

**INTRODUCTION TO COOPERATIVE PARISH:  
FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING HOMOGENEOUS PARISHES INTO  
MULTICULTURAL COOPERATIVE PARISHES**

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## ABSTRACT

### INTRODUCTION TO COOPERATIVE PARISH: FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING HOMOGENEOUS PARISHES INTO MULTICULTURAL COOPERATIVE PARISHES

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The United Methodist Church has experienced a sharp decrease in membership in the last two decades. Additionally, a wave of disaffiliations in 2023 has resulted in a membership drop of 40% in 2024. This has led to concerns in the New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church regarding the ability of local churches to survive in the current environment. To address this issue, the Conference has developed a new model of ministry called the Cooperative Parish Ministry. This model encourages congregations and pastors in a defined geographic area to work together, develop trust and mutuality relationships, and coordinate church programs and ministry. Ideally, this model breaks down racial and ethnic barriers and facilitates effective ministries across Annual Conferences.

The Central Nassau Cooperative Parish is an example of a model in which churches are clustered together in Nassau County, Long Island. These churches have unique ethnic and cultural differences, reflecting their cultural heritage and experiences in their areas of ministry and leadership. Each church is strong in worship, prayer, and community engagement, with good reputations for spiritual influence and community development. To survive and thrive, these churches need to keep their distinctive cultural

identities. However, in this era of increasing multicultural awareness, these churches need to operate in a multicultural environment. Through the Cooperative Parish, these homogeneous churches with unique cultural strengths and identities have united to form cooperative multicultural parishes.

This study draws on the multicultural experiences of the six ethnically different homogeneous churches in Nassau County, with a particular focus on working together to become a multicultural Cooperative Parish. This project highlights the key principles, possibilities, and challenges of multicultural ministry and cooperative parish ministry. This study seeks to understand how homogeneous churches with unique cultural strengths and identities can maximize their capacity to reach and integrate different cultures into their faith communities to create a transformative multicultural cooperative parish.

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## **I. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **A. Introduction**

The increasing ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the Central Nassau Cooperative Parish in Long Island, New York, is a microcosm of a social trend observed in many parts of the United States and around the world. According to DATA USA, the five largest ethnic groups in Nassau County, NY, are white (non-Hispanic, 59%), black or African American (non-Hispanic, 11.1%), Asian (non-Hispanic, 10.2%), white (Hispanic, 7.33%), and other (Hispanic, 6.47%). The data indicates that the white population has decreased by 16.4% in the last decade, while various other ethnicities have sharply increased since 2010. However, despite this demographic shift, 86% of the Mainline Protestant churches still remain predominantly white, according to Pew Research.<sup>1</sup> Nassau County is experiencing significant ethnic diversity, and there is a growing movement to make faith communities more culturally diverse. Yet, most faith communities still remain culturally homogeneous; in other words, they only tend to share certain common cultural characteristics among their community members.

The word “homogeneous” is used to describe something that is made up of culturally similar parts or elements. For example, if a population of a nation is described as “homogeneous,” it suggests that the people share relative characteristics, such as ethnicity, culture, and language.<sup>2</sup> Homogeneous churches can serve one ethnicity/race,

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<sup>1</sup> “Racial and ethnic composition,” Pew Research Center, accessed June 17, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/racial-and-ethnic-composition/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Homogeneous vs. Heterogeneous: What’s The Difference?,” Dictionary, September 8, 2022, <https://www.dictionary.com/e/homogeneous-vs-heterogeneous/>.



such as Koreans, Chinese, Jamaicans, Italians, Brazilians, or Filipinos. These churches' ministries do also focus on a particular age group, such as youth, young adults, or tiny-tot's toddlers. They could also be churches that have a group of people who share some common interests such as: music, politics, sports, poor communities, and climate change. Although there are many forms of homogeneous churches, in this study, I define the term "homogeneous church" as a church where most members share similar language, belief, ethnicity, race, and interest.<sup>3</sup> The homogeneous church reflects its distinctive cultural heritage and experiences in its ministry and leadership areas. The intergenerational and fundamental core of cultural identity has been a source of strength in the church, and the unique cultural identity has already been built up unconsciously within the church.

Some scholars believe that these homogeneous church models are the most effective ways to multiply disciples, plant "strategic" churches and grow churches.<sup>4</sup> Churches grow at a faster pace, McGavran says, when the gospel is propagated along existing social lines and networks and when people do not have to cross any ethnic, cultural, or class barriers to become Christians. These homogeneous churches thus grow in size and gain new believers. However, this approach has its drawbacks. Culturally homogenous churches may limit their outreach and fail to follow Jesus' example of embracing diversity.

Many Christian traditions emphasize on Paul's teaching in Galatians 3:28, we are all one in Christ Jesus. It is about maintaining all the differences but contributing to the

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<sup>3</sup> Michael O. Emerson (with Rodney M. Woo), *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Donald McGavran, *Caste and Church Growth: An Assessment of Donald McGavran's Church Growth Principles from An Indian Perspective*, The Southern Baptist Journal of Missions and Evangelism (forthcoming).

unity of the body of Christ. Imagine if we begin to let our Kingdom life spill into our daily life. How would that change our ministry? How would it affect our neighbors? Paul maintained his Jewish identity but also adapted to other cultures.<sup>5</sup> Homogeneous churches are encouraged to follow this model and adapt their focus to reflect inclusive values. Therefore, this project raises the question of how homogenous churches can increase their potential to reach out and integrate different cultures and different communities within their congregations. The purpose of the project is to explore effective ways for homogeneous churches to participate in and incorporate diverse cultures into their faith communities. Additionally, this project aims to explore practical ways for individual homogeneous churches to exist as a distinct group in a multicultural cooperative parish ministry that encompasses multiple homogeneous individual churches that work towards multiculturalism. It will analyze and offer insights and practical recommendations, as well as provide biblical, theological, and sociological reflections for individuals who are beginning their journey. The study will particularly be useful for congregations that are looking to establish a multicultural ministry.

## **B. Statement of the Problem**

Diversity and inclusion are becoming increasingly important topics among Christians. According to the Pew Research Center<sup>6</sup>, white Americans will no longer constitute the majority of the population by 2050, the Bible's storyline from Babel (Gen. 11) to Pentecost (Acts 2) emphasizes the importance of striving for diversity in

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 14- 15, 1 Corinthians 9:1-13.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Brouwer, *How to Become a Multicultural Church* (Eerdmans, 2017), 189.

intentional ways.<sup>7</sup> The essence of the Great Commission is for Christ's message to be proclaimed by the whole world so that people in every nation would hear the message of salvation. (Matt. 28:16-20) Many Christian traditions interpret Galatians 3:28 as a call to embrace diversity and unity in Christ, challenging cultural norms.<sup>8</sup>

Most homogeneous churches in the United States do tend to only reach out to a single ethnic or cultural group and are limited in their ability to reach out to diverse communities. Despite being located in multi-ethnic neighborhoods, they struggle to include and respect people of different backgrounds. As our society becomes increasingly diverse, it is important for churches to serve all people, not just their own ethnic and cultural groups. Thus, people of faith communities must adapt their focus to reflect their values outwardly.

The New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church has responded to these shifts by launching the Cooperative Parish model in 2021.<sup>9</sup> This model aims to coordinate church programs and ministry, to break down racial and ethnic barriers, and to promote effective ministries across Annual Conferences.<sup>10</sup> Under the Cooperative Parish's new vision, the Central Nassau Cooperative Parish in the Long Island region has grouped six churches together based on geographical proximity. A total of six local churches were part of this initiative in the Central Nassau Cooperative Parish

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 3:28.

<sup>9</sup> The New York Annual Conference offered resources for learning more about Cooperative Parishes at their websites: <https://www.nyac.com/cooperative-parish-resources>.

<sup>10</sup> "New Connections (Fall 2021- Winter 2022)," n.d., [www.nyac.com](http://www.nyac.com), Accessed March 11, 2024, <https://www.nyac.com/new-connections-fall-2021-winter-2022>.

- New York Plainview Korean United Methodist Church, New Dream Korean United Methodist Church, Risen Rock Korean United Methodist Church, Farmingdale United Methodist Church, Hicksville United Methodist Church, and Westbury United Methodist Church.<sup>11</sup> They all are United Methodist Churches, follow the United Methodist tradition, and are under the direction of the Bishop and Cabinet and the Book of Discipline. They are located in the region from Hicksville to Westbury to East Norwich in Nassau County, Long Island, New York. Those cities are suburban and located in central Long Island.

These six churches have unique ethnic, cultural heritage and experiences, with three being Korean-speaking churches, one being predominantly white, one being a mixed ethnic congregation with Indians, and one being a Black church. Each church has its own parish and congregational culture: some churches value contemporary music in the worship; some congregations want to hear God's Words and fellowship in their language to sustain themselves; the traditional ethnic meal is served after worship; styles of worship and theology vary from conservative to liberal. The intergenerational and fundamental core of homogeneous identity has been a source of pride for each church and has significantly influenced the community.

However, developing the cooperative parish ministry has been a challenging task that requires the integration of diverse homogenous cultural entities into a single shared cooperative ministry. Due to the unique traditions, cultures, preaching styles, musical preferences, and different perspectives on ministry and fellowship, it has been difficult to gather leaders and members to work passionately towards the common goal of the cooperative parish.

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<sup>11</sup> "Long Island East Cooperative Parishes," n.d., [www.nyac.com](http://www.nyac.com), <https://www.nyac.com/long-island-east-cooperative-parishes>.

Multicultural churches are churches in which each cultural group will “to some degree engage and embody [their] cultural norms,” rather than everyone assimilating to the culture of the dominant group.”<sup>12</sup> Multicultural churches truly embrace various cultures.<sup>13</sup> Thus, this study examines the transformation of churches from homogeneous to multicultural. To do so, it is necessary to comprehend different cultures and their people. Following Christ’s command to take the gospel to all people, I argue that valuable insights can be gained by studying congregations’ transition from homogeneous to multicultural congregations using a Cooperative Parish framework. Therefore, these insights can be used to establish principles that would guide other churches that are seeking to embrace multicultural ministry either as a church or as part of a cooperative parish ministry.

### **C. Thesis Statement**

The world is becoming increasingly multicultural, which could be seen as a challenge to many Christian homogeneous communities. Some churches find themselves as bewildered cultural bystanders to this change as they wonder what it all means. However, the reality is that the world is changing so much, and many different cultures and ethnicities are getting together. Our world is already a multicultural pot, and people are being raised in communities that embrace beliefs, values, and practices from multiple cultures. People are no longer defined by a mono- or bi-cultural identity, but they rather represent a re-created, adjusted, and multicultural identity. The issue at hand is to study

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<sup>12</sup> Douglas Brouwer, *How to Become a Multicultural Church* (Eerdmans, 2017), 189.

<sup>13</sup> “The Blessings and Challenges of Multicultural Churches,” The Gospel Coalition, Joel Kurz, n.d., <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/how-to-become-a-multicultural-church/>.

the Christian faith community's response to the growing multiculturalism in our society. In order for this study to be effective, church congregations will have to become more accepting of other congregations and churches of different cultures. To achieve this, the study will develop the best principles for building a multicultural cooperative parish by examining six homogeneous churches. Therefore, it is critical that church leadership incorporates practices that will help them adapt to these changes and embed the everlasting importance of the gospel in a multicultural society.

#### **D. The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to explore effective ways for homogeneous churches to reach out to other churches and incorporate diverse cultures into their faith communities. The ultimate goal is to collaborate with the other churches and establish a multicultural Cooperative Parish. This study helps clergies and lay leaders in the Cooperative Parish to find its best principles to be a multicultural Cooperative Parish and leadership strategies from analysis to practice, along with biblical, theological, and sociological reflections. As a result of this study, the Central Nassau Cooperative Parish will gain deep insights into how homogeneous churches collaborate together to achieve a multicultural cooperative parish ministry with their unique cultures. This information will be helpful for congregations that are discerning a multicultural ministry model that might be part of their own future transformation.

#### **E. Limitations of the Study**

This narrative project describes a study that examines cultural and multicultural challenges in the development of cooperative parish ministry, including a review of biblical, theological, and literary literature. This project seeks to promote diversity in ethnic, linguistic, and cultural communities by identifying its helpful principles. I have come across several case studies in which an individual homogeneous church has attempted to become more diverse, but I find it difficult to find studies on multicultural cooperative parishes where multiple homogenous churches work together to build a diverse Christian cooperative parish community. I became aware of the limited resources available and realized that the resources for the work of the multicultural cooperative parish were not sufficient to achieve the desired result of this project. Therefore, I decided to combine two research methods: Firstly, I have analyzed case studies led by other researchers who have successfully accomplished the task of merging two or more homogeneous churches to create a diverse community or transforming a single church into an inclusive and diverse one under a new vision. After analyzing their cases, I used my own analysis and judgment to summarize their case studies and apply them to my project. Secondly, I conducted interviews with key leaders, including pastors and lay coordinators who are running the ministry of cooperative parishes in the New York Annual Conference. By summarizing and analyzing two case studies and conducting ten interviews with key leaders in the cooperative parish, I aim to identify the best practices necessary to become a multicultural cooperative parish. This will contribute to the importance of churches developing a multicultural identity.

This study is limited to reviewing two case studies and interviewing only ten key leaders from the Cooperative Parish at the New York Annual Conference of the United

Methodist Denomination due to constraints on time and resources. However, the findings from this study can potentially be applied to institutions facing similar multicultural challenges in cooperative parish and non-cooperative parish settings. Those who wish to apply the findings of this study on multicultural cooperative parishes composed of churches with homogenous identities should test them in their specific context. As this is a qualitative study, the reader determines what can appropriately be applied to their specific context.

## **F. Methodology**

To support the limitation of the project, I attempted to obtain results in two different ways. To begin my research, I looked into two case studies that the previous researchers had completed successfully. The two case studies are 1) The Real Connection Church, DeKalb County, Illinois by Rodrigo Azofeifa<sup>14</sup>, and 2) Lakeview Church, Illinois by Byoung Ok Koo.<sup>15</sup> The two congregations are in transition and at different stages of becoming more representative of their multicultural communities. The first case study, the Real Connection Church, is about two churches merging to form one multicultural church. I chose this case study because it explains the merging process of two different ethnicities and cultural churches to create a single but diverse multicultural church. The second case study, the Lakeview Church, focuses on a Korean-initiated multicultural church. As the Central Nassau Cooperative Parish consists of three Korean-

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<sup>14</sup> Rodrigo Azofeifa, "Best Practices For Merging Churches In A Multiethnic; Multicultural; And Multilingual Environment" (Dmin diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> Byoung Ok Koo, *Transitioning from an Ethnic to a Multicultural Church: A Transformational Model* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2019), 100-104, Kindle Edition.



speaking churches, this study benefits my project by helping me comprehend how a Korean American church can successfully transform into a multicultural church. The two case studies shed light on the best practices for developing a multicultural cooperative parish composed of churches that share homogeneous identities. In order to examine two cases, I first provide a profile of each church and then analyze how each church navigated the process of becoming multicultural. After analyzing the steps taken by these churches to become multicultural, I also identify common patterns in the process that may be useful for other churches looking to move towards a multicultural direction. Finally, the summary and analysis of case studies from the prior researchers is able to provide one measurement to achieve the best practices for being a multicultural cooperative parish.

Additionally, I analyzed the interviews conducted with ten key leaders in the Cooperative Parish at the New York Annual Conference. Key leaders were equally presented with the same questions. Key leaders in this project are clergy and laypeople who run the work of the Cooperative Parish. Those key leaders were widely spread from Long Island to New York City to Hudson Valley to Connecticut in the New York Annual Conference area. I have refrained from using their real names in order to listen to their voices honestly. The names of individuals are represented by random letters of the alphabet. After conducting the interview, I categorized their responses based on the questions I asked.<sup>16</sup> Those categorized answers were listed based on the frequency of feedback. Those answers are compared with the common keywords from the prior researchers' case studies to find the best practices of a multicultural cooperative parish as a beginner.

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<sup>16</sup> Please refer to Appendix A for the interviewed questions.

The method of qualitative research was applied to this study. Sharan Merriam describes qualitative research in her book, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*:

“Quantitative research is effective when studying large groups or samples and making generalizations about relationships among variables to a broader group or population; while qualitative research is effective at examining in-depth understandings about a given phenomenon by a particular group of individuals at the expense of generalizability.”<sup>17</sup>

Merriam has identified key characteristics that define the nature of qualitative research:

“[T]he focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive.”<sup>18</sup>

This research utilized semi-structured interviews and case studies from prior researchers to gather data. The structure of open-ended interview questions enabled the exploration of the project based on participant responses. The information of case studies from prior researchers and the individual interview format is considered appropriate for data collection as it provides a better scope<sup>19</sup> and allows the researcher to identify common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views across participants.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Donna H. Redmann, Judith J. Lambrecht and Wanda L. Stitt-Gohdes, “The Critical Incident Technique: A Tool for Qualitative Research,” *Delta Pi Epsilon* XXXXII, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 132.

<sup>18</sup> Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 13.

<sup>19</sup> Jessica Schluter, Philippa Seaton and Wendy Chapoyer, “Critical Incident Technique: A User's Guide for Nurse Researchers,” *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 61, no. 1 (2008): 109.

<sup>20</sup> Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 90.

This study also utilized the constant comparative method of routinely analyzing the data throughout the interview process. Merriam explains, “The constant comparative method [of data analysis] involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences.”<sup>21</sup> All of the key leaders have similar institutional structures and are engaged in comparable ministries. The case studies from previous researchers are valuable for finding results in this project. The data was categorized while the research continued, which helped in discovering new sources of data.

### **G. Expectations**

This study aims to find the principles for creating a more loving, inclusive, and culturally aware multicultural cooperative parish by working with several homogeneous churches. Multicultural churches rarely occur naturally. People generally prefer familiarity and tend to relate more easily to those who are similar to them, whether it be in terms of age, socioeconomics, ethnicity, personality, or other factors. Whether this preference is a result of nature or nurture is a question that falls outside the scope of this project. Nevertheless, creating and maintaining a multicultural ministry necessitates deliberate and conscious effort.<sup>22</sup>

“Preparing a congregation that is both ethnically and socioeconomically homogeneous for an ethnic and cultural transition is not simply a matter of having vision or of missiological stimulation. The transition must be accomplished carefully in order to help the existing congregation to be open to change, at least in the initial stages. The element of intentionality is most important. Everything that we do should be thought through

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Pocock and Joseph Henriques, *Cultural Change and Your Church: Helping Your Church Thrive in a Diverse Society* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 102-103.

carefully and open to review.”<sup>23</sup>

Many churches will need to adopt a multicultural approach to remain relevant and thrive. This shift requires inclusive leadership that respectfully incorporates the influences, practices, and values of diverse cultures. To achieve this, churches and leaders need to be prepared with theological, sociological, and cultural education. Leadership plays a crucial role in navigating social and cultural shifts, and it is also essential to find the best principles to transition to a multicultural church. Therefore, my project aims to identify the top five principles that will empower and equip homogeneous churches in the Central Nassau Cooperative Parish for multicultural ministry. As a church, we must create multicultural strategies to advance God's cause and meet the needs of a changing world. Multiculturalism should shape our church both now and in the future.

My study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One establishes the rationale for a multicultural cooperative parish ministry and addresses the ministry problem faced by the Central Nassau Cooperative Parish. Chapter Two develops the biblical and theological reflection for pursuing a multicultural cooperative parish ministry. I explore the struggle that Christ's ministry and the first Christians faced in pursuing God's vision for a diverse church, with a biblical and theological reflection on cultural diversity. It also presents literature on cultures and the need for a multicultural cooperative parish ministry by identifying two missiological responses – the homogeneous church versus the multicultural ministry. Through this reflection, readers will gain insight into how to create a multicultural cooperative parish and find fulfillment in their ministry. Chapter Three presents two case studies from previous researchers who successfully transformed

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<sup>23</sup> Manuel Ortiz, *One New People: Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 118.

their congregation into a multicultural one. By studying and analyzing these case studies, we will be able to identify common processes that can help us determine the best practices for becoming a multicultural cooperative parish. Chapter Four collects qualitative interview data from key leaders who are involved in cooperative parish work. These key leaders include pastors and lay leaders from across the New York Annual Conference. The data collected from their answers is categorized for each question and used to identify multicultural practices. This collected interview data, along with the analysis of two case studies in chapter four, are used to demonstrate the best practices for multicultural ministry. Chapter Five, to conclude, lists the five best practices of a multicultural cooperative parish ministry. These are: (1) Cultivate a unique congregational identity for multicultural ministry; (2) Understand the conflict and embrace the differences; (3) Manage the change – it is a long process (not a program) to become a multicultural community; (4) Promote multilingualism and communication between cultures; and (5) Develop a multicultural leadership team. The collected data are used to improve and encourage each congregation to have stronger, more reconciled, and intimate relationships among our fellow Methodists in order to embrace diversity.

## **H. Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined to help readers understand this project:

Culture - Culture is a complex concept. Modern anthropologists have observed that cultural groups are no longer homogeneous and self-contained. Instead, cultures are constantly evolving and intersecting with one another. Cultures are formed through internal and external engagement, including conflict and negotiation. Each culture has its

own unique sense-making process, which can lead to power struggles among its members. The postmodern anthropocentric view of culture sees the world as a mixture of cultures that are continually interacting and evolving in a pluriform, polycentric interplay of engagement and conflict.<sup>24</sup> Thus, culture “forms the basis for conflict as much as it forms the basis for shared beliefs and sentiments. Whether or not culture is a common focus of *agreement*, culture binds people together as a common focus for *engagement*.”<sup>25</sup>

The understanding of culture, in this project, has brought a great benefit in recognizing and accepting diversity in a community that is polycentric and constantly changing. Christian culture is no longer defined by “group specificity, sharp cultural boundaries, or homogeneity of practices.”<sup>26</sup> Instead, it encourages Christian communities to engage in healthy discussions that lead to further creativity and diversity in their cultural engagement with the world to be an authentic community.<sup>27</sup> This authentic community consisting of diverse cultures is characterized by members who listen to and critique each other while being committed to mutual correction and edification.<sup>28</sup> They share a common goal of good discipleship, faithful adherence, and a pure witness.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Augsburg: Fortress Press, 1997), 46-52.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>26</sup> *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, Kathryn Tanner and Paul Lakeland, Eds. | Center for Practical Theology,”(1997)., [www.bu.edu](http://www.bu.edu), Accessed March 11, 2024, <https://www.bu.edu/cpt/2013/10/03/theories-of-culture-a-new-agenda-for-theology-by-kathryn-tanner-and-paul-lakeland-eds/>.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

Multicultural - The term “*multicultural*” refers to a society where people of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds live together while acknowledging and respecting each other's cultural differences.<sup>30</sup> It describes a church presence of multiple sets of ideas, assumptions, values, and behavioral patterns interacting with each other, and the hope is that this interaction will result in mutual enrichment and edification.

The literature surrounding diverse churches often uses three terms: multiracial, multiethnic, and multicultural. Curtiss DeYoung, et al., (2003) prefer multiracial, while Manuel Ortiz (1996) uses multiethnic. A third term, multicultural, is also used. These terms all refer to churches whose members come from diverse backgrounds. However, the term “*multicultural*” is preferred in this paper for two reasons. First, culture has brought a great benefit in recognizing and accepting diversity in a community and is characterized by diverse members who listen to and critique each other while being committed to mutual correction and encouragement. Therefore, the term multicultural, when used to describe a church, indicates the presence of multiple sets of ideas, assumptions, values, and behaviors interacting together. This interaction should lead to mutual enrichment and edification among people.

Second, the term “*multicultural*” describes a church’s diversity that values equality in cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity and pursues integration rather than assimilation. The term “multicultural church or multiculturalism” implies the presence of ongoing intentional efforts to maintain unity in diversity, which can include cultural differences and recognition of diversity itself as a form of culture.

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<sup>30</sup> “Making the Transition to a Multicultural Church,” Dan Sheffield, Accessed April 4, 2024, <https://fmcic.ca/wp-content/uploads/Transitioning-to-a-Multicultural-Church.pdf>.

Third, in this project, the term “*multicultural*” is used instead of “*intercultural*” or “*cross-cultural*” for a specific reason. “Multicultural” is defined as “many cultures” and refers to the recognition and inclusion of different cultural perspectives in our understanding of the world and our diverse communities.<sup>31</sup> Recognizing the value of having diverse cultures in a community or organization is crucial. Although groups might remain separate, being multicultural is an essential first step.<sup>32</sup> “Multicultural” is a term used to explain the process of including different cultural perspectives in our understanding of the world and diverse communities. This means that we should accept the voices of people who have different worldviews as part of our community, rather than just tolerating them.<sup>33</sup>

“Intercultural” involves a deeper level of connection, and understanding of other cultures.<sup>34</sup> It refers to the acquisition of skills in communicating ideas and information between people who hold different views in order to find common meaning.<sup>35</sup> The term “Intercultural” refers to the process of communicating and exchanging ideas between people of different cultures. This involves acquiring skills that assist us to understand and bridge the gap between individuals with varying worldviews to find common meaning.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> “Multicultural vs Cross-Cultural vs Intercultural Communication,” January 9, 2024, <https://globalarena.com/multicultural-intercultural-cross-cultural-communication-difference/>.

<sup>33</sup> “Making the Transition to a Multicultural Church,” Dan Sheffield, Accessed April 4, 2024, <https://fmcic.ca/wp-content/uploads/Transitioning-to-a-Multicultural-Church.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> “Multicultural vs Cross-Cultural vs Intercultural Communication,” January 9, 2024, <https://globalarena.com/multicultural-intercultural-cross-cultural-communication-difference/>.

<sup>35</sup> “Making the Transition to a Multicultural Church,” Dan Sheffield, Accessed April 4, 2024, <https://fmcic.ca/wp-content/uploads/Transitioning-to-a-Multicultural-Church.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 8.



Finally, “cross-cultural” implies a proactive movement across cultural barriers to form more authentic and closer relationships.<sup>37</sup> It goes a step further than “multicultural” or “intercultural,” by emphasizing on interactions across different cultures, nations, and regions.<sup>38</sup> It involves understanding different cultural norms, values, and beliefs while adapting one’s cultural style to effectively engage with people from diverse backgrounds.<sup>39</sup>

This project used the term “Multicultural” because it is crucial and is the first step towards recognition of the value of cultural diversity in a community. “Multicultural” prepares its members to reach out to the wider community by actively seeking to recognize, utilize, celebrate, and incorporate the gifts of its diversity in various ways, including worship, evangelism, and power sharing in ministry.<sup>40</sup> Thus, I prefer to use the term ‘multicultural’ because a successful multicultural church is one that practices mutual inclusion and values relationships between and among different cultural groups. Therefore, this project will explore the achievement of multicultural ministry through a cooperative parish with multiple culturally homogeneous communities working together toward a successful Christian ministry.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Runiel A. Apolonio , Marie-Helene Labrosse Pedersen , and Carles Pont:, “Multicultural VS Cross-Cultural VS Intercultural Communication,” Global Arena, January 9, 2024, <https://globalarena.com/multicultural-intercultural-cross-cultural-communication-difference/>.

<sup>38</sup> “Multicultural vs Cross-Cultural vs Intercultural Communication,” January 9, 2024, <https://globalarena.com/multicultural-intercultural-cross-cultural-communication-difference/>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Parker, S., & Girgis, R., *Living the Vision: Becoming a Multicultural Church* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church, USA: Evangelism and Church Witness, 2010) as cited in Somasundram, Ashwin James 2014, 41.

<sup>41</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Politics of Recognition*, in A. Gutman, (ed.), *Multiculturalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 32-35.

Homogeneous – The classical definition of “*homogeneous*” churches is made up of people who are mostly alike. Culturally “homogeneous” churches are those in which all the members are from a similar cultural background.<sup>42</sup> These “homogeneous” churches serve one ethnicity/race, such as Koreans, Chinese, Jamaicans, Italians, Brazilians, or Filipinos. These churches could also only focus on a particular age group, such as youth, young adults, or tiny-tot’s toddlers. They could also be churches that have a group of people with something in common, such as music, politics, sports, service to the poor, or concerns about climate change. Although there are many forms of homogeneous churches, I define the term “*homogeneous*” in this study as a church where most members share the same language, ethnicity, race, or interest.<sup>43</sup> The homogeneous church reflects its distinctive cultural heritage and experiences in its ministry and leadership areas. The intergenerational and fundamental core of cultural identity has been a source of strength in the church, and the unique cultural identity has already been built up unconsciously within the church. This project promotes the formation of a unique cultural identity through the combination of elements from different cultures, known as cultural hybridity. This involves blending religious practices with local cultural norms.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> “Homogeneous Unit Principle: Real World,” March 9, <https://somajc.org/hup-part3/#:~:text=Homogeneous%20churches%20are%20those%20in,I%20like%20people%20like%20me>'.

<sup>43</sup> “Monocultural Churches Still the Norm in Diverse US Society,” MPR News, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2012/06/07/monocultural-churches-still-the-norm-in-diverse-us-society>.

<sup>44</sup> Andreas Ackermann, *Cultural Hybridity: Between Metaphor and Empiricism. In Conceptualizing Cultural Hybridization: A Transdisciplinary Approach* (London: Springer, 2012), 5–25.

## **II. CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter explores biblical, theological, and literary reflections on multicultural ministry. Reconsidering God's call and how the church must respond to multiculturalism's challenge is essential. I will structure this chapter around a biblical and theological foundation for multicultural ministry, and then I will follow up by a literature reflection on culture and the church and missiological approaches to cultural diversity.

### **A. Biblical and Theological Reflection on the Multicultural Ministry**

This chapter provides the biblical and theological framework for how the biblical figures reached out to diverse groups and how the church can transition into a multicultural church by reflecting on the Bible and theology. This chapter has three sections: (1) the Early Church as a diverse and inclusive community, (2) Jesus and His ministry across cultures, and (3) the mission of God (Missio Dei), which identifies multicultural ministry with a focus on God's mission to all nations.

#### **1) The Early Church As a Diverse and Inclusive Community**

Being a multicultural church that follows Christ is a daunting task that requires much effort. However, it is the way that Christ has chosen, and it is the mission of all his disciples. To be a follower of Christ means not only demonstrating his love for everyone but also advocating for justice and inclusivity in the world. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that the need for a diverse and inclusive church is a fundamental part of Christ's teachings and is deeply ingrained in the Christian identity.

An attentive reader of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament should understand that the multicultural church is not a new phenomenon because many early

church communities were already multicultural and multilingual from their inception. Diversity, culture, and multi-cultures are part of the beginning and the goal from God (Gen. 1-2) and part of the celebrated “new beginning” (Rev. 21). Israel as the people of God provides sanctuary for individuals such as Ruth, the widow at Zarephath (I Kings 17). Murphy highlights that foreigners were welcome in Israel and had rights as resident aliens. They were protected by the law which made concessions for them due to their situation.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, their distinct nationalities were maintained in ancient Israelite society, creating a limited form of multicultural expression rather than being forced to assimilate.<sup>46</sup> The story of the Samaritan woman of Sychar vividly describes the emergence of Christ's multicultural Church. Despite the cultural norms of that time, Jesus engaged with a Samaritan woman who had three strikes against her: (a) she was a woman; (b) she was a Samaritan; and (c) she had a questionable reputation.<sup>47</sup> Jesus bridged cultural barriers to teach that his message is for all. Throughout the process, the Spirit of God served as the empowering and enabling force for embracing diversity within the church.<sup>48</sup>

The early Christian Church was characterized by its multicultural reality, which meant being inclusive of different cultures and backgrounds was at the heart of the

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<sup>45</sup> Roland Murphy, “Nation” in *the Old Testament*. In *Ethnicity*, eds., Andrew Greeley & Gregory Baum (New York: The Seabury Press), 75.

<sup>46</sup> Wan, Enoch and Konieczny, Richard J., *An Old Testament Theology of Multiculturalism Diversity: God’s Eschatological Plan for the Nations*, published in Global Missiology, Featured Articles, July 2004, [www.globalmissiology.net](http://www.globalmissiology.net), 17, <https://www.enochwan.com/english/articles/pdf/An%20Old%20Testament%20Theology%20of%20Multiculturalism.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> John 4:19-23.

<sup>48</sup> Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, “Multicultural Ministry: A Call to Act Justly,” *International Review of Mission* 100.1(392) (April 2011): 21.

Christian calling. On the day of Pentecost, the Church was born as a multicultural and multilingual community,<sup>49</sup> with a hundred and twenty followers led by Peter growing to three thousand by the end of the day through the inspiring power of the Spirit of God.<sup>50</sup> This diverse crowd, from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem, welcomed Peter's message and were baptized. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, breaking the bread, and prayers.<sup>51</sup> According to Curtiss De Young et al.:

“On the day of Pentecost, the Jerusalem congregation grew from 120 Galilean Jews to over 3,000 multicultural, multilingual Jews. Several thousand more were added in the days that followed. The church was multicultural and multilingual from the first moment of its existence.”<sup>52</sup> (Acts 2:41-48)

The book of Acts details the growth of the early church and emphasizes the importance of gathering new believers to Christ. Luke's account tells the readers the mission of the church should not just be limited to preaching the gospel but it should also extend to educating the new believers and bringing them together for worship and communion across different cultural and linguistic boundaries. The book emphasizes the significance of baptism as a way to join new believers into a community of worshippers that provides accountability and sets boundaries. Luke states in Acts 2, “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Acts 2:41.

<sup>51</sup> Acts 2: 5, 42.

<sup>52</sup> DeYoung, C.P., et al, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 22.

thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”<sup>53</sup>

After coming to believe in the gospel's message, these people were drawn to gather in communities where they shared the amazing gifts and resources for the community. Luke continues to say,

“Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe, and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all the believers were together and had all things in common; and they would sell their property and possessions and share them with all, to the extent that anyone had need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”<sup>54</sup>

As a result, others were attracted to join them. This is why evangelism alone is not enough. It's important to also establish new communities where believers can exercise their gifts and enhance multiplication for the purpose of building God's kingdom. It was always God's intention to gather his children in faith communities for mutual relationships.

As the number of believers grew, the community faced its first conflict that shattered their peaceful coexistence. The conflict arose when a group of Hellenic-Jewish believers complained against native Hebrews that their widows were not being treated fairly in the distribution of food. (Acts 6:1) The conflict between the Hebrews and the Hellenists was primarily a division based on language and culture. The Hellenists were Jews who spoke Greek, while the Aramaic-speaking Jews were likely natives. The

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<sup>53</sup> Acts 2:41-42 (*New American Standard Bible*).

<sup>54</sup> Luke 2:43-47 (*English Standard Version*).

Hellenists complained that the Aramaic-speaking Jews neglected the Hellenistic widows when distributing food. The term "widows" may imply those who were disadvantaged in some way.<sup>55</sup> The Hellenists, who were probably immigrants and a minority in the new community of believers, had differences in social and cultural practices, as indicated by the distribution of food.<sup>56</sup>

The Apostles soon shifted their focus to the neglect of "the word of God" (Acts 6:2) to resolve this issue. The apostles were dedicated to teaching and preaching the Word of Jesus Christ and proposed a solution to the conflict. They appointed seven men and blessed them to manage the conflict. These seven servants (*diakanoi*), often referred to as "deacons," were appointed to oversee the food ministry for Greek-speaking members of the Jerusalem congregation. It is important to note that the way the church handled the issue of the Hellenist widow in Acts 6 serves as a positive example of the practice of multicultural leadership in multicultural ministry. Moreover, the disciples played a crucial role in preventing the division of the developing church by addressing the needs of the Hellenists. They taught the importance of working together without showing favoritism, which is in line with the teachings of Jesus. Jesus emphasized the unity of his disciples, just as He and His Father are one (John 17:21-23).

## 2) Jesus and His Ministry Across Cultures

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<sup>55</sup> "Commentary on Acts 6:1—7:2a, 7:44-60," 2013, Working Preacher from Luther Seminary, April 14, 2013, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/stephen/commentary-on-acts-61-15-71-2-44-60>.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

It is crucial that a church's ministry is founded upon the teachings of the Word of God. The Bible emphasizes that ministering across cultures is critical to the church's mission. This is evident from the teachings and life of Jesus and the writings of his disciples. The early church also recognized and implemented multicultural ministry.

Philippians 2:5-11 states that “Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!” Ao and Penley assert that Christ, being God, became human to reveal Himself to humanity. This forms the basis of the church's understanding of multicultural ministry and communication.<sup>57</sup> Jesus left His heavenly kingdom to come and live among us so that we could know our Heavenly God. Christ was willing to leave behind His own culture (the heavenly kingdom) and embrace a new culture (sinful mankind) to bring God's salvation to the world.<sup>58</sup> Jesus' decision to reach out to people who were different from him was a clear message from God that we, too, should be willing to communicate with and understand other cultures in order to spread the Gospel. It is important that we reach out to those who are different from us for the

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<sup>57</sup> Ao, L. M., & Penley, D. R., *Cross Cultural Leadership: Ministering to a Multicultural Community* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press., 2006), 28 as cited in Somasundram, Ashwin James, “Cultural intelligence: a Model to Empower the West Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church for Multicultural Ministry” (Dmin diss., Andrews University, 2014), 8.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



sake of the gospel.<sup>59</sup> He reached across the gap of cultural differences with love and redemption.

When we examine the gospels, we see that the opening chapter of the New Testament anticipates the inclusive nature of Jesus' ministry. Matthew affirms the inclusive nature of ministry at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. By quoting from Isaiah 9:1-2, "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, on the other side of the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned."<sup>60</sup> Bible scholar Barnett asserted that Jesus' upbringing in Nazareth in Galilee held great significance. While Jerusalem was the center of rabbinic academies, Jesus' home was in a region surrounded by Greek states and influenced by Hellenism. This made Jesus an appropriate messenger to bring the message of the Gospel to the Gentile world.<sup>61</sup> The beginning of Matthew's gospel foreshadows the inclusive and multicultural nature of Jesus' ministry.

Jesus chose a diverse group of disciples, representing different backgrounds and beliefs. His followers included Matthew, a tax collector who worked for the Roman occupation, and Simon, a zealot who wanted to overthrow Roman rule violently. Jesus also welcomed women into his circle of followers, including Joanna (the wife of Chuza),

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<sup>59</sup> Ao, L. M., & Penley, D. R., *Cross Cultural Leadership: Ministering to a Multicultural Community* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press., 2006), 31 as cited in Somasundram, Ashwin James 2014, 8.

<sup>60</sup> Matthew 4:15-16 (*New American Standard Bible*).

<sup>61</sup> Barnett, P., *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity: A History of New Testament Times* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 105 as cited in Somasundram, Ashwin James 2014, 10.

Mary (Magdalene), Susanna, Salome, and Mary, the mother of James.<sup>62</sup> Throughout his life, Jesus emphasized the importance of inclusion and valued the diversity of people and multicultural leadership.

Jesus challenged the laws and traditions of the predominant and segregated culture of his time. In Matthew 23:13-39, Jesus condemns the scribes and Pharisees for their legalism, calling them hypocrites, snakes, and a brood of vipers. In contrast, Jesus advocated for an inclusive and diverse community of God where people of all races, genders, and cultures from east and west, north and south, are welcomed and appreciated. Jesus has not only accepted the followers but also has “commissioned” disciples:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”<sup>63</sup>

Such a mandate involves exercising the Lord’s authority for, on behalf of, and in place of him to accomplish the task of disciple-making. It was Matthew’s intent “to provide guidance to a community in crisis on how it should understand its calling and mission.”<sup>64</sup>

The Gospels contain numerous stories and parables of Jesus that convey the vision of an inclusive and multicultural ministry. During his ministry, he welcomed sinners and ate with them (Luke 15), breaking all race, class, and gender barriers (John 4), encountering with Samaritan woman (John 4), the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15), the great banquet (Luke 14), the good Samaritan (Luke 10), Jesus healed the child of the

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<sup>62</sup> Luke 8:1-3; Mark 15:40-41.

<sup>63</sup> Matthew 28:18-20.

<sup>64</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 57.

Canaanite woman (Matthew 15), and healed the son of the Gentile military officer (Matthew 8). The disciples were surprised by Jesus's interaction with Gentiles (Luke 4). Jesus taught His disciples that God's kingdom is open to everyone and reached across all of these divisive barriers to teach his disciples that the message of God is for everyone.

Jesus not only taught and put into practice multicultural ministry, but he also prayed for the inclusive faith of communities. The most touching example of his desire for multicultural ministry in the Gospel can be found in John 17:20-26. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:20-21) In this prayer, Jesus not only seeks blessings for his disciples, including those who were with him during his earthly ministry but also for those who would become his followers in the future. Christians believe in unity in Christ despite their different cultures. However, unity among believers is based on the unity of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit. This unity allows for diversity, as the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit remain distinct persons despite their unity. The Holy Trinity serves as a model for diversity and being One. While the expression of faith may differ between cultural groups, the person of Jesus Christ and the gospel serve as the unifying point for all. Similarly, distinctions among Christians of different cultures should be acknowledged and celebrated, but should not prevent Christians from experiencing unity in the church.

By understanding the cultural context in which the gospel was originally communicated and recognizing its diverse expressions in different cultures, we can navigate the relationship between the gospel and culture in our modern day's context.

Thus, Christ-centered ministry is a multicultural ministry. As stated by Rhodes, “Nothing else, whether in heaven or on earth, can bring together such a diverse group of people. The church of Jesus Christ is not just a collection of separate but equal individual cultures, races, or ethnic groups. In the midst of our cultural diversity, Christ stands at the center to bridge and transcend our differences.”<sup>65</sup>

### **3) The Mission of God (Missio Dei)**

The vision of a multicultural church is not only based on the early New Testament Church, which was diverse in terms of culture and language but is also a biblical approach to being a church. This vision acknowledges that the Holy Spirit leads the church to bear witness to our unity in Christ while also appreciating and accepting cultural differences. Furthermore, the statement confirms the theological belief that God has placed us in a world and society that is multicultural, and our responsibility is to demonstrate how Christ's power can break down the barriers that divide humanity from both God and each other.<sup>66</sup>

In the Book of Revelation, John of Patmos describes a diverse group of people from every nation. This vision of multicultural ministry is also evident in Luke's account of the apostles' ministry in Acts and in the ministry of Paul. John sees a great multitude of people from all tribes, languages, and peoples standing before the throne of God and the

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<sup>65</sup> Rhodes, S, *Where the Nations Meet: The Church in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 52-53 as cited in Somasundram, Ashwin James, “Cultural intelligence: a Model to Empower the West Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church for Multicultural Ministry” (Dmin diss., Andrews University, 2014), 16.

<sup>66</sup> Tahaafe-Williams, K. & Ackroyd, S., *Multicultural Ministry Toolkit* (London: URC. 2005), 4 as cited in Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, “A Multicultural Church? Multicultural Ministry as a Tool for Building the Multicultural Church” (PhD diss., The University of Birmingham, 2012), 100.

Lamb, dressed in white and holding palm branches. They cry out loudly, proclaiming that salvation belongs to their God (Rev. 7:9-10). According to Justo Gonzalez, the book of Revelation is the only book in the New Testament that deals repeatedly and specifically with the issue of the coming together of a variety of peoples and cultures.<sup>67</sup> Gonzalez views Rev. 7:9-10 as a liturgical vision culminating in John's image of a multicultural worshipping ecclesia - "the future that God is calling us to."<sup>68</sup> The biblical narratives are an extension of what was embodied in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. They bear witness to God's mission that breaks down barriers.

The Gospel encourages people from all corners of the world to offer praise to God. To comprehend how this is possible, we need to understand God's mission for humanity. According to David Bosch, the Church's Mission is a "Mission of God" (Missio Dei), in which God reveals Himself, His love, and His care for the world that He created.<sup>69</sup> God summons the Church to participate in this mission to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. David Bosch added:

There is no such thing as a "pure" gospel, isolated from culture. It was therefore inevitable that Western missionaries would not only introduce "Christ" to Africa and Asia but also "Western civilization".<sup>70</sup> Mission is, primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and sanctifier, for the sake of the world, a ministry has its origin in the heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source

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<sup>67</sup> J. Gonzalez, *For the Healing of the Nations* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 69 as cited in Katalina Tahaafe-Williams 2012, 134.

<sup>68</sup> J. Gonzalez, *For the Healing of the Nations* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 112 as cited in Katalina Tahaafe-Williams 2012, 134.

<sup>69</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 392.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

of the mission. It is impossible to penetrate deeper still; there is a mission because God loves people.<sup>71</sup>

God has a church for God's mission in the world, and mission was not made for the church; the church was made for God's mission.<sup>72</sup> To participate in this mission, one should join the movement of God's love toward people since God is a fountain of love.<sup>73</sup>

The mission of God emphasizes the importance of sharing the message of salvation with the entire world so that every individual can hear and receive it. The message is meant for people of every nation, tribe, language, and community. This inclusivity requires Jesus's disciples to break down any barriers that might hinder the spread of the gospel to the farthest corners of the earth. The mission of God for the Christian Church is to be multicultural and inclusive, which is an essential part of its DNA. Although it is challenging, given the imperfections of human beings, Christ sets the standard and calls for the Church to live up to this vision. The early church in the New Testament included members from diverse cultural backgrounds, which made multicultural ministry a fact and an ideal. However, it required intentional effort and constant work to uphold gospel values such as mutual recognition, acceptance, and sharing of Christ's grace.

After two thousand years, cultural diversity remains a central concern and challenge in the 21st century. This is because it is difficult to avoid trying to impose our

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 392.

<sup>72</sup> Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*, Kindle ed. Zondervan, 2010, p. 154 as cited in Azofeifa, Rodrigo. "Best Practices For Merging Churches In A Multiethnic; Multicultural; And Multilingual Environment." (Dmin diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2019), 34.

<sup>73</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 390.

own beliefs on others and expecting them to conform to our ways in order to be accepted. This assimilationist tendency is something that must be avoided if we truly want to accept and embrace diversity.<sup>74</sup> It entails significant adjustments to our self-conception and business operations.<sup>75</sup> In the meantime, Fulkerson proposes that the realization of a multicultural vision is possible through practices such as formation, worship, homemaking, and biblical study.<sup>76</sup> Fulkerson describes the liturgy and worship as formation practices in this church and how the various elements contribute to creating a multicultural place where:

“Welcome meant a way of feeling included, accepted, and that others are interested in you. Welcome also meant a response to the inherited exclusions of history and society, the inclusion of people from different classes, races, nationalities, and abilities. From the confession and self-scrutiny that marked the need for change in individuals to the performed call for transformation in worship, to the logic of discomfort as a first moment in attention to social difference, conviction for change resonated in several directions.”<sup>77</sup>

The vision of a multicultural church can significantly enhance its ability to fulfill its mission. It is important to clarify that we are referring to the church as the body of Christ, in its universal, national, and local forms. The Church, being universal, is inherently multicultural because the world is diverse. The local expression of the church is where the multicultural vision can be most effectively put into practice and witnessed.

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<sup>74</sup> J. Gonzalez, *For the Healing of the Nations* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 90 as cited in Katalina Tahaafe-Williams (2012), 137.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 92 as cited in Katalina Tahaafe-Williams (2012), 90.

<sup>76</sup> Fulkerson, Mary M. *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 208 as cited in Katalina Tahaafe-Williams (2012), 138.

<sup>77</sup> Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, “A Multicultural Church? Multicultural Ministry as a Tool for Building the Multicultural Church” (PhD diss., The University of Birmingham, 2012), 138.

Although the local church may encounter challenging obstacles, this is where Christ's call for a truly multicultural expression of His body must take root and produce fruit.

## **B. Literature Reflection on Culture and Multiculturalism in the Church**

This section contains literature that reflects on the role of culture in the church and multiculturalism. It provides ideas on how the church can adapt to cultural changes. The fundamental premise of this study is that God desires all human beings, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or religious backgrounds, to live, work, and worship together in harmony. This harmony can only be achieved when individuals have a close relationship with God and are willing to follow God's plan and design for God's diverse creation. By examining organizational literature, I have identified critical parameters that can help shape the philosophy and behavior of the church towards multiculturalism, thereby promoting diverse communities that work together to carry out God's mission.

### **1) Culture and Church**

Christians must understand that cultural change is inevitable with every generation. As a church, we must figure out our relationship with the constantly evolving culture we live in. Many of us witnessed significant changes in the culture during our lifetime, including demographic shifts and changing attitudes towards traditions and morals. One of the biggest challenges to the church in the world is the manner to which the church responds to cultural change. What is our relationship with the culture in which we live? To answer these questions, we must examine two critical notions, the culture and the church.



All individuals are born into a culture that shapes their worldview and is passed down from their ancestors. This culture includes behaviors, actions, and perceptions that are learned from families, communities, and countries of origin. When individuals from different backgrounds come together in an integrated multicultural congregation, they create a new culture that reflects the unique heritage of each family and community. This new culture engages all members of the church. The ideal is to draw the inclusive circle encompassing all church members.

Christians strive to create a culture by following Jesus's example and connecting to Him through the Holy Spirit. This culture should demonstrate traits like deep forgiveness, selfless generosity, love for enemies, solidarity with the poor and oppressed, and hospitality. These qualities are what distinguish the church from the rest of the world in the way it interacts with it. Thus, the Church has certain responsibilities to fulfill. We are God's family, and are called to live in a way that demonstrates a proper ordering of relationships - with God, with others, and with all of creation. The Church is called to live out the salvation that Jesus offers us through his life, death, and resurrection, and to be an agent of Jesus to the world. As the body of Christ, we are to create and maintain a culture that reflects our confession of Jesus as Lord and the reality of God's reign in the world.<sup>78</sup>

However, the culture in the church does not suggest that Christianity is expressed through a singular cultural lens. Instead, as churches engage with their unique local context, there will be diverse cultural relationships and expressions. Kathryn Tanner challenges the theology confined to reductionism and boundaries that hinder evolving the

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<sup>78</sup> 2 Corinthians 5.

church culture and Christian identity. She suggests “remaining open to direction for the free grace of God in Christ”<sup>79</sup> to allow the Spirit to blow freely and not be scripted by human demands<sup>80</sup> with regard to Christian cultural identity from a postmodern cultural perspective. In other words, she seeks an openness to theological engagement with the culture that allows for the free movement of God’s grace.<sup>81</sup> The diversity of Christian practices is achieved through unity in a task rather than a pre-scripted set of rules or methods of investigation.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Christian identity can no longer be determined by “group specificity, sharp cultural boundaries, or homogeneity of practices.”<sup>83</sup> To promote the diversity of Christian practices, Tanner suggests to open up Christian communities of healthy argument toward further creativity and diversity in Christian engagement with the world.<sup>84</sup> Tanner’s vision is focused on creating “a genuine community of argument, one marked by mutual hearing and criticism among those who disagree, by a common commitment to mutual correction and uplift, in keeping with the shared hope of good discipleship, proper faithfulness, and purity of witness.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, Kathryn Tanner and Paul Lakeland, Eds. | Center for Practical Theology,”(1997)., [www.bu.edu](http://www.bu.edu), Accessed March 11, 2024, <https://www.bu.edu/cpt/2013/10/03/theories-of-culture-a-new-agenda-for-theology-by-kathryn-tanner-and-paul-lakeland-eds/>.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 123-124.

The Central Nassau Cooperative Parish comprises six churches, and each church has its unique and strong culture, offering worship and prayer services to members and engaging in missions to their neighborhood. They offer church fellowship and ministry programs and are well-settled in their hometowns as homogeneous churches. They have good reputations to influence people spiritually and participate in community development. Moreover, there are three ethnic congregations in the Cooperative Parish that serve in their native languages. The Cooperative Parish consists of many ethnic and racial groups from all over the world. In this cultural setting, it can be challenging for these homogeneous churches to come together to form a multicultural Cooperative Parish ministry.

Creating a multicultural church requires hard work, wisdom, and cultural sensitivity. Above all, leaders need to be courageous and open to God's direction. It is more than just getting different people in the same space together. Leaders and congregations face a process of transformation through which they examine, experience, and become clearer about their own cultural assumptions and limitations. They need to seek creativity and diversity in both divine and human expression—theology born out of struggle rather than uniformity.<sup>86</sup> We develop a multicultural foundation by continuously learning from people of different cultures. Leaders and congregations must be willing to work and reconcile through critical reflection on our preferences and prejudices.

## **B. Two Missiological Approaches to Cultural Diversity - Homogeneous Vs**

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 149.

## Multicultural Ministry

This section aims to establish the need for a multicultural cooperative parish ministry. To achieve this, I examine two missiological approaches to cultural diversity: homogeneous and multicultural ministry. By presenting arguments for and reservations about each approach, this section aims to create a strong foundation of understanding to determine the best practices for establishing a multicultural cooperative parish ministry. In order to understand the core differences, I will briefly analyze these homogeneous and multicultural ministries.

### 1) The Homogeneous Ministry

McGavran demonstrated the theory of “homogeneous unit principle” (or commonly known as HUP) as the most effective way to multiply disciples and plant churches.<sup>87</sup> Donald McGavran defines a HUP as “a section of society in which all members have some characteristics in common.”<sup>88</sup> To be more precise, the common bond may be geographical, ethnic, linguistic, social, educational, vocational, or economic, or a combination of several of these and other factors.<sup>89</sup>

McGavran argued that the idea of the homogeneous unit is effective for church

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<sup>87</sup> Donald McGavran, *Caste and Church Growth: An Assessment of Donald McGavran's Church Growth Principles from An Indian Perspective*, The Southern Baptist Journal of Missions and Evangelism (forthcoming) as cited in Pablo Morales, “Key Components of a Culturally Relevant Multiethnic Church Model” (DMin diss., George Fox University, 2018), 10.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Donald McGavran, *Understanding church growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) Retrieved from <https://lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-1>.

growth.<sup>90</sup> Dr. Harvey Kwiyani writes that there is a theory among church planting and church growth enthusiasts that suggests that churches grow faster if they are homogeneous.<sup>91</sup> McGavran calls this the ‘homogenous unit principle.’<sup>92</sup> Church planters are encouraged to find strategies to grow churches fast with people of similar cultural characteristics because people like to attend churches where they do not encounter cross-cultural barriers.<sup>93</sup>

Homogeneous ministry will benefit by ensuring that everyone understands each other clearly. Homogeneity is safe, convenient, and comfortable. Chuck Warnock says that homogeneous churches are incubators that allow potentially fragile populations to establish themselves, grow, preserve culture, develop a unique witness, and thrive in the rich diversity of American church life.<sup>94</sup>

A homogeneous ministry model can be especially valuable to new immigrant populations in the United States. This model enables these immigrants to preserve the culture of their home countries while adapting to the new and foreign culture of the United States. Homogeneous churches also provide essential social services for vulnerable immigrant populations. Korean churches, for example, “serve as virtual

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<sup>90</sup> Pablo Morales, “Key Components of a Culturally Relevant Multiethnic Church Model” (DMin diss., George Fox University, 2018), 10-12.

<sup>91</sup> Kwiyani, Harvey, “Monocultural Churches in An Age of Migration” [https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/content/explore\\_the\\_bible/bible\\_in\\_transmission/files/2018\\_spring/Monocultural\\_churches\\_in\\_an\\_age\\_of\\_migration.pdf](https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/content/explore_the_bible/bible_in_transmission/files/2018_spring/Monocultural_churches_in_an_age_of_migration.pdf)

<sup>92</sup> Donald McGavran, *Caste and Church Growth: An Assessment of Donald McGavran’s Church Growth Principles from An Indian Perspective*, The Southern Baptist Journal of Missions and Evangelism (forthcoming) as cited in Morales 2018, 10-11.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Chuck Warnock, *Why We Still Need (Some) Monocultural Churches*, (2013) Retrieved from <https://chuckwarnockblog.wordpress.com/2013/11/04/why-we-still-need-some-monocultural-churches/>.

clearinghouses for new immigrants, providing emergency shelter, job training, English language instruction, and naturalization services. These churches also challenge the New York Christian community by presenting us with exemplary models of prayerfulness and evangelical zeal.”<sup>95</sup>

## 2) The Multicultural Ministry

This study generally uses the multicultural church to refer to what Robert Schreiter defines as “many cultures in the one Church.”<sup>96</sup> The term “multicultural ministry” was first formally used in the 1996 Conference on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches (WCC).<sup>97</sup> A multicultural ministry is defined in two ways. First, the number of church members from the dominant ethnic group does not exceed 80 percent of a congregation’s total population, following DeYoung et al.<sup>98</sup> Secondly, the multicultural church values equality in cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity, and it pursues integration rather than assimilation.<sup>99</sup> The term “multicultural” refers to the continuous and deliberate efforts towards maintaining unity amidst diversity.

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<sup>95</sup> Robert Carle and Louis DeCaro, *Signs of Hope in the City* (Judson Press, 1999), 202.

<sup>96</sup> R. Schreiter, Ministry for a Multicultural Church (2008), Retrieved from <http://www.sedos.org/english/schreiter.htm>.

<sup>97</sup> C. Crowe, & S. Y. Crowe (eds.), *First International Network Forum on Multicultural Ministry* (Sydney: Inform, 1999).

<sup>98</sup> Curtiss Paul DeYoung et al., *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

North America is becoming more diverse, and the social milieu is changing. Most churches intentionally embrace a multicultural ministry model representing the diverse people around them. The multicultural ministry often represents the racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the community.<sup>100</sup> This community consists of individuals from various backgrounds who maintain and respect their cultural heritage and have created a new culture. Kathleen Garces-Fole explains, “A truly effective multiracial congregation not only reflects aspects of the cultures represented by congregation members, but it reflects a new and unique culture that transcends the worldly cultures.”<sup>101</sup> The integrated group maintains the aspects of separate cultures and creates a new culture from the cultures in the congregation.<sup>102</sup> We need a call for different methodologies and degrees of ethnic integration to be unified among differences to foster a multicultural ministry.

Urban missiologist, Harvie Conn, in the “Forward” to Ortiz’ book, *One New People*, clarifies this point:<sup>103</sup>

“In a day of fear and distrust the multicultural church is a sample of recomposition in Christ. *E Pluribus Unum* is a visionary slogan in politics; in the multicultural church it is a response of the Holy Spirit to culture wars. It is well worth more than a quick glance by a fractured society

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<sup>100</sup> Kathleen Garces-Fole, “New Opportunities and New Values: The Emergence of the Multicultural Church,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 612, no.1 (July 2007): 209-224.

<sup>101</sup> Curtiss Paul DeYoung, “Arguing the Case for Multiracial Congregation,” *United by Faith*, 2003; 169, doi:10.1093/9780195152159.003.0009 as cited in Jamar R. Mabry, “Race, Ethnicity & Culture with Purpose: The Growth of a Multicultural Church Ministry” (Dmin., Diss, Liberty University School of Divinity, Virginia, 2020), 19.

<sup>102</sup> Curtiss Paul DeYoung, “Arguing the Case for Multiracial Congregation,” *United by Faith*, 2003; 165, doi:10.1093/9780195152159.003.0009.

<sup>103</sup> Manuel Ortiz, *One New People: Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 11, 78-84.

seeking unity in too many superficial solutions, and by a church that often doesn't realize the treasure it has been given.”<sup>104</sup>

To create a sample of recomposition in Christ as a multicultural ministry, the ministry must intentionally adopt the challenge of biblical justice and mission in the context of cultural diversity, racial tensions, and multiple linguistic and cultural complexities to build relationships between diverse groups, bringing unity.<sup>105</sup>

Multicultural churches are microcosms that simultaneously foretaste of the reality of heaven (Revelation 7:9-10, 21:3). God is already calling people from every nation and every language to build a new world.

### **3) Concerns and Limitations of the Two Models**

As I examine two missiological approaches to cultural diversity - homogeneous vs multicultural ministry – homogeneous ministry may prioritize numerical growth, yet there are many blind spots. Peter Wagner's Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP) suggests that people prefer to worship with others who share similar beliefs. This is considered the most effective way to grow a church, particularly in the context of ethnic minorities or any community.<sup>106</sup> It is unclear if homogenous churches are the only way to grow. For example, Madison Square Church is an example of church growth through the incorporation of people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds into their body.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 78-84.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 86-91, 149-150.

<sup>106</sup> Peter C Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1990), 67.

<sup>107</sup> Byoung Ok Koo, *Transitioning from an Ethnic to a Multicultural Church: A Transformational Model* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2019), 111-119, Kindle Edition.



The principles of homogenous ministry suggest that a congregation and its leadership from the same cultural background are most effective for church growth and running the ministry within the church. This claim may be controversial for those pursuing a multicultural church to be reconciliatory, relevant, and biblical.

H. Richard Niebuhr believed that in his 20<sup>th</sup>-century American context, segmenting churches into groups of people, cultures, traditions, etc., has led to denominationalism, which in turn has ‘fractured the church universal’ instead of ‘transcending socially constructed differences and unifying Christians in the pursuit of a common calling.’<sup>108</sup> I understand the importance of homogenous ministry in terms of church growth and cultural preservation, but culturally homogenous churches are at a higher risk of creating simplistic and divisive labels. Grunlan and Reimer raise these questions:<sup>109</sup>

“How do we ‘bridge the gap’ between many different traditions, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and still be effective at reaching specific groups of people? How do we have an effective ministry to one group without disenfranchising others? As one commentator noted, it would be ‘difficult...for our heterogeneous population to find an equal sense of meaning and belonging in the same...religious organization.’”<sup>110</sup>

The challenge with the homogeneous ministry is that despite good intentions of rapidly reaching the community with the gospel and consequently growing churches

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<sup>108</sup> Grunlan and Reimer, *Christian Perspectives on Sociology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 248.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. 247.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

quickly, the homogeneous ministry has had the unintended impact of segregating local congregations along ethnic, racial, and linguistic lines.<sup>111</sup>

I also see the concern about the biblical and theological polemic. First of all, it is interesting that the Bible celebrates both diversity and spiritual unity. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, God used the Jewish people to receive God's word, and God reached out to all nations to be a blessing with God's message. "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." (Isaiah 56:7) It is clear that God calls out and blesses all nations. The Bible emphasizes Christian diversity in unity. René Padilla says in the book, *Landmark essay in mission and world Christianity*:

"The Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP) is based on a problematic theological framework. This is because, in an effort to prioritize evangelism, the HUP sacrifices an essential aspect of the gospel: the oneness of the new humanity to be displayed in the church. Instead, the HUP enables people to follow Christ without having to cross social barriers, which results in a church that replaces oneness with uniformity. This, in turn, makes race, social status, or gender—rather than Christ—a primary source of identity. According to Padilla, this faulty theological framework leads to a missiology that does not challenge the status quo, creating an environment where the racist and the classist can feel at home."<sup>112</sup>

The Central Nassau Cooperative Parish has churches that are predominantly made up of White, Black, Korean, and various other culturally homogenous groups. However, we hope to see these dividing walls broken down within the family of God. After all, the Kingdom of Heaven is not divided, so why should the church be? Creating a community is an art that involves bringing our unique selves into the mix. Our gifts, skills,

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<sup>111</sup> Mark DeYmaz, *Leading a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Seven Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 27, 62 (ebook).

<sup>112</sup> René Padilla, edited by Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig, "Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle," in *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 73-92.

personalities, dreams, and visions all contribute to shaping and reshaping the community.

In a multicultural cooperative parish, we are all connected; and without each individual's contribution, the vision remains incomplete. By maximizing the capacity of each individual homogeneous church, we can establish a multicultural cooperative parish ministry that is more faithful to Scripture and more fully displays the vertical and horizontal view of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **III. CHAPTER THREE - CASE STUDIES FROM PRIOR RESEARCHERS**

#### **A. Introduction**

The Central Nassau Cooperative Parish has six thriving and sustainable churches reflecting their unique cultural heritage and homogeneous identities in their areas. My project focuses on how a cooperative parish of sustainable, thriving churches can adopt a multicultural identity with its distinctive homogeneous characteristics. Thus, this project will discover the best practices for developing a multicultural cooperative parish and propose the practices to leaders and members of the Central Nassau Cooperative Parish.

I have come across several case studies in which an individual homogeneous church has attempted to become more diverse, but I have not found examples of multicultural cooperative parishes, where multiple homogeneous churches work together to build a diverse Christian cooperative parish community.

Becoming aware of the limited resources available, I realized that the resources regarding the work of multicultural cooperative parishes were not sufficient to achieve the desired result of this project. Therefore, I have based my research on case studies of previous researchers who have successfully accomplished the task of merging two or more homogeneous churches to create a diverse community or transforming a single church into an inclusive and diverse one under a new vision. By summarizing and analyzing two case studies from prior researchers, I aim to identify the best practices for becoming a multicultural cooperative parish. The data from two case-studies add to the importance of churches developing a multicultural identity.

The two case studies that the previous researchers had successfully completed focused on two churches: 1) The Real Connection Church, DeKalb County, Illinois<sup>113</sup>, and 2) Lakeview Church, Illinois.<sup>114</sup> They are congregations in transition and are at different stages of becoming more representative of their multicultural communities. The first case study, the Real Connection Church, is about two churches merging to form one multicultural church. I chose this case study because it explains the merging process of two different ethnicities and cultures and how they attempted to be a multicultural church. The second case study, the Lakeview Church, focuses on a Korean-initiated multicultural church. As the Central Nassau Cooperative Parish includes three Korean-speaking churches, this study benefits my project by helping me understand how a Korean American church can successfully become a multicultural church. Those two case studies help to find the best practices for developing a multicultural cooperative parish composed of churches that share homogeneous identities.

Before I examine these two case studies, I will first provide a profile of each church and then analyze how they each navigated the process of becoming multicultural. After analyzing the steps taken by these churches to become multicultural, I have also identified any common patterns in the process that may be useful for other churches looking to move in a multicultural direction. Finally, the summary and analysis of case studies from the prior researchers is able to provide one measurement to achieve the best practices for being a multicultural cooperative parish.

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<sup>113</sup> Rodrigo Azofeifa, "Best Practices For Merging Churches In A Multiethnic; Multicultural; And Multilingual Environment" (Dmin diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2019).

<sup>114</sup> Byoung Ok Koo, *Transitioning from an Ethnic to a Multicultural Church: A Transformational Model* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2019), 100-104, Kindle Edition.

**B. First Case Study: A multicultural church was formed by merging Vida Nueva Wesleyan Church (predominantly Latino) and DeKalb Wesleyan Church (predominantly Anglo).**

**Researcher's name: Rodrigo Azofeifa**

**Church Name: The Real Connection Church**

**1) Profile of the Church<sup>115</sup>**

DeKalb Wesleyan Church (DWC) and Vida Nueva Wesleyan Church (VNWC) recognized the significant changes in their historical context since their churches were established. When DWC was founded in 1967, DeKalb County was mainly inhabited by people of Anglo-European descent. The DWC's primary goal was to bring the Gospel to Anglo-European descent. DWC's main culture was an English-speaking and homogeneous family-oriented church. DWC members could be classified as a mix of Baby Boomers and Generation X. In the meantime, VNWC was established to reach the growing Hispanic immigrant community in 2000. VNWC's main culture was Spanish-speaking and bicultural. VNWC members are mostly millennials and Generation Z. Although their audiences were different, the main mission of both churches has always been to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the people of DeKalb County, Illinois.

According to statistics, more than half (54.9%) of the residents in DeKalb are under twenty-five years old. The community is multiracial, and it continues to grow rapidly. The data shows that among the Hispanic population, there has been an 82%

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<sup>115</sup> I summarized the profile of the church from the original dissertation to help my project.

increase in the last ten years. Most of these Hispanics are bilingual or speak Spanish as their primary language.

This merger aimed to respond to the increasing multilingualism, multiculturalism, ethnic diversity, and sense of community in DeKalb County, Illinois. The study examines the best strategic and administrative practices that contributed to the successful merger of these two distinct churches of the Wesleyan denomination while also addressing the needs of the increasingly diverse community.

## **2) The Summary of the Process of Become A Multicultural Church:**

1. Prayed first to seek God's guidance: The senior pastors of both monoethnic churches had been meeting weekly to pray together and talk about ministry and their community needs. Rodrigo Azofeifa said that "from these conversations, an embryo was planted that grew into this merger process."<sup>116</sup> Senior pastors had the same goal for the most effective way to reach their ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse population in their region with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>117</sup>
2. Members of both churches approved the merger: DWC and VNWC recognized the needs of the community and approved the proposal. The proposal was for two ethnically and culturally diverse congregations to merge, one English-speaking and the other Spanish-speaking.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Azofeifa, Rodrig, "Best Practices For Merging Churches In A Multiethnic, Multicultural; and Multilingual Environment" (Dmin diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2019), 112.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 44.

3. They chose the new church name: The real connection church (RCC) was created as their new church name after the merge, and the vision statement of RCC is “to connect all people to God and one another through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.”<sup>119</sup>
4. Leadership from both churches, the ministry directors, and the principal pastors led the unification process: A formal strategic plan was not available, but congregations operated on goodwill and hoped that the Holy Spirit would guide them through this process.<sup>120</sup> Leadership played a crucial role in developing a good strategy to promote bilingual and multicultural relationships in a healthy manner. This involved listening to different opinions and perspectives. It was also important to assess whether the current discipleship programs have successfully promoted ethnic and cultural diversity in the worship service and church life. Additionally, it was necessary to evaluate the administrative policies of the merged church to ensure that they respect, safeguard, and embrace the identity of both churches.
5. Adopted a strategic plan to manage the change process: Rodrigo Azofeifa found the useful steps suggested by Rev. Hans Finzel and Charles R. Swindoll in managing change.<sup>121</sup> These three specific areas include: a) fellowship and worship strategies, b) discipleship strategies, and c) administrative strategies.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 42.



6. Promoted diverse ministry: The merged Christian education and discipleship program was a tool the church uses to enhance and encouraged spiritual health. Ensuring that all church boards and ministries intentionally included individuals from diverse backgrounds was important. All boards should be willing to embrace diversity in terms of age, gender, culture, ethnicity, education level, and financial status.
7. Diverse leadership training: to remind God's mission to bring the Gospel to “all people” regardless of their ethnicity, language, culture, or social conditions. Leaders participated in the discussion of Mark DeYmaz's book *Multiethnic Conversation: An Eight-Week Journey Toward Unity in Your Church Mission*.<sup>123</sup>
8. Inclusivity and diversity in Worship: Ethnic, generational, cultural, and linguistic diversity have become the DNA of the merged church and its worship. A bilingual worship service was available, completed with a translation tool. Bilingual worship songs with lyrics projected on a screen in both languages. Generation Z, or the younger generation, felt comfortable with inclusive worship and was willing to participate in worship services.
9. Improved Communication: The leadership team at Real Connection Church was working to improve communication regarding their vision, mission, and strategies.<sup>124</sup> They offered various activities like studying the Bible, sharing meals, listening to the Gospel, and embraced the cultural and ethnic diversity of the community for both leaders and members. The team was aware that language not only serves as a means

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 124-125.

of communication but also as a marker of cultural identity. They also offered a bilingual translation tool called to worship and ministry.

### **3) Keywords for the Project to Find the Key Principles:<sup>125</sup>**

1. Relationship with God first: Trust in God to guide them through merge and be a multicultural church. Emphasis on God's mission to "all people" through leadership training study and discipleship studies.
2. One clear target mission and vision: Merge and become a new multi-culturally, multi-ethnically, multi-linguistically church.
3. Diverse and inclusive worship and ministry with bilingual system: communication, bilingual interpretation of combined worship.
4. Diverse leadership: Culturally, intergenerationally, gender inclusive, and ethnically diverse leadership.
5. Multicultural strategy: Create new training, discipleship, administrative, and worship strategies to lead the congregation to be multicultural.

## **C. Second Case Study: Transitioning From an Ethnic to a Multicultural Church**

**Researcher's Name: Koo, Byoung Ok**

**Church Name: Lakeview Church**

### **1) Profile of the Church<sup>126</sup>**

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<sup>125</sup> I listed the keywords for the project that the researcher repeated for emphasis.

<sup>126</sup> Byoung Ok Koo, *Transitioning from an Ethnic to a Multicultural Church: A Transformational Model* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2019), 100-104, Kindle Edition.

Lakeview Church began as the English ministry of Lakeview Korean Presbyterian Church, located in the Chicago, IL area in 1990. Pastor Jongmin Lee, who founded Lakeview in 1977 with an emphasis on the education of the next generation, had difficulty establishing an English-language ministry. However, in 1996, the arrival of Pastor Joshua Kang led to the rapid growth of the English congregation. Because of this expansion, the church building could no longer accommodate both the Korean-speaking and English-speaking congregations together. Thus, in 2004, Lakeview Church became independent. With this independence, the church established and shared a vision for a multicultural congregation. In 2006, Lakeview strategically initiated its second campus to expand its multicultural community. While building a multi-ethnic church on both campuses, in 2011, Lakeview merged with a small Korean immigrant church that owned the church building that Northbrook rented. Lakeview church became a multicultural, multisite church with three congregations (two English-speaking congregations and one Korean-speaking congregation) in two locations. Among the three, two congregations are multicultural (Northbrook and Vernon Hills), and the Korean congregation is mono-ethnic (Northbrook Korean).

The racial/ethnic breakdown at the Northbrook first campus consists of approximately 250 congregants: 70% Korean, 20% Non-Korean Asian, and 10% White and Hispanic. The Vernon Hill second campus has approximately 100 congregants, with 50% Korean, 35% White, and 15% other Asian individuals. In terms of ministry staff composition, there are 5 Koreans, 3 Whites, 1 Hispanic, and 1 individual born to Korean and Chinese parents, totaling 11 staff members. Among them is a white preaching pastor at the second campus, who contributed to the increase of white members to 50% from the

initial stage. Geographically, the first campus is located in an area that is predominantly white, but has a considerable number of Jews, resulting in minimal attendance from locals in that area. As indicated by the 2010 census, the second campus is composed of 65% white, 19% Asian, and 11% Hispanic residents, leading to a significantly higher local resident attendance than the first campus.

## **2) The Summary of the Process to Become a Multicultural Church:**

1. English Ministry in a Korean Church and non-Koreans joined and participated in the ministry: Lakeview church began as an English Ministry in a Korean homogeneous church. As the congregation grew, it became more diverse with non-Koreans, including Filipinos, Japanese, and Chinese.<sup>127</sup>
2. Becoming an independent ministry, relocating, and choosing a new name: The first-generation Korean leaders decided to make the English Ministry self-governing in terms of finance and administration. As a result, the Lakeview English Ministry was relocated to a different church building and given a new name - Lakeview Presbyterian Church.<sup>128</sup> The name remained similar to the previous one, but without the word "Korean" to maintain a good relationship with the mother church.<sup>129</sup>
3. Vision casting: After Lakeview church gained independence, Reverend Kang took a month off to contemplate and seek God's guidance on what kind of church Lakeview should be. Eventually, Lakeview church crafted a three-word vision: seek, transform,

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

- and multiply.<sup>130</sup> To foster this multiplication, Lakeview church decided to become multiethnic so that they could multiply beyond the Korean ethnic barrier.<sup>131</sup>
4. Hire Non-Asian Staff: Lakeview church hired non-Asian staff members to become a multiethnic church.<sup>132</sup>
  5. The strategy was designed to have a large group of Caucasians attend the event simultaneously so they wouldn't feel overwhelmed by the predominantly Asian crowd. During the grand opening in 2004, around 100 Caucasians attended, and about 20 of them decided to stay. This group formed the core of the multicultural ministry.<sup>133</sup>
  6. Vision for Multi-site: Although non-Asians were continually coming, the worship space was already full. Thus, Lakeview church prayerfully decided to adopt a multi-site church strategy.<sup>134</sup>
  7. Had a "Vision Night"<sup>135</sup> and Fundraising: Lakeview church held a "Vision Night" to launch a second campus with 50 founding members. Lakeview church raised the funds necessary to launch the new campus within six months of the vision night.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>135</sup> According to *Transitioning from an Ethnic to a Multicultural Church: A Transformational Model* (p. 104, Kindle Edition), Byoung Ok Koo explained that "Lakeview Church had a "Vision Night" in order to share the vision of having a new campus, to gather voluntary founding members, to raise money for the launch of the new campus and to gather voluntary founding members.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

8. Launched a multiethnic campus: Six months later, Lakeview launched the Vernon Hills campus with a Caucasian campus teaching pastor and 50 initial members.<sup>137</sup>

### **3) Keywords for the Project to Find the Key Principles:<sup>138</sup>**

1. Seek God first: seek God's guidance on what kind of church would be.
2. Carry on their homogeneity heritage and be independent: separate from the Korean-speaking mother church and start self-governing in terms of finance and administration. They want to keep the church name "Lakeview" to maintain a good relationship with the original mother church.
3. Multicultural staffing: Diverse leadership from different racial groups to maximize the benefit of multicultural leaders.<sup>139</sup>
4. Multicultural multisite church: two campuses and three congregations – two English-speaking congregations and one Korean-speaking congregation.
5. Joint worship with all three congregations; a multi-language system.
6. Serving neighbors regardless of their ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds.

## **D. Conclusion**

Based on the case studies information from prior researchers, some keywords of the two cases can be overlapped. I deleted the overlapped keywords and organized them into

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> I listed the keywords for the project that the researcher repeated for emphasis.

<sup>139</sup> Byoung Ok Koo, *Transitioning from an Ethnic to a Multicultural Church: A Transformational Model* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2019), 105-106, Kindle Edition.

categories, which help us to observe the results of each church's intentional and unintentional multicultural transformations.

1. Common keyword one: Seek God first for the vision.
2. Common keyword two: Share their homogeneous heritage to enrich their worship and ministry through diverse and inclusive worship.
3. Common keyword three: Multi-language system and translation service.
4. Common keyword four: Intentionally diversified leadership.
5. Common keyword five: Serving neighbors regardless of their ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds.

It is important to note that every church is unique and cannot be replicated in exactly the same manner as any other. Previous researchers' case studies demonstrate how they have successfully transformed from a mono-ethnic and homogeneous environment to a multicultural church. Each summarized process provides insight into what it is needed in the Central Nassau Cooperative Parish.

## **IV. CHAPTER FOUR: THE KEY COMPONENTS FOR DEVELOPING A MULTICULTURAL COOPERATIVE PARISH**

### **A. Introduction**

As I explained in the previous chapter, I was limited in finding resources for key components of a multicultural Cooperative Parish that shares each church's distinctive mono-cultural uniqueness. Because of these limitations, I researched the case studies that the prior researchers had successfully completed. At the end of each case study, I summarized how parishes have transformed into multicultural churches. In addition, I found that they overlapped in terms of the strategies they applied in their process, and those overlapping processes were summarized as common keywords.

In this chapter, I analyze the interviews conducted with key leaders in the Cooperative Parish at the New York Annual Conference—interview questions are attached as Appendix A. Key leaders consisted of six pastors and four lay representatives. Those leaders were widely spread from Long Island to New York City to Hudson Valley to Connecticut in the New York Annual Conference area. I have refrained from using their real names in order to listen to their voices honestly. The names of individuals, churches, and cooperative parishes are represented by alphabet letters. For readers to easily differentiate the contents of the conversation between clergies and lay leaders, I added a 'C' or 'L' after the first letter, respectively. After analyzing the conversation, I organize their answers under the interviewed questions. Those answers are listed based on the frequency of feedback and are compared with the keywords employed by the prior researchers' case studies to find the key components of a multicultural cooperative parish with its distinctive mono-cultural identity.



### **B. Summary of Key Leader's Interview**

Ten key leaders for the cooperative parish ministry were selected to participate in this study. As explained above, six participants are pastors, and four are laity members of the cooperative parish ministry. In this section, the summary of their answers will be displayed. All the participants' names and identifiable information have been changed. I used random letters to protect their anonymity.

I asked nine questions, as shown in Appendix A. However, since many of them were the same, I have grouped the answers into three main questions, as shown in Appendix B.

#### **The Summary of the Answers is given below:**

Key leaders serving the cooperative parish often experience a different culture from the culture of their parishes. I highlighted common challenges mentioned by six or more interviewees. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed using the constant comparative method, and the findings were categorized under different subheadings regarding each major research question.

#### **First Question: What are the ministry challenges of multicultural cooperative parish?**

##### **Categorized Answer One: Lack of Leadership and Shared Vision**

Six out of the ten key leaders said that cooperative parish work for multiculturalism is hard work and requires good leadership. They hope to have strong

leadership and shared vision. IC says, “To set up and lead parishes to a multicultural cooperative parish is all about leadership. Not only does each parish require specific leadership, but also the cooperative parish needs leaders with certain characteristics to support multicultural ministry.” AC says, “We can find numerous stories addressing leadership issues that apply to churches and cooperative parishes in diverse cultural contexts. Transformative Leadership is one of the most potent advantages any organization can have.”

Additionally, five of the interviewed key leaders expressed their desire to establish a common vision that would help them focus on creating a practical and transformative cooperative parish. DC emphasized, “I believe that the key to achieving a healthy and collaborative multicultural parish lies in developing a common vision and encouraging custom leadership for each cooperative parish. Since each parish has unique settings, we must create a tailored vision and goal for our parish and then analyze our progress to move with a cohesive, transformative, and unified multicultural leadership.”

### **Categorized Answer Two: Lack of Cultural Awareness**

Each person is born into a culture that shapes their worldview. This cultural heritage is passed down from our ancestors and is an integral part of our lives. Our behaviors, actions, and perceptions are influenced by our families, communities, and ultimately, the countries we come from. George Cladis, in his book *Leading the Team-Based Church*, says that the church leader, where every member is a minister, must understand the culture and lead a team-based church.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Cladis, G., *Leading the Team-Based Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999) as cited in Uatisone A. Afa’ese, “Multicultural Strategies for Developing a Church With Intentional References to

Six leaders identified the lack of cultural understanding between each parish as a challenge. HL stated, “Key leaders from each parish could never interpret the cultural differences, and they would not recognize the new congregation as a multicultural cooperative parish due to their insistence on following their own traditions and cultural styles.”

During the conversation, some key leaders acknowledged the problematic nature of their assumptions about other cultures. GC struggled to lead GC’s cooperative parish to understand the cultural differences between the congregations, “We never count the cultural differences. Although we speak the same language, we need to be aware that each church has its own style and culture.” Later, GC summarized the difficulties: “When we focus on the ministry with many parishes, we need to study its own identity and embrace the differences and respect them. Understanding cultural factors is important for a healthy, practical, multicultural ministry.” Six of the key leaders also said that it could be better to start with consideration of the cultures of each congregation. They believed the lack of cultural awareness can lead to congregational mistrust. DC said, “There are many cultural challenges within our cooperative parish. We need reconciliation, commitment, wisdom, and love to move the church beyond one’s culture.” DC saw a lack of cultural awareness in DC’s parish and how its strong cultural identity became problematic in making other cultures feel welcome.

### **Categorized Answer Three: Lack of Time**

Seven interviewees referred to time as another major challenge. Some shared that cooperative parish ministry takes more time to achieve goals, make decisions, and see growth in multicultural contexts than in homogeneous ministries. Other pastors expressed how they personally needed more time to adjust to working in a cooperative parish environment.

AC shared that cooperating with other churches' ministry styles is a bigger challenge than they thought. AC added that "it is not a mathematical equation. They need enough time to understand each other to create a new environment." FC explained, "We need time to discover new things. You might have thought you had understood the other cultures but then realized you had not." Regarding time, JC said, "The best way of learning their cultures is just spending time with them to get to know each other. Space and time for getting to know each other is needed." AC said, "This world expects instant gratification, but the slower process may become more valuable and create a more permanent result."

**Second Question: What criteria would be helpful for the effectiveness of multicultural cooperative parish challenges?**

**Categorized Answer One: Cultural Reconciliation and Cultivation of Congregational Identity**

Jesus taught us to "love one another as God has loved us." He also said that the second most important commandment is to "love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Mark 12:30-31.

Multicultural churches cannot simply accept the coexistence of diverse cultures, but rather, they should confront the issue of racial reconciliation. Moreover, the cooperative parish ministry leads multiple culturally different churches/congregants, and it needs to have an intentional desire to draw people of diverse cultural backgrounds together in a sacramental and missional community in their area.<sup>142</sup> Between congregations, they need to have reconciliatory, relational processes that accept and embrace diversified groups of people.<sup>143</sup> The ministries that intentionally attempt to create multi-congregational and multicultural churches have been most productive when they move towards reconciliation, but if they have not addressed the issues of division and hostility that have long separated the church, it cannot truly be called a multiethnic/multicultural church.<sup>144</sup>

Seven key leaders mentioned racial and cultural conflict as challenging in their congregations. FC experienced many struggles related to racial tension and reconciliation. As a Hispanic pastor serving an Anglo church, FC's church struggled to survive because it refused to open its doors to other cultures, even to the pastor. IL told me how difficult it was to keep the church doors open to other multiethnic neighbors. IL found that when visitors of other ethnicities attended their church, some members introduced them to a neighboring church with a similar ethnic makeup. IL added, "The members seem to lack understanding of racial and cultural differences and the concept of reconciliation."

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<sup>142</sup> "Making the Transition to a Multicultural Church," Dan Sheffield, Accessed April 4, 2024, <https://fmcic.ca/wp-content/uploads/Transitioning-to-a-Multicultural-Church.pdf>.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Manuel Ortiz, *One New People: Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 45-46.

EL shared that she realized early on that instead of integrating all cultures, minorities tend to assimilate into the predominant group. EL believes that it's important to respect and listen to diverse voices from each culture. Unfortunately, different groups may not always be naturally attracted to each other, and misunderstandings can occur even when attempts are made to bring diverse groups together. This can result in segregation despite our best efforts to promote integration. Although ethnicity seems to tear nations apart, the church needs to work hard to bring them together.

### **Categorized Answer Two: Understanding of Life-long Process**

Multicultural ministry development is a continuous, lifelong process rather than a single discrete event.<sup>145</sup> Multicultural work involves a continuous long process of learning, collecting, and reflection that involves working with different groups of colleagues to achieve work-related initiatives.<sup>146</sup> The world is changing rapidly, and successful leaders must regularly update their knowledge and keep up with the fast changing pace. “Living things change; the local church is a living thing” Samuel Faircloth writes.<sup>147</sup> Not only is the continuing process important because of the constant development of the world and theology, but also because longtime experience becomes much more valuable after pastors have been actively involved in ministry. Participants in an intensive environment must challenge their ideas, reflect on their values, and take risks

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<sup>145</sup> Conger and Benjamin, *Building Leaders: How Successful Companies Develop the Next Generation* (John Wiley & Sons, 1999), 21.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>147</sup> Samuel D. Faircloth, *Church Planting for Reproduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991), 174.

with their behaviors to learn and to take action.<sup>148</sup>

Six key leaders desired ongoing training and a forum for sharing their experience, ideas, and resources for ministry. AC proposed, “Instead of a broad training program and education, it would be great to continue to gather and collect all our truthful experience, and learn and narrow the scope for practices. It can be helpful to manage the process of changing.” DC also said, “The denomination needs to work with each cooperative parish to design their own training program that suits the reality and needs of their context, addressing challenges and blessings. And then continuously share and develop the process.”

EL saw another benefit to continuing the process: “This is not a program, but a life-long process. This life-long process puts all cooperative parishes and their key leaders at the same level, improving worship and fellowship, and the idea of forming the cooperative parish disciples, not just followers.”

### **Categorized Answer Three: Inclusive Worship**

Ephesians 2:11-22 reminds us that Jesus Christ died to demolish the walls that separate us from one another. Through the message of Jesus Christ, all the walls and barriers that divide people who want to worship God were removed. A group of key leaders questioned how homogeneous parishes can offer opportunities for multicultural interaction. Eight key leaders believe that a multicultural cooperative parish should provide equal opportunities for every member, regardless of their culture, ethnicity, age,

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<sup>148</sup> Dotlich and Noel, *Action Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 10.

gender, language, or other social status to be part of worship, fellowship, and interact with other parishes. JC expressed it this way:

“My first temptation was to project the worship style of my own homogeneous congregation in a cooperative parish entity. I was completely wrong, and it took some time to realize that we, as a group, need to listen and reflect their ideas in Christ. We encountered some conflicts while planning for a joint worship session with all the parishes. We discussed several factors, such as how to include language differences, musical singing styles, and worship element preferences based on their traditions. For example, whether to include communion or spiritual dance sections in the worship. We had to learn to create an inclusive worship style that was different from our own preferences.”

CC said, “Liturgy, music, and culture are very close. Liturgies have an important amount of flavor of the culture it represents.” CC added, “For example, my church does not recite the prayer of affirmation or Psalter with the rhythm in the worship. However, I understand some congregations focus on those rituals for their faith journey. Developing an inclusive worship is challenging but also wonderful work.” In the same sense, DC shared the challenge of language in multicultural worship, “Incorporating an inclusive worship style with other languages was a significant challenge. The multicultural cooperative parish has a multilingual system or translation that would be helpful for any congregation to celebrate worship together.”

### **Third Question: In What Way Or How Can A Cooperative Parish as a Group Promote Multiculturalism Together?**

#### **Categorized Answer One: Communication and Language**

Effective communication is crucial for multicultural relationships and requires intentional planning. Having multiple languages spoken within a congregation can



certainly pose a challenge, but it can be challenging when a group assumes that their intended message will be understood, especially when they all speak the same language.

IC is concerned, “It’s important not to assume that everything we say is understood correctly.” Effective communication is crucial in all situations, whether they are positive or negative. It’s important for leaders to actively promote healthy communication in multicultural congregations, particularly when it comes to supporting multicultural worship and ministry, outlining the rules of the cooperative parish, and establishing expectations for the multicultural cooperative parish. Leaders should prioritize understanding their role in communication rather than exerting control and power dynamics.

Additionally, the philosophy behind a multicultural church is that members have a willingness to interact with other languages. One of the opportunities for multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual interaction was the combined, multilingual worship service. JC mentioned that the multicultural worship involved translation services. JC added, “Language is more than a means of communication, both spoken and written; it also reflects cultural identity. My congregation is comfortable with bilingual worship songs if they are projected on the screen with lyrics in both our native language and English.” Communication requires affirming language that acknowledges the congregation’s experiences, journeys, and courage in taking risks while also acknowledging their hopes, dreams, and fears, and it plays a crucial role in multicultural ministry settings.

### **Categorized Answer Two: Multicultural Openness and Intentional Commitment**

“The Gospels show Jesus living a life of openness, where he breaks down barriers with those who are normally separated from each other.”<sup>149</sup> The church can play a significant role in unifying people across cultural differences by following the example of Jesus. It is important to integrate people of all cultures and share the love and grace of Jesus with them. This interview also affirms that the church can create a healthy multicultural environment, but it requires individuals’ intentional commitment to embrace diversity. By opening the door to different cultures, the church can help to eliminate differences and bring people together.

Nine key leaders shared how important it is for each congregation in their cooperative parishes to be culturally open and ready to adapt to different circumstances. The FC mentioned that we need to understand that we are submerged into a new situation, having to learn different ways of doing things. AC shared the importance of “working the contextualization of theological and cultural elements, developing their own homogeneous identity in multicultural spheres, and stripping the gospel of the added historical and cultural carcass.” AC added, “We need the structure to be more flexible, avoiding too many regulations. We must learn how to adapt a stubborn atmosphere to the new congregation’s culture.”

The intentional commitment to multicultural openness helps to keep the church diverse and prevents any specific group from dominating. The nine leaders agreed that when a church is committed to serving a diverse community, it begins to develop a congregational identity based on its mission. This shift in focus allows the church to stay relevant and focused on its purpose. Their mission of diversity leads congregations to a

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<sup>149</sup> Meewon Yang, “Ways of Being a Multicultural Church: An Evaluation of Multicultural Church Models in the Baptist Union of Victoria.” (PhD diss., 2012), 12.

new commitment. Their commitments to multicultural ministries in the community are helping them to be aware of the changes and an ongoing process of evaluation and planning to accommodate the multicultural ministry.

### **Conclusion of Interviews with Key Leaders**

I conducted the interview with ten key leaders in the Cooperative Parish at the New York Annual Conference. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed, and findings were categorized under different subheadings regarding each major research question.

The first research question examined the common themes regarding the challenges of multicultural cooperative parishes. The answers from key leaders were summarized under the following headings: lack of cultural awareness; lack of multicultural leadership and shared vision; and lack of time.

The second research question explored what criteria would be helpful for the effectiveness of multicultural cooperative parish challenges. The analysis brought these answers: cultural reconciliation and cultivating congregational identity; understanding of life-long process; and inclusive worship and fellowship.

Finally, the third research question analyzed the common answers for the ways a cooperative parish can promote multiculturalism together as a group. These findings were categorized under the following headings: communication and language; and multicultural openness.

The next section will combine the data of common answers by the interviewees and the data collected from case studies successfully done by prior researchers in Chapter

3. These data were processed and analyzed to discover the best practices for creating a multicultural cooperative parish.

### **C. Summary of the Case Studies Findings by Prior Researchers and Interviews with Key Leaders:**

This section of the summary of findings examined the data collected from case studies successfully done by prior researchers in Chapter 3, as well as from interviews with the Cooperative Parish Ministry in Chapter 4. The data was processed and analyzed in order to identify common themes, patterns, and concerns. The goal was to discover the best practices for creating a multicultural cooperative parish.

The following is a summary of the findings from research conducted on two case studies in Chapter 3. One of the selected case studies was from Rodrigo Azofeifa, who worked on merging two parishes to create a multicultural community. I additionally described another case study by Byoung Koo that discussed a Korean church's efforts to transition into a multicultural church. As the Central Nassau Cooperative Parish includes three Korean-speaking and three English-speaking churches with diverse ethnicities and cultures in Nassau County, Long Island, New York, Koo's project was helpful in finding best practices for a healthy transition.

By analyzing each case study based on information from researchers' books and dissertations, I was able to identify common keywords for how each church processed its own vision of becoming a multicultural church. The common keywords <sup>150</sup> used in those case studies were reflected in the following visions: Seek God first for the vision; Share

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<sup>150</sup> Please refer to the details on pages 47-58.

the homogeneity heritage to enrich their worship and ministry through diverse and inclusive worship; Multi-language system and translation service; Intentionally diversified leadership; Serving neighbors regardless of their ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds.

Next, in chapter four, I conducted the interview with key leaders in the Cooperative Parish at the New York Annual Conference. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed, and findings were categorized under different subheadings regarding each major research question.<sup>151</sup>

The first research question examined the common themes regarding the challenges of multicultural cooperative parishes. The answers from key leaders were summarized under these headings: lack of cultural awareness; lack of multicultural leadership and vision sharing; and not enough time. The second research question explored helpful criteria for the effectiveness of multicultural cooperative parish challenges. The analysis brought the following points: cultural reconciliation and cultivating congregational identity; understanding of cultural communication of life-long process; and inclusive worship and fellowship. Finally, the third research question analyzed the common answers about the ways a cooperative parish can promote multiculturalism together as a group. These findings were categorized under the following headings: communication and language; and multicultural openness.

After comparing and analyzing all the data collected from the case studies and interviews, I have identified common themes and practices that can help a cooperative parish take its first steps in developing a multicultural cooperative parish. I have listed

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<sup>151</sup> Please refer to the details on pages 59-60.

below the best practices, divided them into five categories, and provided recommendations for cooperative parishes that want to embark on this journey. Here are the overall findings for the five best principles:

1. The first practice: Cultivate a unique congregational identity for multicultural ministry.

This section aims to raise awareness about the shift in racial or cultural dynamics within the community. It is important to foster a unique cultural identity among individuals or groups and encourage a growing sense of responsibility toward multicultural ministry. The objective of a multicultural church is not just to have a diverse congregation but to strive for unity in diversity. It is our mission to embrace this diversity and cultivate a ministry that celebrates and respects different cultures.

2. The second principle: Understand the conflict and embrace differences.

Multicultural ministry generates multiple voices that clamor to promote their version of normalcy.<sup>152</sup> Conflicts are bound to arise in the process of building multicultural congregations and dealing with ministry challenges. To decrease conflict when working in multicultural settings, it is important for individuals to understand their own culture as one culture among many, and that other cultures do also Foster and emphasize the importance of the “theology of embrace”<sup>153</sup> as a term that captures the interplay of differentiation and intimacy in human communities. This concept provides a framework for resolving conflicts among ethnic and cultural groups, creating space

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<sup>152</sup> “Multicultural Evangelism - Common Ground for Common Ministry,” *Discipleship Ministries*, 4 Dec. 2006, [www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/part-6-in-a-6-part-series](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/part-6-in-a-6-part-series).

<sup>153</sup> Charles R. Foster, *Embracing Diversity: Leadership in Multicultural Congregations* (Washington, D.C.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 1, Kindle Edition.

within ourselves for others, and communicating that we value their differences.<sup>154</sup>

Embracing others is essential because we cannot live authentically without welcoming other genders, cultures, and individuals into our lives. We are called to embrace others because we are created to reflect the triune God's fellowship.

3. The third principle: Manage the change – it is a long process (not a program) to become a multicultural community

Creating a cultural shift in a congregation's life should be viewed as an ongoing process.<sup>155</sup> As circumstances change, new responses are needed, and the congregation must become more flexible in how it lives out its vision and call. Congregational leaders are required to make new decisions, and sometimes even revise old ones. These decisions include how they approach gathering people into their congregational life and work, how they understand and practice their mission, and how they will relate to the interplay of cultural perspectives on the gospel and their common life together.<sup>156</sup>

4. The fourth principle: Promote multilingualism and communication between cultures.

This section explains why promoting multilingualism and inclusive communication as a strategy for the multicultural church is important. Language plays a crucial role in our identity, and we all feel welcomed and accepted when our primary language is recognized and embraced. However, when people from different cultural backgrounds come together, it can be challenging to communicate effectively.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 1-12.

<sup>155</sup> Jacqueline J. Lewis and John Janka, *Ten Essential Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2018), 30.

<sup>156</sup> Charles R. Foster, *Embracing Diversity: Leadership in Multicultural Congregations* (Washington, D.C.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 35, Kindle Edition.

5. The fifth principle: Develop a Multicultural Leadership Team.

People must establish genuine multicultural relationships to build trust when interacting with people from other cultures. However, for a congregation to transition into a multicultural community, the leadership team must first develop friendships and gain a deeper understanding of other cultures and worldviews. This requires trust and mutual critique, even with those whose cultures they do not fully comprehend. To begin this journey, the leadership team should start by researching their community and congregation and become aware of how cultural differences have affected them.

The next chapter will explore the practical recommendations that can enhance the cooperative parish's role in multicultural ministry.



## **V. CHAPTER FIVE – FIVE BEST PRINCIPLES TO DEVELOP A MULTICULTURAL CHURCH WITH A HOMOGENEOUS UNIQUE IDENTITY**

The chapter synthesizes the research and interviews presented earlier to explore the best practices for a multicultural cooperative church composed of congregations with unique homogeneous congregational identities. It discusses the key findings from my analysis of the case studies and interviews with key leaders.

### **A. First Principle: Cultivate a Unique Congregational Identity for Multicultural Ministry**

The membership of the cooperative parish is multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual. 50% of the Central Nassau Parish speaks Korean, and their major worship services are in Korean. Another 50% of the cooperative parish has English-speaking services. Korean-speaking worshippers have their own English service for second-generation congregants. I do not doubt that each church has its own cultural style to express its faith in God, regardless of ethnicity or languages. The cooperative parish ministry should work together to significantly enrich its cultural heritage and open resources and opportunities to serve its diverse community. However, we need to respect our own culture because God fearfully and wonderfully created each of us.<sup>157</sup> Therefore, we need to learn other people's cultures by becoming aware of our own culture.

The key leader who leads a congregation where every member is a minister must be prepared to understand the culture<sup>158</sup> and what it means to cultivate congregational

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<sup>157</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16.

<sup>158</sup> Cladis, G., *Leading the Team-Based Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999) as cited in Uatisone A. Afa'ese, "Multicultural Strategies for Developing a Church With Intentional References to

identity for diversity. Every individual is born into a specific culture, which shapes their worldview and becomes a part of their life. This cultural influence is called "heritage" or inheritance from previous generations.<sup>159</sup> The actions, behaviors, and perspectives of individuals and groups stem from the families, communities, and, ultimately, the countries from which they originate.<sup>160</sup> This results in a new culture and identity for the group.

By becoming a multicultural cooperative parish, the members choose to maintain some aspects of their separate cultures while also creating a new one. The church's new culture is inclusive of all its members, and the members have initiated this change. Munck claims that culture can and does change.<sup>161</sup> Levin and Charon agree with Munck and assert that all cultures are susceptible to change as cultures interact.<sup>162</sup>

In his article, *Understanding and Honoring Your Congregation's Unique Culture*, Roy Spore argues that every local church has its own unique culture, which is a product of years and decades of its members living, working, suffering, and rejoicing together. This culture represents a blend of all the factors that define the church and its

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Diversity, Inclusiveness, And Structure As Modeled By The All Nations Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1979-2012" (Dmin. Diss, Andrews University, 2013), 45.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Hodge, G. Derrick, *Learning from Strangers: Best Practices for Cross-Racial and Cross-Cultural Ministry in the United Methodist Church* (The General Commission on Religion and Race of The United Methodist Church, 2017), 4.

<sup>161</sup> Munck, B. (2001, Nov 1), "Changing a culture of face time," *Harvard Business Review* (electronic version), Retrieved from [hbr.org/product/changing-a-cultureof.../R0110J-PDF-ENG](http://hbr.org/product/changing-a-cultureof.../R0110J-PDF-ENG) as cited in Uatisone A. Afa'ese (2013), 45.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

core values. Without its culture, the church has no sense of identity, and any threat poses a risk of losing that identity.<sup>163</sup> Jacqueline Lewis mentioned that:

“Congregational identity describes our sense of who we are in our relationship to each other, to the community around us, and to the faith tradition of which we are a part. Identity is shaped by the stories we tell about ourselves and those others tell about us. Our identity is shaped by relationships, history, ritual, shared values, and our picture of the future. It is informed by decisions we have made, testing we have endured, and by our faithfulness to the gospel. Identity is informed by our sense of calling and purpose.”<sup>164</sup>

The Central Nassau Cooperative Parish incorporates people from many countries: Ghana, Korea, India, Germany, Philippines, Greece, Jamaica, and many other countries. Since many members come from such diverse places worldwide, each church in the Cooperative Parish has contributed its own congregational culture and identity to build God’s Kingdom for the community. Although the division or disagreement might happen in some parts of the ministry due to a lack of understanding of their own congregational culture, the communication through the language of love in Christ is helpful in challenging times. As JC suggested, we firmly believe that it is important to understand our congregation's unique culture and identity to cooperate with God's ministry in a multicultural setting. We have all been given unique gifts by God, and through our diverse gifts and talents, we can work together to bring goodness to this broken world in the name of Christ.

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<sup>163</sup> Roy L. Spore, “Understanding and Honoring Your Congregation’s Unique Culture - Lewis Center for Church Leadership,” July 12, 2022, <https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/understanding-and-honoring-your-congregations-unique-culture/>.

<sup>164</sup> Jacqueline J. Lewis and John Janka, *Ten Essential Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 37.

## **B. Second Principle: Understand the Conflict and Embrace the Differences**

The act of embracing is always a two-way movement between two individuals or groups.<sup>165</sup> It involves creating "space in myself for the other" and an enclosing movement to communicate that I do not want to be without the other in their uniqueness. To embrace others is to acknowledge that we cannot live authentically without welcoming people from different genders, races, ethnicities, personalities, theologies, and cultures into the very fabric of our being.<sup>166</sup> Embracing others means celebrating each person's uniqueness. Miroslav Volf suggested that we should embrace others because we are created to reflect the fellowship that exists within the triune God.<sup>167</sup>

Though each congregation is at a different stage of transition, congregational leaders have recognized that embracing diversity will have a significant impact on their community. The four elements that Charles Foster suggested are very helpful in embracing cultural, racial, ethnic, theological, and linguistic differences in the church:<sup>168</sup>

1. Quest for Survival<sup>169</sup> - Building a strong multicultural ministry within a church takes significant time and effort. Usually, this process begins out of necessity and intentionality rather than choice. Emerging multicultural churches often face changes in their communities and realize that their future success depends on attracting some newcomers to maintain their ministry activities or to rebuild a church.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Paul Pearce, "Characteristics Of Emerging Healthy Multicultural Churches" (Hamilton, Ontario: Dmin. Diss., McMaster University, 2000), 150.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. 151.

<sup>167</sup> Charles R. Foster, *Embracing Diversity: Leadership in Multicultural Congregations* (San Francisco, CA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 1, Kindle Edition.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

2. Gospel Commitment<sup>171</sup> - The commitment to spreading the gospel should be delivered with a strong passion for reaching all those who are willing to hear and respond to it. Multicultural churches may encounter uncertain and awkward situations, but it's all worthwhile as long as they witness people coming to faith in Jesus Christ. The expression of faith may vary from one cultural group to another, but it's important to recognize that the person of Jesus Christ and the gospel are the common and unifying points for living with diversity.<sup>172</sup>
3. Hospitality<sup>173</sup> - Multicultural churches are places where people from all backgrounds feel welcome and accepted. These churches often offer ministries like programs for children and youth and share living resources – food, clothes, and immigration information. By embracing each other's differences and welcoming without prejudices, the church and community members are transformed, leading to new paths of understanding and communication.<sup>174</sup>
4. Theological Vision<sup>175</sup> - Embracing diversity requires a commitment to creating a new faith community that celebrates differences in worship and service to neighbors.<sup>176</sup> It is important to acknowledge the existence of subconscious prejudice found in many churches, regardless of the ethnic group.<sup>177</sup>

It is clear from the amount of media attention and daily conversations that the growth of immigrant populations in major cities concerns many Americans. This challenges towards certain groups' rights to preserve their unique cultural customs (i.e., Tong-sung ki-do, or speak-in-tongues prayer at Korean church), placing pressures on them to assimilate. This is especially true in multicultural churches where biases among members are more apparent. Therefore, as we embrace the differences that exist in God and fellowship within the Trinity, it can help people move beyond their individualistic

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

and self-centered mindset to embrace a larger vision beyond their personal needs and worldview.

### **C. Third Principle: Manage the Change – It Ss a Long Process (Not a Program) to Become a Multicultural Community**

The multicultural church is in a constant state of change as it adapts to accommodate emerging diversity. Congregations that begin to embrace their members' racial and cultural diversity often face a challenge in reevaluating their assumptions about what it truly means to be a multicultural church. They are required to make new decisions, and sometimes even revise old ones, about how they approach gathering people into their congregational life and work, how they understand and practice their mission, and how they will relate to the interplay of cultural perspectives on the gospel and their common life together.<sup>178</sup>

Multicultural churches often face challenges such as managing differences, navigating complex communication, and adapting new organizational structures that can accommodate the diversity needs and leadership styles of the community. Change often feels like a repudiation or rejection of how we have done things in the past or of what we value, which can make it difficult to implement.<sup>179</sup>

Seven key leaders have expressed their opinion that the concept of a multicultural cooperative parish ministry is not a familiar one to them. They have observed that their congregations sometimes perceive this concept as a threat to their identity rather than a

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>179</sup> Jacqueline J. Lewis and John Janka, *Ten Essential Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2018), 29.

chance to serve the community with a fresh approach to ministry. BL added that we share many values and goals, but we quickly reject relationships and use stereotypes to justify our lack of engagement. This behavior can cause a decline not only in memberships but also in budgets in the transition.

God is capable of creating and recreating, making all things new, and leading us towards both personal and collective transformation.<sup>180</sup> This implies that God is a change advocate, and transformation is a normative value in the faith tradition.<sup>181</sup> In Revelation 21, God affirms: “I am making all things new.” A life of faith that remains static and unchanging can be limiting, while a community of faith that doesn't aim to progress, grow, learn, and adapt has misunderstood the true message of the gospel.

Jacqueline Lewis, in *Ten Essential Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation*, suggests one model that social scientist Kurt Lewin developed and demonstrated to assess the possibility of institutional change.<sup>182</sup> The model is called the *Force Field Analysis*.<sup>183</sup> Lewin argues that the current reality of any organization is the outcome of a dynamic equilibrium between opposing forces. These forces can be categorized as driving forces that compel organizations to change and restraining forces that resist any changes. According to Lewin, the forces for and against change are balanced when an organization is stable. This balance is known as quasistatic

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 29.

equilibrium.<sup>184</sup> However, sometimes an unforeseen circumstance or set of circumstances may motivate the system to change. For instance, if a congregation becomes aware of a demographic shift in their community or visitors of a different ethnicity attend their worship, it may prompt some leaders to raise this observation at the next board meeting. To achieve change, two things must happen: driving forces must increase, and restraining forces must decrease.<sup>185</sup> Lewin and Jacqueline offered readers the force field analysis to identify actions that would maximize driving forces and minimize constraining forces for managing the changing process and achieving their multicultural goal.:<sup>186</sup>

APPENDIX C: *Force Field Analysis* developed by Kurt Lewin to assess the possibility of institutional change.<sup>187</sup>

| Driving Forces | Restraining Forces |
|----------------|--------------------|
|                |                    |
|                |                    |

Creating a culture shift within a congregation is not a one-time initiative but rather a continuous process.<sup>188</sup> The congregation must be open to change and willing to adapt to new challenges that arise in order to achieve its vision. Solutions that worked in the past may not work for new challenges. A healthy multicultural congregational culture should encourage creativity, have a forward-thinking perspective, and be willing to take risks. The Central Nassau Cooperative Parish is working towards integrating the desire

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 33-35.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 29.



for community and the experience of community. It's important to understand that there is no premade plan or program that churches can follow to become more genuinely multicultural. The key to success is to establish trust by developing healthy relationships over time, which allows for ongoing communication and openness to change.

#### **D. Fourth Principle: Promote Multilingualism and Communication Between Cultures**

This section explains why promoting multilingualism and inclusive communication as a strategy for the multicultural church is important. It is especially helpful for the cooperative parish with members who speak many other languages. As shown in case studies in Chapter 3 and in interviews in Chapter 4, multilingual communication is identified as the essential and desirable element for a multicultural ministry. However, language and communication can also pose a significant challenge in a multicultural setting, as it may emphasize people's differences rather than promoting their unity. This challenge should be addressed proactively to ensure effective communication and inclusivity.

Language plays a crucial role in our identity formation, and we all feel welcomed and accepted when our primary language is recognized and embraced. However, when people from different cultural backgrounds come together, it can be challenging to communicate effectively. Differences in language, worship style, theological beliefs, family expectations, and children's behaviors can create barriers to communication, leading to relationship awkwardness for many people. Thus, in a multicultural ministry setting, it is critical to understand the basic language differences. Using a multilingual

translation system and printing bulletins in multiple languages can be helpful. However, communicating in a different language is just one part of the challenge because different cultures not only speak differently but also think differently. For example, Koreans and Americans come from different contexts, which might lead to a difference on how to perceive things, and that sometimes can result in miscommunication. The two cultures may have different approaches to solving the same problem, ask different questions, and reach different conclusions. Therefore, it is essential to take the time to understand each group's culture and language to promote healthy and inclusive communication.

*Communication on the border* requires using language that acknowledges and affirms the experiences, journeys, courage, hopes, dreams, and fears of the people in the congregation.<sup>189</sup> In order to communicate effectively, we must become interculturally competent, which means making a conscious effort to communicate in the cultural languages of the people in our congregation and those we hope to reach. In multicultural congregations, it is important to be aware of and sensitive to many cultures as we communicate. This requires intentional communication that takes into consideration how the message will impact the various cultures represented in the congregation.

The Central Nassau Cooperative Parish has made a commitment to being a multicultural cooperative parish but was unsure where and how to start. To deepen my relationships with people from different cultures within my congregation and cooperative parish, I have expanded my vocabulary for prayers and sermons. I have studied other cultures to enhance my competencies and learned how and when to use language appropriately. Effective communication in multicultural settings requires the ability to

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 82.

communicate God's love to as many people as possible while respecting and honoring their culture.

Nonverbal cues play a crucial role in how we understand verbal messages. Non-verbal communication is a type of communication that doesn't include words. It encompasses body language and the environmental context surrounding any communication. It's not what we say, but how we say it and present it. Non-verbal communication can take various forms, such as eye contact, hand movements, facial expressions, touch, and gestures. It varies from person to person, and even more so from one culture to another. Cultural background plays a significant role in shaping our non-verbal communication, as they are learned behaviors.

Nonverbal communication also includes cultural rhythm, instrumental music, liturgical movement, visual art, and cultural food, which aid other cultural congregations. For example, when an Indian family learned that their church included Hindi cultural rhythm and instrumental music in worship, the Spirit touched their hearts. Language serves not only as a means of delivering information but also as a way to demonstrate acceptance and belonging.<sup>190</sup> Non-verbal communication is a powerful tool that can help us navigate cultural differences more sensitively, fostering inclusivity and preventing misunderstandings in diverse environments. Visual representations of different racial or ethnic groups, for example, can make people feel welcome in a church that is not their own.

As we prepare for a new community with increased ethnic and cultural diversity, it is important to be intentional about shifting our culture. Our communication strategy

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<sup>190</sup> Pasquale, Michael and Nathan L. K. Bierma., *Every Tribe and Tongue: A Biblical Vision for Language in Society* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 74 as cited in Morales 2018, 130.

should encompass not only what we do but also who we are as a group. This means developing norms that allow for diversity and inclusivity so that we can build bridges and connect with others meaningfully, a mission-critical skill.<sup>191</sup>

### **E. Fifth Principle: Develop a Multicultural Leadership Team**

The New Testament talks about leadership in two ways: as a process of guiding group members towards a common goal,<sup>192</sup> and as properties of characteristics and behaviors that enable individuals to effectively achieve objectives.<sup>193</sup> Leaders are expected to lead diligently (as a process) and demonstrate qualities and behaviors (as a property) that are consistent with their ability to lead. The Apostle Paul instructed both Timothy and Titus to seek out these qualities without compromise (1 Tm 3).<sup>194</sup>

Leadership is the ability to influence and inspire trust in people to pursue God's interests.

Sociologist Mark DeYmaz suggests three reasons for prioritizing ethnic and cultural diversity when forming a leadership team in a multicultural church: (1) a leadership team that represents diverse cultures and ethnicities can attract people from different racial and cultural backgrounds. This is because the members accept each other's differences which could attract in more diverse members of the congregation<sup>195</sup> ;

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<sup>191</sup> Jacqueline J. Lewis and John Janka, *Ten Essential Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2018), 88-90.

<sup>192</sup> De Vries, 165 as cited in Pablo Morales, "Key Components of a Culturally Relevant Multiethnic Church Model" (DMin diss., George Fox University, 2018), 145.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> For a comprehensive study about elders and deacons, see Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008).

<sup>195</sup> Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass/John Wiley, 2007), 87.

(2) a multicultural leadership team can foster a sense of belonging among the members by ensuring that the perspectives of multiple cultural groups are reflected in the major decisions of the church;<sup>196</sup> (3) a multicultural leadership team can facilitate the development of a liminal worship ministry that promotes inclusion and diversity because different cultures have different worship styles.<sup>197</sup> Therefore, having a multicultural leadership team that embodies ethnic and cultural diversity instills trust, communicates acceptance, promotes diversity, and reinforces an identity of inclusion.

S. Aqeel Tirmizi defines a multicultural leadership team as a diverse group of people with varying cultural backgrounds. They rely on each other to complete their tasks, share accountability for their results, consider themselves as a unified social unit that is part of one or more significant social systems, and handle their interactions across organizational limitations and beyond.<sup>198</sup> A multicultural leadership team is essential for productivity and creativity, as cultural diversity often leads to better diverse thinking skills.<sup>199</sup> It is important to understand that diverse perspectives in a multicultural team may lead to disagreements due to differences in opinions. However, it is crucial to recognize the positive correlation between disagreement of opinion and diverse thinking, especially in the context of a multicultural church. A multicultural leadership team should

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<sup>196</sup> Curtiss Paul DeYoung et al., *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 177.

<sup>197</sup> Michael O. Emerson and Rodney M. Woo, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 68-69.

<sup>198</sup> Claire B. Halverson and S. Aqeel Tirmizi, *Effective Multicultural Teams: Theory and Practice* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2008), 5, Kindle Edition.

<sup>199</sup> Celik, Storme, and Forthmann, "A New Perspective on the Link between Multiculturalism and Creativity: The Relationship between Core Value Diversity and Divergent Thinking," *Learning and Individual Differences* 52 (2016), accessed November 20, 2017, Elsevier ScienceDirect.

welcome diverse perspectives, and this inclusive approach can foster innovation and refinement of ideas in the ministry.

Pablo Morales recommends three strategies for leading a multicultural team: having a shared vision, creating an integrated space, and being aware of cultural differences<sup>200</sup>. The first strategy, having a shared vision, emphasizes a clear vision that provides direction and purpose. This vision sparks shared common passions, motivates, guides, and sets goals.<sup>201</sup> When individuals from different backgrounds come together to work towards a common goal, they often develop a more resilient attitude that enables them to overcome the challenges of multiculturalism. A shared vision is the most crucial element in defining the team's identity and transforming the team from a group of individuals into a collective 'we.'<sup>202</sup> Thus, it is important to consistently emphasize the vision when forming, developing, and maintaining a multicultural leadership team as a proactive measure to increase awareness of different cultures and promote unity.

The second strategy involves giving importance to the creation of an integrated space. Nancy Adler describes various methods for managing multicultural teams. One of these approaches is called assimilation, where the dominant culture expects individuals from minority cultures to adapt to the dominant culture's norms.<sup>203</sup> However, this mindset can damage the relationship between team members since the dominant culture expects

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<sup>200</sup> Pablo Morales, "Key Components of a Culturally Relevant Multiethnic Church Model" (DMin diss., George Fox University, 2018), 156.

<sup>201</sup> Andy Stanley, *Visioneering: God's Blueprint for Discovering and Maintaining Vision* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 1999), 9-15 as cited in Morales 2018, 157.

<sup>202</sup> Evelyn Hibbert and Richard Hibbert, *Leading Multicultural Teams* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2014), location 1900, Kindle as cited in Morales 2018, 157.

<sup>203</sup> Claire B. Halverson and S. Aqeel Tirmizi, *Effective Multicultural Teams: Theory and Practice* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2008), 23, Kindle as cited in Morales 2018, 158.

minority cultures to erase their cultural heritage and adapt accordingly to the dominant one.<sup>204</sup> Another approach is called cultural pluralism. In cultural pluralism, the dominant culture acknowledges the team's diverse subcultures while remaining ethnocentric. Evelyn and Richard Hibbert argue that maintaining boundaries between cultures fails to lead to a multicultural team because team members of different cultural backgrounds are unable to value each other and work closely together.<sup>205</sup> The best approach is to create an integrated space that recognizes the cultural perspectives of each team member. This creates a fair environment for all ethnicities represented in the team and promotes an equal plainfield. As a result, the team can challenge and negotiate the way things are done, leading to the creation of a unique team culture. Integration, unlike assimilation and cultural pluralism, promotes a leveled plainfield by treating everyone as equal partners, which increases trust. Therefore, Evelyn and Richard Hibbert have emphasized that one of the vital responsibilities of a multicultural team leader is to establish and maintain a liminal space where cultural power imbalances can be corrected and every team member can feel secure and confident to contribute to the development of the team's unique identity.<sup>206</sup> Thus, a multicultural team is most effective when they have a shared vision, equal voice, and work in an integrated space.

The third strategy to successfully lead a multicultural team is to be aware of cultural differences. After conducting interviews with key leaders, I found that many of

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<sup>204</sup> Nancy J. Adler, *International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior* (Boston, MA: PWS-Kent Pub., 1986), 12 as cited in Morales 2018, 153.

<sup>205</sup> Evelyn Hibbert and Richard Hibbert, *Leading Multicultural Teams* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2014), location 1213, Kindle Edition as cited in Morales 2018, 158.

<sup>206</sup> Evelyn Hibbert and Richard Hibbert, *Leading Multicultural Teams* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2014), location 1250, Kindle Edition as cited in Morales 2018, 159.

the teams lacked cultural awareness, leading to difficulties in identifying and resolving conflicts. In contrast, when a team is aware of its own cultural prejudices and engages in constructive dialogue, it can bring a new environment and creative potential.<sup>207</sup> In this way, a multicultural leadership team has the opportunity to be aware of other cultures and learn and appreciate them while also addressing conflicts with spiritual maturity.

A multicultural church is more effective with a leadership team that is spiritually mature, ethnically diverse, and culturally unique, consistently engaged in the disciplined pursuit of collaboration and diverse thinking. In order to manage a healthy multicultural teams, leaders should focus on (1) establishing a shared vision that everyone in the team can work towards, (2) creating an integrated space that fosters listening of voices in equality, collaboration, and communication, and (3) being aware of cultural differences and demonstrating the necessary understanding and flexibility in order to achieve the common goal that unites the multicultural leadership team.

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<sup>207</sup> Nancy J. Adler, *International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior* (Boston, MA: PWS-Kent Pub., 1986), 115- 118 as cited in Morales 2018, 160.



## **VII. CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION**

### **Good Trouble for God's Call**

The world is becoming more multicultural, and this new social reality presents a challenge to the church's customs, doctrines, and principles. However, the church has a crucial part to play in fulfilling God's mission of bringing together Christians of all nations, races, tribes, peoples, cultures, and languages to worship Jesus Christ in unity. There is a significant question that has been raised: God is calling us to start a multicultural church, but how do we begin this journey? Throughout history, many have written about the importance of having a community that is diverse. However, despite all these efforts, it appears that we have yet to achieve a truly diverse community.

It is common for people to associate the term "multicultural" solely with race or ethnicity, without realizing that it encompasses much more than that. This was a key takeaway for the group members, who learned that the term has a broader meaning. Through this study, I hope that the cooperative parish can take actual practicable steps to form a “multicultural” ministry that mutually and intentionally adjusts its practices to accommodate different values and expressions to create a diverse and inclusive community. A successful multicultural ministry involves intentional planning, dedicated leadership, building multicultural relationships at both interpersonal and intergroup levels, and engagement by the entire congregation to create a culture of inclusion.<sup>208</sup> God has called and empowered all people to become thought disciples in multicultural ministry. To implement this, we, as individuals, must first be multicultural before we can minister in a multicultural setting. Being a multicultural person involves having an

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<sup>208</sup> Ashwin James Somasundram, “Cultural intelligence: a Model to Empower the West Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church for Multicultural Ministry” (Dmin diss., Andrews University, 2014), 76.

intentional attitude of openness, tolerance, awareness, and a willingness to change and grow. This attitude is necessary if one is to minister successfully in a multicultural context.

On March 26, 2024 our Central Nassau County cooperative parish organized a Holy Week joint meditation service. People of all ethnicities and cultures gathered for a unique experience of being a multicultural cooperative parish. During the worship service, the scriptures were read in English, Korean, and Spanish. The music and songs were performed with ethnic rhythms and languages. We all prayed together in different languages, just like the Pentecost, and held hands to pray for one another. After the service, people from different cultures came together and enjoyed Korean-style refreshments. This worship experience helped us to reconcile, heal, harmonize, and find joy. It also gave us a deeper sense of zeal to interact and share our unique heritages and cultures. The preacher proclaimed before the benediction that there are no Koreans, Indians, Africans, Americans, White, Black, and Asians in heaven. Only God's people are in heaven. We all shouted Amen.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the summary findings of this study, there are some suggestions for the Central Nassau Cooperative Parish, which is looking to establish a multicultural congregation in the central area of Nassau County, New York. I also provide guidance on how church leaders can facilitate multicultural Cooperative Parish ministry.

### **Recommendations for The Central Nassau Cooperative Parish**

The following recommendations are based on the results of the case study and the responses from the interview:

1. Have a defined and clear mission and vision statements along with a strong strategic plan to transform those statements and visions into a reality.
2. Give the members space and time to accept multicultural practices and beliefs that differ from their own.
3. Have intentional plans to study Scripture or other Christian books in order to teach members about God's vision and multiculturalism.
4. Maintain open communication channels among parish leaders and members. Provide frequent updates on multicultural progress.
5. Create a multicultural worship service with diverse music, liturgy, and many languages. Exercise intentional inclusivity of all diverse members and styles of worship.
6. Plan multicultural fellowship activities such as international food fairs, cultural fairs, and cultural music nights —choirs, bands, etc., in cooperation with other different parishes. This would help expose the entire congregation and experience the multicultural fellowship.
7. Establish a structured multicultural leadership with a committee that is responsible for keeping in touch with the needs of the congregation based on their ethnic and cultural status.
8. Encourage the members and leaders to be vigilant as they meet regularly to ensure that diverse individuals and parishes are represented, and that they are being effectively ministered to.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Questions for Key Leaders of the Cooperative Parish**

1. What are the ministry challenges of multicultural cooperative parish?
2. What are the biggest blessings and challenges of multiculturalism as a cooperative parish? Give specific examples.
3. Is cooperative parish ministry a burden for your church, and/or does it help your church in fulfilling its Christian mission? How?
4. What criteria would be helpful for the effectiveness of multicultural cooperative parish challenges?
5. Is there a strategic plan in place to monitor the progress and health of the multicultural cooperative parish?
6. Can you provide information on the theological framework that can help a congregation become more diverse and multicultural?
7. In what way or how can a cooperative parish promote multiculturalism together as a group?
8. Does your participation in a cooperative parish ministry promote multiculturalism? How? What led you to the conclusion that a multicultural church is necessary in the community?
9. What are your biggest blessings and/or challenges as a key leader of a multicultural cooperative parish to promote multiculturalism together as a group?

**Thank you for taking the time to participate and answer the questions.**

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Questions for Key Leaders of the Cooperative Parish**

1. What are the ministry challenges and blessings of a multicultural cooperative parish?
  - a. What are the biggest blessings and challenges of multiculturalism as a cooperative parish? Give specific examples.
  - b. Is cooperative parish ministry a burden for your church, and/or does it help your church in fulfilling its Christian mission? How?
2. What criteria would be helpful for measuring? the effectiveness of multicultural cooperative parish challenges?
  - a. Can you provide information on the theological framework that can help a congregation become more diverse and multicultural?
  - b. Is there a strategic plan in place to monitor the progress and health of the multicultural cooperative parish?
  - c. Describe your cooperative parish's reconciliatory, relational processes that facilitate the embrace of a diversity of cultures.
3. In what way or how can a cooperative parish promote multiculturalism together as a group?
  - a. What are your biggest blessings and/or challenges as a key leader of a multicultural cooperative parish to promote multiculturalism together as a group?

- b. Does your church's participation in a cooperative parish ministry promote multiculturalism? How? What led you to the conclusion that a multicultural church is necessary in the community?

## APPENDIX C

*Force Field Analysis* developed and demonstrated by Kurt Lewin to assess the possibility of institutional change:<sup>209</sup>

Jacqueline Lewis suggests generating your own Force Field Analysis in the book *Ten Essential Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation*:

“Generate your own Force Field Analysis as it applies to the challenge goal of becoming more diverse ethnically or culturally. If the analysis does not indicate readiness for change, then the correct question to ask is, “What must we do to help the congregation get ready for needed change?” rather than resigning the faith community to doing nothing.”<sup>210</sup>

| Driving Forces | Restraining Forces |
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<sup>209</sup> Jacqueline J. Lewis and John Janka, *Ten Essential Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 33-34.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 34.

