encounter with God outwardly, through words, gestures and sounds, while others express their encounter with God in quietness. Church leaders need to open the space for these different expressions to be acceptable and welcome in the congregation.

Multicultural worship needs to also stay prophetic, and challenge the congregation to cross boundaries that excludes some.[12] It must also be intentional about providing time and space for the congregation to build interpersonal relationships.[13] Contrary to popular claims, Emerson and Woo argue that, Charismatic or Pentecostal congregations are no more likely to be racially mixed than other faith traditions,[14] but congregations, even mainline ones, with a charismatic style of worship are more likely to be racially mixed.[15]

The experience of Garfield Memorial seems to prove that point. This church kept its traditional worship service while offering a more charismatic worship experience, which has attracted a younger diverse population.

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[11] Rodney M. Woo, *The Color of Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 188.

[12] Law, *The Bush Was Blazing but not Consumed*, 121.

[13] Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, 102.

[14] Emerson and Woo, 47.

[15] Ibid., 48.

The experience of the other two churches is somewhat different. Traditional worship offered immigrants in these communities a connection with their familial and religious roots. These congregations understood however that they needed to be open enough to incorporate new elements in their traditional worship to more closely reflect the experience of the immigrants in their communities.

Churches that are welcoming new and diverse people into their congregations intentionally integrate diverse accents, in worship; through readings, singing, leading prayers, in addition to reflecting their diversity with new and different components such as visual arts, story-telling and theater, for example.

Regarding music, creativity is foremost. It is critical to discern the styles and components that may speak to those in the community and integrate them in worship. Singing traditional songs in diverse styles, as well as adding new songs and styles from various traditions and cultures into worship, can help create an atmosphere in which various cultures are represented and celebrated, while adding an appropriate balance of comfort and discomfort.[16]

As the congregation changes, so will its worship. Worship services may get longer and may become something different to what the majority White congregation is used to. Leaders can use these opportunities to teach and dialogue, about the meaning of worship, about the content of liturgy, about the theology behind it, and about how their worship service is providing the opportunity for many to experience God.

Churches in the journey to become multicultural need to be open to the development of new celebrations and traditions, and execute them with excellence. Part

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[16] Deymaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation,* 159.

of this journey is allowing the emerging diverse leadership to contribute to what these new traditions looks like, which will broaden the worship experience. Through this process new people will feel heard and welcome, and innovation will shape the life of the community of faith.

The church members identified preaching as an essential component of worship. The way preaching is done and perceived varies from culture to culture. Whether the preacher stands behind the pulpit or walks across the stage or among the people, what he or she wears, the tone of voice and the gestures used, whether the preacher reads from a manuscript, preaches from a memorized script, or is totally extemporaneous; all of these are related to the preacher's culture and personal style. On the other side, the message the congregation hears, and what the congregation perceives through tones, gestures and movements are intrinsically related to their various cultures. Therefore, the preacher must take special care to adapt the sermon style and content to the multicultural audience, and be cognizant of the different ways in which people from different cultures understand and process ideas. The sermon is a bridge that facilitates the connection between the congregation and God, and it reminds them of the ways in which God's grace has already been present in their lives.

The Pursuit for Justice

Communities with diverse populations often deal with issues of racism, discrimination and violence. The church is an ideal space to deal with these issues within the context of faith, to share the assurance that God walks with the community, and gives them hope and courage to seek justice.

The biblical idea of social justice plays a prominent role in building a case for the biblical authenticity of multiculturalism.[17] In the Grawemeyer Award winning book *Exclusion and Embrace*, Miroslav Volf states that there can be no justice without the will to embrace; in order to agree on justice one has to make space for the perspective of the other, since justice depends on the will to embrace. Volf argues that embrace is part and parcel of the very definition of justice.[18] Throughout their journeys, these three churches learned that embracing their diverse communities meant joining them in their journey, in their pain, and in their struggle for justice.

A multicultural church is a sign of hope within the community, particularly for those who are pushed to its fringes. It actively works for the reconciliation and restoration of people who are alienated from each other, and it is called to actively seek justice and peace for all. A multicultural church must take this prophetic task seriously.[19]

It Is Not About Diversity but About Relationships

Churches that find themselves in communities that have experienced a significant population shift often view their neighbors through a lens of need. When churches make assumptions about what people need, they often respond with charity. These charity ministries are seldom reciprocal, and therefore do not create the environment to develop relationships among equals. Charity ministries are often one-sided; they create clients, and rarely create relationships.

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[17] Chinaka Samuel DomNwachukwu and HeeKap Lee, *Multiculturalism, A Shalom Motif for the Christian Community* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2014), vi.

[18] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace. A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 220.

[19] "The Vision of a Multicultural Church," *Curious Christian*, accessed January 22, 2016, http://mattstone.blogs.com/christian/2009/04/multicultural-church.html.

The three researched churches created spaces for people to interact with each other and build relationships. They created these spaces at the entrance of the church, through special events, Bible studies, small groups, special meals, fellowship hour, and they emphasized to the congregation the importance of forming new relationships. By providing opportunities for relationships to emerge, and be nurtured, churches are actively supporting the development of an authentic community.

Sociologist Kevin Dougherty argues that the potential for multiracial congregations to survive long term is enhanced to the degree that their members develop interpersonal ties across cultures and races. The opportunities for relational ties is strengthened through the social arrangements of small groups, which stress close relationships among its participants.[20] It is not enough for people of different races and cultures to worship together. They must be able to develop social connections across races; get together socially, babysit each other's children, and comfort each other in times of stress. Furthermore, leaders and members need to be committed to the life-long journey of becoming cross-cultural competent, which describes the growing ability to engage with people of other cultures effectively.[21] Cultural competent people are not experts about all cultures. They do, however, value diversity and seek to be aware of their own cultural traits and how they inform their behavior.

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[20] Kevin D. Dougherty and Kimberly R. Huyser, "Racially Diverse Congregations: Organizational Identity and the Accommodation of Differences," *Journal for the Social Scientific Study of Religion* Vol. 47, No. 1 (March, 2008), accessed March 8, 2016, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20486885, 24.

[21] Deymaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation*, Ibid., 96.

Leadership is Key

The leaders of churches on this journey have the extraordinary task of opening spaces for new things to happen. They are intentional about diversifying the leadership, and expressing its multiculturalism in every component of the life of the church. The pastors who led these three churches were White men. They, however, were deliberate in hiring diverse staff and forming and empowering diverse leaders. When hiring staff, the key is to ask the right questions to ensure the candidate embraces diversity as a personal value, and embraces the church's vision to be multicultural. Multicultural church leaders also have the task of identifying emerging leaders, mentoring them, participating in their training, and recruiting them for leadership positions in the church. Churches that want to become multicultural but have leaders and staff who are all from only one racial group will inevitably find it difficult to maintain its multicultural character.[22]

Prepare for Conflict

The journey to transition from majority White to multicultural will inevitably cause conflicts and misunderstandings. Pastoral leaders must equip themselves and prepare the congregation to manage conflicts in healthy and productive ways.

Conflicts present opportunities to learn from one another and build relationships. When viewed not as battles to be won, but as part of God's redemptive work, conflict can serve to reinforce relational bridges.[23]

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[22] Emerson and Woo, 88.

[23] Derek Chinn, *1+1, Creating a Multicultural Church from Single Race Congregations* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 100.

Sometimes, however, people in the congregation disagree with the vision of becoming multicultural and threaten to leave. This happened in all three churches, and they all loss members in the process. It is important, however, for church leaders to stay the course and not allow this kind of opposition to stall the movement.

Other Factors that Facilitated the Transition

A church aiming to reach its diverse neighbors must practice hospitality, not as mere pleasantries, but as a spiritual discipline. Beyond being friendly, radical hospitality is communicating the certainty that the other person is beloved by God and worthy, and the conviction that the congregation will be enriched with their presence. The church must receive their diverse neighbors without judgement, and welcome them in such a way that they feel accepted no matter who they are or what they look like. Practicing this kind of hospitality will require teaching, modeling and practice.

In one of the churches, the United Methodist Women group was pivotal in leading the congregation to focus on mission and learning about the countries represented in its community. Women's groups within the denomination have often been key for guiding churches to be aware of the issues that affect immigrants and others who are at the margins.

Small groups also proved to be effective opportunities to provide more intimate space for relationships to be formed and strengthened. This factor is mentioned as one of the keys to the permanence of multicultural congregations.[24]

[24] Dougherty, and Huyser, "Racially Diverse Congregations: Organizational Identity and the Accommodation of Differences," *Journal for the Social Scientific Study of Religion,* 24.

A congregation journeying to become multicultural needs to be intentional about getting involved in the life of the community, in its causes and events, and participating in festivals that celebrate the various cultural groups represented in the community. It is also important to think through how the use of the space communicates a welcoming message, and provides a safe space for children and adults alike. The sanctuary also needs to offer the flexibility to incorporate artefacts, symbols and musical instruments into worship.

These three churches were successful in incorporating new people in the life of the church. The leaders were intentional about recruiting volunteers, and consistently inviting new people not only to participate but also to have a voice in the church's direction.

Regarding pastoral transitions, the pastoral tenures in all three churches was longer than is customary. This factor seemed to have helped these pastors to lead these churches to become multicultural. Furthermore, pastoral transitions need to be handled with care. Denominational and church leaders need to be strategic and provide the time and space for congregations to mourn the loss of their pastoral leader, and establish the foundation for a healthy relationship with the new pastor.

The Way the Church Operates Needs to Change

Power analysis is critical in a multicultural congregation. Identifying who has power is crucial to determine the style of leadership to be used, as well as the theological emphasis and spirituality on which to focus.[25]

[25] Law, *Sacred Acts, Holy Change*, 63.

Furthermore, the way people perceive power is one of the major differences among cultures. It is not enough to understand conceptually how people perceive power. It is critical that leaders of multicultural churches adapt their leadership style to be sensitive to diverse perceptions. A leader cannot effectively lead across cultures without understanding this nuance.[26]

Determining how to handle the power dynamics in the congregation helps the leaders decide how to run meetings; how to identify, mentor and assign leaders; and how to use culturally competency skills and techniques to discuss issues and make decisions in a group setting. One of these techniques, for example, is "Mutual Invitation." This technique seeks to equalize the power in a group by offering each person the opportunity to speak. This technique can be used to run meetings, and also for Bible Studies.[27]
All three churches made changes on the way they made decisions. They reduced the number of committees and streamlined the decision making process, while mentoring and preparing emerging leaders to chair committees, and intentionally assigning new and diverse members to them.

This process can be very conflicting and painful for a congregation. Most people fear giving power away, because they feel once they do, they will be powerless forever. Eric Law argues that this assumption is a source of evil, as in our fear of becoming powerless, we hold on to whatever power and material possessions we have and in the

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[26] "Forbes Leadership Forum, Power Distance: You Can't Lead Across Cultures Without Understanding," *Forbes Leadership* (Sept 25, 2014), accessed January 22, 2016, http://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesleadershipforum/2014/09/25/power-distance-you-cant-lead-across-cultures-without-understanding-it/#10e9f5e16977.

[27] Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, 81, 83, 113.

process relinquish the message of the cross, where Jesus let go of power and triumphed over evil.[28]

Longtime members must be recognized as persons who stayed, who are invested in the church and who are valued for their contributions and institutional memory. However, they need to take time to reflect on how to share power with the new members, and find ways to change the power structure to let others into the decision making entities of the congregations. When this does not happen, when longtime members hold on to their power in a changing congregation, it becomes difficult if not impossible for new people to stay and become an integral part of the church.

[28] Ibid., 76.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

The United States is living through extraordinary times. The 2008 election of an African American president, originally deemed an impossibility, brought hope for many and unearthed hatred feelings in others. Fifty percent of Americans now say that racism is a significant problem; up from 33% five years earlier.[1] The removal of the confederate flag from federal buildings in South Carolina hints that it may be possible to extirpate ingrained symbols of hate from the United States society. Yet, young black males are 21 times at a far greater risk of being shot dead by police than their white counterparts;[2] the number of groups whose ideology is organized against specific racial, religious, sexual or other characteristics has risen steadily since 2000;[3] and more than 60% of the people in prison are racial and ethnic minorities.[4]

[1] Bruce Drake, "5 facts about race in America," *Pew Research Center* (January 18, 2016), accessed January 20, 2016, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/18/5-facts-about-race-in-america/.

[2] Ryan Gabrielson, Ryann Grochowski Jones and Eric Sagara, "Deadly Force, In Black And White," *ProPublica* (Oct 10, 2014), accessed January 20, 2016, http://www.propublica.org/article/deadly-force-in-black-and-white.

[3] Kim Severson, "Number of U.S. Hate Groups Is Rising, Report Says," *New York Times* (March 7, 2012), accessed January 20, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/08/us/number-of-us-hate-groups-on-the-rise-report-says.html.

[4] "Racial Disparity," *The Sentencing Project*, accessed January 20, 2016, http://www.sentencingproject.org/template/page.cfm?id=122.

In the 21st century, eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is still the most segregated hour of the week in the United States.[5] More than 90% of people attend churches that are predominantly of one race;[6] and because of the focus on numerical and financial growth, principles of niche marketing instead of the iconic "great commission" often drive these churches. Moreover, the legacy of slavery, segregation, Native American removal, internment camps, and discrimination, among others, continues to permeate relationships across races and cultures.

Furthermore, the White majority in the United States is shrinking rapidly and it has essentially reached zero population growth,[7] and it is predicted that in the next half century the United States will become a plurality nation, where no group is in the majority.[8]

According to the Harford Institute for Religion Research, growth in predominantly White congregations is less likely, partly because this population has zero growth demographically;[9] while congregations that use a language other than English in one or

[5] Martin Luther King Jr., "Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution," *Martin Luther King Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle* (March 31, 1968), accessed March 4, 2016, http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_remaining_awake_through_a_great_revolution.1.html.

[6] Emerson and Woo, 36.

[7] C. Kirk Hadaway, "Facts of Growth: 2010," *Faith Communities Today* (2011), accessed January 21, 2016, http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/default/files/FACTs%20on%20Growth%202010.pdf.

[8] Michael Cooper, "Census Officials, Citing Increasing Diversity, Say U.S. Will Be a 'Plurality Nation'," *New York Times* (December 12, 2012), accessed January 23, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/13/us/us-will-have-no-ethnic-majority-census-finds.html

[9] Hadaway, Facts of Growth: 2010, *Faith Communities Today*.

more of their worship services or have a bilingual worship service are much more likely to grow than congregations where services are in English only.[10]

The majority of churches seem oblivious to these realities, and currently only about 7% of churches in the United States are multiracial.[11] Reports, however, foresee that multiracial congregations will become more common, and their growth will be driven by immigrants, specially their children and future generations.[12]

Denominational leaders have attempted to respond to this situation by designing organizational strategies to develop multicultural congregations. It imperative to recognize that three strategies that rarely work are: church mergers, renting space to smaller ethnic congregations, and placing ethnic congregations under one roof with majority White congregations, with occasional joint services.[13] Additionally, multicultural congregations that rely on its neighborhood racial composition, denominational directives, or judicatory maneuvers such as mergers are the least likely to survive.[14]

Class and income level are also issues that come into play in multicultural congregations. In his in-depth study of 490 contemporary multiracial congregations, Michael O. Emerson concluded that the data does not support the belief that racially mixed congregations will only form if they are socio-economically homogeneous. In fact,

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Emerson and Woo, 36

[12] Ibid., 87.

[13] John Dart, "Hues in the pews, Racially Mixed Churches an Elusive Goal," *Hartford Institute for Religion Research*, (2001), accessed January 21, 2016, http://www.hartfordinstitute.org/cong/articles_huesinthepews.html.

[14] Emerson and Woo, 62.

his research shows that most multiracial congregations in his research were economically mixed.[15]

Other research also shows that there is very little relationship between growth and theological orientation.[16] Whether a church leans theological conservative or liberal or somewhere in between does not predict a congregation's diversity.[17]

Many mention the issue of comfort as one reason why eleven o'clock on Sunday morning continues to be the most segregated hour of the week in the United States.[18] The church, however, was never intended to be a place of comfort. In a multicultural church, those who come are expected to embrace difference and learn from it. These persons choose to relinquish comfort for the possibility of learning from others and being changed.[19]

One of the major dangers for a church in this journey is becoming multicultural with an assimilation model. This model welcomes diverse people but expects them to conform to the established majority in worship style, leadership, methodology and vision. Their doors are open to everyone but only to the degree that they submit to the majority culture and leave their own behind.[20] Culmore UMC, Garfield Memorial UMC and the UMC at New Brunswick wrestled with this tendency. These congregations continue

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[15] Ibid., 51-52.

[16] Hadaway, "Facts of Growth: 2010," *Faith Communities Today*.

[17] Emerson and Woo, 50.

[18] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution."

[19] Garces-Foley, 133.

[20] Deymaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation,* 158.

choosing instead to become congregations where diverse voices are welcome to shape their identity, their program and their worship.

Many lessons can be gleaned from the stories of these three churches. The main one is that it takes going back to the basics: leadership, hospitality, and relationships. When we look around our communities, we can chose to see the changing landscape of the country not with fear but as an opportunity to be the presence of God in our communities. Churches that choose to faithfully respond to the call to “all nations” will benefit from staying away of unfounded assumptions and quick fixes, and learn instead from lessons from those already in the journey.

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