

THE INTRODUCTION OF INTERCULTURAL WORSHIP AND THEOLOGY AT
ST.PAULS UNITED CHURCH TO FOSTER GROWTH BY ENHANCING THE
INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTH AND CHILDREN, PROMOTING DIVERSITY, INCLUSION
AND JUSTICE AND INCREASING NUMERICAL GROWTH

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ABSTRACT

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The research project explores how implementing Interculturalism at St Paul's United Church in Thunder Bay could enhance participation among children and youth and promote diversity, inclusion, and social justice. This paper will discuss the historical challenges and background of the church, emphasising the obstacles it has encountered, such as declining membership due to ageing and mortality. Traditionally, the church has struggled to engage children and youth, who perceive it as unappealing and ill-equipped to fulfil their needs. Churches in the Western world continue to experience decline, leading to the closure of numerous congregations. Although it identifies as an affirming church, it has struggled to welcome many people, and its initiatives have often been unsuccessful. These issues are further exacerbated by COVID-19, ageing, and mortality.

The theology of interculturalism perceives the church as a blend of diversity and adaptability, acknowledging errors and learning from them as it evolves. In its quest for justice, interculturalism steers clear of allowing any single culture to dominate. An intercultural church aims for justice, creates a welcoming environment for all, and openly tackles issues related to racism, justice, and equality. It acknowledges the historical inequalities and injustices present within the church. It advocates for justice and strives for equal involvement and equal access to benefits. Ultimately, an intercultural church operates as a missional community that embraces, invites, includes, and expands. In summary, this paper will explore the implications and effects of implementing interculturalism at St Paul's United Church, discussing both its advantages and challenges.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my wife, Judith, and my cherished family, Blessing, Brian, Beverly, and Pamela. They were my steadfast support during a challenging time when I focused entirely on my studies, often at the cost of quality time with my family. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the leaders of St. Paul's United Church for their numerous forms of support, particularly to those members who personally helped me address specific financial challenges at the University. I appreciate the African Choir for their community and spiritual encouragement during my times of need.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Project Thesis

This project explores how intercultural worship, inspired by the Ubuntu philosophy, can foster renewal, inclusivity, and greater participation at St. Paul's United Church, especially during a time of significant decline. It introduces a practical approach to ministry that combines insights from intercultural theology with hands-on pastoral experience. The findings reveal that integrating Ubuntu philosophy with intercultural theology has led to noticeable improvements in congregational vitality at St. Paul's, particularly through increased youth participation, greater diversity, and stronger community engagement.

By blending Ubuntu and intercultural theology, the church can extend its reach to embrace a wider array of people, including those from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. This initiative is rooted in a problem-solving mission to address the challenges of a declining church through actionable, transformative ministerial solutions. Unlike abstract theories or fragmented theological concepts, the work presented here stems from tangible, practical ministry activities designed for real-world impact.

This hands-on approach is enriched by incorporating African Ubuntu principles alongside years of ministerial experience in Africa to provide a clear pathway for renewal. By intertwining these elements, this project offers a meaningful and sustainable response to the pressing issues faced by St. Paul's United Church, with a focus on fostering unity, inclusion, and vibrant community life. Ubuntu provides a theological and ethical framework centred on relationality—"I am

because we are.”¹ Rather than individual achievement, it prioritises shared responsibility and communal flourishing.

Ubuntu brings positive characteristics and commendable qualities, such as shared humanity, values and beliefs, and collective responsibility, and serves as a counterpoint to individualism. All the above traits and attributes are not just being thrown into the fray haphazardly; each is meant to influence opinions, theological understanding, and perceptions, and to align them coherently towards a shared end goal. Likewise, “Ubuntu worldview guides African approaches to justice, education, and social cohesion in diverse societies by valuing dialogue, empathy, and shared dignity over division.”² It is interesting to note that both intercultural theology and Ubuntu philosophy promote and build community harmony, unity, and togetherness. These values will lay the foundation for peace, harmony, and inclusion at St. Paul's United Church. In both approaches, “communal, community, and group values are valued over individualistic pursuits, thereby fostering an environment where mutual respect and cooperation thrive.”³ Through these approaches, the church will revive its fortunes, bringing back children and youth, attracting young families, welcoming new people, and making the church more accessible.

In my writing, the concepts of intercultural theology and Ubuntu encompass a wealth of principles and standards, emphasising active dialogue, meaningful interaction, and mutual understanding among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. They strongly advocate for fostering relationships and building community. As St. Paul's moves forward, this is the ethos the church needs to embrace and the values it must embody. Central to this language are ideas such

¹ Mayaka and Truell, “Ubuntu and Its Potential Impact on the International Social Work Profession.”

² Mayaka and Truell, “Ubuntu and Its Potential Impact on the International Social Work Profession.”

³ Mayaka and Truell, “Ubuntu and Its Potential Impact on the International Social Work Profession.”

as respect, reconciliation, forgiveness, and restorative justice, all aimed at cultivating social cohesion by actively recognising and honouring diverse identities rather than merely tolerating them as separate entities.

This approach is designed to provide St. Paul's United Church with the foundation to nurture an environment that is not only safe and welcoming but also fertile for growth across multiple dimensions. The project asserts that this vision of intercultural theology can create avenues to enhance diversity, expand church membership, increase youth and children's participation, and foster greater inclusivity. Ultimately, this perspective promises solutions to longstanding issues like the church's steady decline.

The realities St. Paul's grappled with before my appointment as minister were stark: a significant drop in attendance during COVID-19, the absence of active Sunday school programs for children, no initiatives for youth or activities tailored to men and women, and an inability to attract individuals from diverse racial and cultural groups. However, the hope driving our efforts is rooted in the belief that through this endeavour, the church can transform its trajectory. By embracing interculturalism, nurturing connections between people and their surroundings, and celebrating the diversity of God's creation despite physical differences, the church has the potential to usher in a renewed chapter of growth and unity. "It embodies a communal ethos stressing shared responsibility, empathy, trust in each other, and interconnectedness among the community members ."⁴ The church was generally quiet, unknown, too formal, and on its path to extinction. The approach seeks to build a diverse and inclusive church that is welcoming, relational, adaptive, justice-seeking, intentional, and missional.

⁴ Mayaka and Truell, "Ubuntu and Its Potential Impact on the International Social Work Profession."

a) St. Paul United Church's Historical Context

St. Paul's United Church of Canada in Thunder Bay is a 150-year-old church. Although visually appealing, the church building is deteriorating with age, necessitating a substantial, ongoing maintenance budget. In its heyday, the church accommodated more than 1500 people, but today, due to decline, it accommodates only a handful. Several interconnected issues emerge, including demographic ageing, limited youth engagement, and worship practices that no longer resonate with younger generations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the church was closed and relied on live broadcasting. The church is an Affirming Ministry, historically committed to welcoming all, particularly marginalised members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, since 2014. As an Affirming church, the church is welcoming, particularly to the queer community, and this has been its mandate and vision since 2014. Despite the '*everyone is welcome*' mantra, the congregation has suffered a massive decline from the 1960s to the present, and there is no phase in history when the church has shown signs of growth, but rather a relatively steady and substantial decline.

b) Problems and Challenges

The faith community struggled to attract new members, particularly children, youth, and young adults who found the church unattractive and unfulfilling. The church has also failed to include a growth mandate in its mission statement. The church's mission statement omits terms such as "growth," "expansion," "evangelism," and "discipleship" that speak to growth. Traditional ways of doing church have generally been the primary deterrent, repelling children and youth. This insight helps explain the situation at St. Paul's, where worship was often perceived as repetitive and disconnected from the lived experiences of younger participants.

Most traditional Protestant liturgies are criticised for their repetitive structures and lack of engagement, which can contribute to perceptions of monotony among certain congregants. “This phenomenon, alongside broader shifts in Western society, has been cited as one factor in the decline of some mainline denominations. While some argue that the embrace of more liberal theologies has sidelined traditional spirituality, others contend that these shifts represent a faithful adaptation of Christian mission to contemporary challenges.”⁵ Even in contemporary settings, the role of the gospel and mission remains crucial. Yet, the shift from traditional spiritual practices to secular activities has raised concerns about spiritual vitality, particularly among youth. Church decline is attributed to secularisation, demographic changes, and societal shifts, alongside theological changes. Young people favour vibrant, engaging church environments with youth-led programs. The church's decision to become an Affirming Ministry in 2014 resulted in a significant membership drop due to opposition to same-sex marriages. Despite celebrating diversity, the church has struggled to attract new members and has predominantly remained a declining white middle-class entity. Efforts to foster an intercultural community have not offset the overall decline in attendance.

Furthermore, the church's problems worsened, leading to financial challenges that hindered its ability to sustain itself. It is essential to note that these financial constraints directly contribute to membership decline as the church struggles to meet its budget, pay bills, and fulfill other ministerial needs. Ageing, financial struggles, illnesses, theological shifts, membership decline, the impact of COVID-19, and general apathy among young people are among the challenges confronting the church.

⁵ Haskell, “Liberal Churches Decline.”

c) Local Church Demographics

A demographic outline of the church shows that 55% of members are aged 75-90 or 95 years, with many facing health challenges that hinder attendance. The church board, elected annually, has recently welcomed six new members from the youth group and intercultural choir, revitalising the quorum. Various church ministries are overseen by committees, including finance, communications, and outreach, with a focus on inclusion of the 2S LGBTQIA+ community. Despite previous struggles with participation due to illness or age, the addition of new members has improved functionality. Notably, 10% of members are aged 60-74, with most remaining active in leadership roles, while the 50-59 age group constitutes 5% and is also engaged in committee leadership.

e) A Dawn of New Hope

Most members aged 30-50 are new members still on probation, accounting for approximately 10-15 % of the membership. These are people who joined the church during my time as minister at St. Paul's United Church.

Over time, we see young parents with children who actively participate in church programs. Notably, most of these individuals are African immigrants who have recently joined the church through my intercultural initiatives. The church has a substantial cohort of children and young adults aged 12-30, comprising about 12% of the membership. These include senior primary school, high school, and university students. The majority are Africans, but we also have other people of colour.

A significant shift in the membership demographics has occurred since I joined St. Paul's United Church as minister. A reasonable number of young white Canadians are actively involved in

youth and children's activities, and a few younger families have joined the church. The last group is the Sunday School, which constitutes about 8% of the church's membership. This diverse group is not homogeneous; it comprises children from various backgrounds, including White, Indigenous, Black African, and Asian. However, the presence of the new members has brought relief to a church that has struggled to run its Sunday School and Vacation Bible School over the years. The impact of intercultural ministry at St. Paul's can be seen in several measurable changes:

- Children's participation increased from 1–2 attendees in 2022 to 12-26 in 2026. 30 youth attended a recent Youth Go Project at St Paul's United Church.
- Vacation Bible School enrollment grew from 8 participants to approximately 25.
- New leadership emerged, including youth and intercultural members joining the church board. About 60 people attended the Camp Duncan Family Camp in 2025.

Undoubtedly, the Church attributes its change to the intercultural approach introduced since I joined St. Paul's United Church as a minister in Feb 2022. Service attendance has increased to between 50 and 80, and sometimes 120.

Upon my joining the church in 2022, the church board asked me to draw and present a plan of action. That was an important opportunity for me to outline a vision for the church and to encourage them to rally with me in accompaniment. My plan of action was simple, specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Even though my plan covered a wider spectrum of issues related to the life of the church, it basically could be summarised and narrowed to a few achievable SMART goals, such as: to rebuild or reestablish the youth, to bring more young families and more children, to reestablish fellowships, i.e., women, men, youth, and children fellowships. I also aimed to rejuvenate the worship services to make them more vibrant,

engaging, lively, and energetic. I intentionally introduced a new method of sermon delivery, with the Bible at the centre of my theology. I introduced a youth and adult Bible study. Learning from previous African experiences, especially from ministry in the Democratic Republic of Congo and several years of ministry and leadership training in the United Methodist Church, I knew that my set goals needed a strong plan of action to sustain them. This work is a roadmap outlining specific tasks, resources, and timelines required to achieve the goals.

The action plan, grounded in the Ubuntu philosophy and intercultural theology, would provide St. Paul's United Church with a solid foundation for enhancing inclusivity. Ubuntu and intercultural theology will help the church open its doors to a much wider spectrum of people, including diverse ethnic and cultural groups and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, as I aim to demonstrate in this project. By altering the church's theology and outlook on development, mission, and discipleship, the strategy will foster optimism and positivity rather than pessimism and negativity.

Chapter 2

Justification

The justification seeks to rationalise, vindicate, and confirm the research's rationale. By validating the project and laying the groundwork for the thesis research, it demonstrates how an Ubuntu-modelled intercultural theology can lead St. Paul's United Church toward diverse, inclusive, numerical, and spiritual growth. The project thesis itself will key in, explain the significance of the research, and highlight how it fills knowledge gaps. The research question's importance, answerability, simplicity, and modesty are crucial. Does the topic tackle the church's enduring challenges or offer solutions? How practical and applicable is it in real-world settings?

Does the research provide answers to the problems it identifies and attempt to resolve the puzzles the church faces, or does it primarily aim to answer questions raised in this discussion? Does it attempt to remedy the puzzles that the church is dealing with, or does it seek to give answers to many questions raised in this discussion?

It is relevant to admission ministers, African ministers, and even White Canadian ministers who may feel lost as the church experiences decades of decline and urgently needs revitalisation.

Such an undertaking will help the church understand and appreciate the richness of African theologies and of intercultural worship. Historically, many Western theologians have unfairly dismissed African theologies and theologians as inferior. This research aims to illuminate the enduring strength of the African Church. As an African-ordained minister with significant pastoral experience in Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I brought to St. Paul's United my cultural background, my understanding of the church, my traditions, theology, and worldview – all valuable tools. My engagement with intercultural theology has revealed avenues for growth within my church in the DRC.

Furthermore, my nearly 26 (now 30) years of ministerial experience, encompassing evangelism, growth, and discipleship, combined with the United Church's intercultural theology, have informed a ministry that has proven to be public, intentional, and explicit. The church has faced decades of decline and urgently needs a strategy to revitalise its ministry and reverse its trajectory towards obsolescence. Ubuntu-guided interculturalism offers a tested, reliable, and proven path that I previously implemented successfully in my ministry, effectively transforming congregational engagement. Such pastoral experience shapes not only our theological perspectives but also our spirituality, religious beliefs, and personal character. While discipleship aims to reach all people, my primary focus has been on Africans. As an African myself, I

understand the strong community orientation prevalent among Africans and how their Ubuntu worldview prioritises collective well-being. Everything in life and all that exists should benefit the community rather than individuals. This approach to church ministry fosters an understanding of the diverse shared values, customs, and worldviews of various people from all walks of life. It recognises individual differences and advocates respect, dialogue, and mutual adaptation over assimilation. This area of study is also crucial now, as many institutions that once unified society—churches, community centres, cooperatives, and many cultural groups—are declining or even facing closure. This initiative offers a practical, experience-based approach, drawing from both the intercultural community at St. Paul’s Thunder Bay and St. Paul’s United Church. It challenges Western individualism by promoting an African-inspired communal and intercultural theology. The findings will provide guidelines, theological strategies, and narratives to ministers, church leaders, theologians, and other spiritually inclined individuals, offering insights into navigating contemporary church challenges and showcasing the project’s commitment to diversity. The work at St. Paul’s is already picking up momentum; I’ve had numerous interviews and been featured on a TV program with Diversity ThunderBay, a prominent Thunder Bay organisation promoting inclusion, and the CBC spoke with me regarding the African Choir and development initiatives at St. Paul’s. In April 2026, I will participate in a Regional Podcast with the Canadian Region of the United Church of Canada, discussing the approaches I have used to develop an intercultural ministry at St Paul’s United Church. A different podcast featuring Emo Yango and Eric Hebert-Daly, named “Things We Tell Ourselves”, is set for April 15th. Finally, I am set to speak at the United Church of Canada about managing interculturality in a previously white, middle-class congregation and to highlight the ongoing growth happening locally.

This pattern will help St. Paul's United Church serve as a route for development, fostering inclusion and recognising diverse groups as cherished children of the living God. Information about the ethnocentric ministry at St Paul's has begun circulating among other faith communities within the United Church and throughout the city. The initiative will announce the positive developments of interculturality to the wider United Church Denomination, updating them on the achievements of an African-origin, Ubuntu-inspired Intercultural approach that has transformed the essence of the church at St Paul's United Church. Ultimately, the vision promotes the progression of justice, equality, and fairness. Additionally, it is revolutionary in nature as it aims to enhance the concept of an Affirming ministry by expanding the range of inclusion and diversity to encompass more than just gender and sexuality. It tackles the enigmas, obstacles, trials, and uncertainties that the church has faced and contended with for years by truly welcoming radical inclusivity and radical hospitality. Nonetheless, the interethnic influences endorse and complement Bishop Robert Schnase's five practices for a thriving congregation: radical hospitality, passionate worship, and intentional faith.

However, this work rubber-stamps Bishop Robert Schnase's five practices of a fruitful congregation: radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith development, risk-taking mission, and extravagant hospitality. These practices speak to welcome, inclusion, generosity, spirituality, discipleship, and diversity. Lastly, the project will explain how "understanding" is important in an intercultural, multiracial context.

Chapter 3

Conceptual Framework and Definition of Terms

a) What is culture?

Before defining interculturalism, it is essential to elucidate the concept of culture since “interculturalism is derived from the combining words prefix inter - meaning between, among, mutually, and the word cultura from Latin with a suffix -ism meaning a doctrine and theory of, or a system of practice.”⁶ Collectively, the phrase refers to a framework that encourages communication, engagement, and sharing among various cultures in a community. According to Paul Michael Gallagher, “Culture can be one of the words that can be exasperating in its inclusiveness.”⁷ He outlines two primary interpretive schools that appeared in the nineteenth century. Western Enlightenment high culture perceives culture as a traditional, normative, and enduring value that has persisted throughout history and is separate from the broader context of wider society.

Additionally, “it is a repository tradition pointing to the highest available expression of human vision and value.”⁸ Culture is a complex and dynamic repository of human values, encompassing factors such as age, language, worldview, occupation, gender, sexual orientation, and various beliefs. “The notion of culture, while vast, is often conceptualised through an examination of gender, race, and ethnicity; class and economics; religion; sexual orientation; and even age.”⁹

Understanding culture is essential for fostering inclusive and diverse ministry, particularly at St.

⁶ “What Is Interculturalism? - McGill Law Journal.”

⁷ Gallagher, “Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture - Michael Paul Gallagher.”

⁸ Gallagher, “Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture - Michael Paul Gallagher.”

⁹ Gallagher, “Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture - Michael Paul Gallagher.”

Paul's United Church. It encompasses a range of elements that resist reduction to a single narrative, revealing diverse meanings and interpretations across many dimensions, including race, class, economics, and religion. For Eric Law, "culture refers to ethnic culture, the values, beliefs, arts, food, language, customs, clothing, family, organisations, and government given to people for a given period of time."¹⁰

In addition, understanding culture is crucial, as it lays the foundation for the growth and establishment of a model ministry at St. Paul's United Church. The African perspective on culture highlights its diversity, comprising myriad customs and traditions from thousands of ethnic groups, and emphasises its changing nature, influenced by geography and history. This multifaceted view of culture is vital for establishing a robust foundation for intercultural engagements. "but a vast, diverse collection of customs, traditions, beliefs, languages, and artistic expressions from over 3000 ethnic groups."¹¹ Culture is dynamic; it keeps changing according to geography, history, and interactions that emphasise community, ancestry, vibrant art, music, song, dance, and a deep sense of spiritual and natural connections. It is important to note that Africans are, for John Stewart Mbiti, "notoriously religious, as they bring their religion, culture, and spirituality in all aspects of their lives."¹² He also argued that "Africans are incurably religious."¹³ Such an overview of a people's culture and religion is useful for establishing a new ministry.

¹⁰ Law, "The Bush Was Blazing But Not Consumed."

¹¹ Dillard and Neal, "Ubuntu: The African Philosophy Of Interconnectedness - Leadership Forum Community."

¹² Henri Mbaya+Ntozakhe Cezula+, "Contribution of John S Mbiti to the Study of African Religions and African Theology and Philosophy."

¹³ Bangura and Seed (eds), "Is Africa Incurably Religious?"

b) Defining the Dominant Culture

A dominant culture refers to “the prevailing set of beliefs, values, and practices that are held by a majority group and exert considerable influence over a society, often shaping institutions and social norms, and potentially influencing other cultures within that society that determines the norm of the center.”¹⁴ It has the power to define the “other”; it is a privileged culture capable of carrying forward its vision to the present generation and determining appropriate responses to the current cultural context. Such culture can undermine an organisation’s attempts to create an inclusive environment. “These cultural norms may be accepted because they are considered convenient for the dominant culture .”¹⁵ Western European and North American Christianity has long been the dominant cultural shape of Christianity and continues to shape Canadian institutions, including the churches. In many United Churches, St. Paul's United included, there is visible white domination. The churches were predominantly white and middle-class. They established the culture and dominated church leadership for decades. It is only recently that we have seen the admission ministers from Jamaica and Africa begin to trickle in, thereby changing the narrative. The dominant culture is a mindset, a worldview, and a system that has dominated power since time immemorial. It is the one to which the others must conform; it sets the rules and the standards. The discussion of the dominant culture at this point in the project helps us understand that St. Paul's was predominantly a white, middle-class congregation with no history of interculturalism. It shapes access to power, privilege, and social capital, which sets the norms under which that access occurs. Within the dominant culture, the church's role was well defined for all involved. It was a role that lasted, on and off, for the better part of half a millennium. “The church was to be the conscience of the culture and the arbiter of morality and ethics, formulating

¹⁴ Yadav and Drew, “Dominant Culture: Definition and 10 Examples (2026).”

¹⁵ Yadav and Drew, “Dominant Culture: Definition and 10 Examples (2026).”

orthodoxy and orthopraxy.”¹⁶ The church represented white supremacy and colonialism. They owned the church building and the money; they were the trustees and controlled everything. It was their church and their property, the white church-owned racialised participants in Engage Difference!

I have listened to many racialised people who lament feeling completely not part of their church or deciding to stop serving on church committees when they suspect that their skin colour, and not their views, is not wanted. They could not sing in the choir because they could not read the music. They could not preach or lead worship because of their English accent. Those who are elected to serve on the board are placeholders who do not feel safe. They can not stand up to oppression and injustice. They are just there to warm the chairs as place holders and for political reasons. People who sing in white choirs are there for mere colouring and the political imagery.

These are some of the heavy issues we deal with daily as we cultivate interculturalism. It is a difficult, combative approach to ministry—tantamount to a theological war: a struggle for space, relevance, and recognition. If the church wants to adopt interculturalism, there should be a willingness to confront the dominant culture and replace it with one that fosters equality, justice, and fairness in access to power and privileges. The marginalised and those on the margins know the power and privilege of the dominant culture well. However, confronting these powers and privileges is not a simple task. In any case, understanding these cultural dynamics is crucial for the church or anyone seeking inclusivity. Such knowledge of how to both survive and how to struggle against them. It connects very well with the situation at St. Paul’s United Church, where the board and committees were predominantly white because the church was a predominantly

¹⁶ “The Church: Dominant, Sub-, or Countercultural? — Faith Beyond Belief.”

white, middle-class congregation. However, recent changes in the church result from its commitment to interculturalism.

c) What is interculturalism?

At this juncture, we will attempt to answer the question: In any case, to set the ball rolling, we shall begin by establishing a clear distinction and definition of terms. Multiculturalism, interculturalism, and cross-culturalism help us understand how these terms work in this discussion. What is interculturalism and interculturality? What is an intercultural ministry? Let me hasten to note that the word "interculturalism" can be used interchangeably with other related words and concepts to mean cultural exchange, cross-cultural interaction, interculturality, intercultural dialogue, multiculturalism, cross-ethnocentrism, and others, to refer to shared understanding and engagement between cultures in a society, and is often contrasted with coexistence. My understanding of interculturalism and interculturality is influenced by my African culture, experiences, and Ubuntu-based worldview as an African United Methodist minister who was born, educated, and employed for many years in Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Ubuntu philosophy, which emphasizes interconnectedness ("I am because we are"), offers a potent framework for interculturalism by encouraging compassion, shared humanity, and collective responsibility. "It also serves as a counterbalance to individualism and directs African approaches to justice, education, and social cohesion in diverse societies by prioritising communication, empathy, and shared dignity over division."¹⁷ If these values became part of a community such as St. Paul's United Church, they would help the church grow, embrace, and welcome other people wholeheartedly. They also emphasize that, "communal, community, and group values are valued over individualistic

¹⁷ Mayaka and Truell, "Ubuntu and Its Potential Impact on the International Social Work Profession."

pursuits, thereby fostering environments where mutual respect and cooperation thrive.”¹⁸

Through this model, the church provides a safe space for diverse groups of newcomers and strangers. “It goes beyond multiculturalism’s focus on the coexistence of diverse groups by promoting meaningful interaction, relationships, exchange, and the creation of shared experiences and values. The pathway offers the view that we all benefit when actively encouraging connections between people from different cultures.”¹⁹ According to Grace Ji-Sun Kin and Jan Alderidge, “We use the word ‘intercultural’ to include ‘interracial,’ but in a wider sense, including nationalities and ethnicities as well as races.”²⁰ The Church recognises that some experiences can be joyful, but others can be challenging, painful, and uncomfortable. The approach can also be a form of contextual theology; it adopts many names for God, as well as symbols, metaphors, and images. “It builds its theology from the many cultures, experiences, and world views. It uses many different images and ways of communication in drawing policies.”²¹ It is theology in action, or contextual theology. There is an open invitation to dialogue through which the church allows itself to be constantly changed. “Because of the complexity of language, interculturalism endeavours to create a church where people can speak many languages .”²²

People at St Paul’s speak many languages, and they also speak English differently. St. Paul’s United Church also seeks to become an adaptive church that adopts new avenues as it learns from its mistakes and grows from its past. Both St. Paul’s Church and the new, growing

¹⁸ Mayaka and Truell, “Ubuntu and Its Potential Impact on the International Social Work Profession.”

¹⁹ Maykel et al., “Interculturalism: A New Diversity Ideology with Interrelated Components of Dialogue, Unity, and Identity Flexibility - Verkuyten - 2020 - European Journal of Social Psychology - Wiley Online Library.”

²⁰ Maykel et al., “Interculturalism: A New Diversity Ideology with Interrelated Components of Dialogue, Unity, and Identity Flexibility - Verkuyten - 2020 - European Journal of Social Psychology - Wiley Online Library.”

²¹ Mayaka and Truell, “Ubuntu and Its Potential Impact on the International Social Work Profession.”

²² Fennell, “Intercultural Visions: Called to Be the Church (e-Book) – United Church Bookstore.”

ethnocentric community are benefiting from the multiple advantages of embracing interculturality.

In fighting for equality and justice and in advocating for the world that is home for everyone,

Eduardo Galeano argued, "Each person shines with his light. No two flames are alike."²³

However, it is worth noting that a single dominant culture does not exist; rather, a common culture emerges across diverse terrain. That is a new culture, a culture of welcome and radical hospitality. The model challenges the church to seek new ways to share resources, redress power imbalances, and challenge unfair colonial systems. It seeks the equitable participation of all, both within and outside the church.

d) The distinction between interculturalism and multiculturalism, cross-cultural

In common usage, the terms "interculturalism," "multiculturalism," and "cross-cultural" are often used interchangeably, but they have distinct meanings. This paper aims to clarify distinctions as we examine interculturality at St. Paul's United Church and the intercultural community.

e) Defining Multiculturalism

While these terms refer to societies with diverse cultures, multiculturalism simply refers to the existence of multiple cultures within the society. At the same time, interculturalism goes further by emphasising active "interaction, dialogue, and understanding between these different cultures, promoting a sense of unity and shared learning rather than just passive coexistence; essentially, multiculturalism is about having different cultures, while interculturalism is about engaging with different cultures".²⁴ A multicultural society contains several cultural or ethnic groups. People

²³ "The Church: Dominant, Sub-, or Countercultural? — Faith Beyond Belief."

²⁴ "Full Article: A Systematic Review of Studies on Interculturalism and Intercultural Dialogue."

live alongside one another, but cultural groups do not necessarily interact. For example, in a multicultural neighbourhood, people may frequent ethnic grocery stores and restaurants without interacting with neighbours from other countries. Although these terms have slight differences, they all point to the convergence of people from different cultures. It encourages communities and individuals to develop a deep understanding of and respect for all cultures. Interculturalism focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas, norms, and deep relationships. In such communities, “no one is left unchanged because everyone learns from one another and grows together.”²⁵

f) Defining Cross-Culturalism

It simply states that two or more cultures interact. It does not describe the nature of the interaction nor make a judgment of that interaction or those relationships. It involves comparing different cultures and navigating the differences. It's a learning phase for everyone, since we can all learn and benefit from our differences. In cross-cultural societies, one culture acts as the norm, and all other cultures are compared with or contrasted with it. “As long as two cultures are interacting, no matter the justice of that interaction, it is cross-cultural.”²⁶

Chapter 4

a) The History of Interculturalism in the United Church of Canada

The United Church of Canada holds a theocentric theology, which is broadening to include other theologies. This shift in theological focus is a desire to foster relationships with others and to engage in collaborative efforts with nontheistic and nonreligious traditions. The United Church

²⁵ Schriefer, “What’s the Difference between Multicultural, Intercultural, and Cross-Cultural Communication?”

²⁶ Schriefer, “What’s the Difference between Multicultural, Intercultural, and Cross-Cultural Communication?”

of Canada committed to becoming an intercultural church in 2006. In making that commitment, the church was to form “mutually reciprocal relationships among and between cultures.”²⁷ By adopting interculturalism, St. Paul’s United Church is responding to the United Church of Canada’s denominational call to embrace cultural pluralism, work collaboratively with others, affirm individuals who differ from them, and foster an inclusive and welcoming environment. The church grappled with numerous questions and puzzles, such as how to apply the concept of mutual reciprocity to its theology, spirituality, and institutional life. How can we respond to the New Creed’s call to live in concern for all creation? How can we fulfil the desire to be fully inclusive of all people and all cultures? Similarly, in responding to these questions, the church is an intercultural church. According to the United Church of Canada, interculturalism regards everyone, whether or not they are of faith, and the church regards it as its responsibility to the other. However, by making such a bold decision, the church extended its invitation to go beyond interfaith dialogue to a celebration of cultural diversity. It is important to note that the 39th Council of the United Church in 2006 declared that the church must be welcoming, inclusive, and “intercultural.”²⁸ The church decided to “mutually respect diversity and to accept the full participation of all Aboriginal, Francophone, ethnic, and ethnic majority constituencies in the total life of the church, mission, and practices of the whole church.”²⁹ According to the vision of the church at that time, “all people within the church, regardless of their racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds, should be invited to participate equally, or it is even more important for the church to work with others beyond its ecclesiastical boundaries.”³⁰ St. Paul’s United Church is aware of

²⁷ Seonwoo, “Finding Rhythm for Multicultural Worship.”

²⁸ Chane, “Intercultural Dialogue in 21st Century | Together - Towards a Cultural Understanding of the Other.”

²⁹ Hyuk, “Relation without Relation.”

³⁰ Hyuk, “Relation without Relation.”

the theological window and opportunity to exploit it to its benefit. The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer once stated, “The church is the church only when it exists for others.”³¹ For Bonhoeffer, “The church should move from a church-centered to an other-centred ecclesiology to share the problems of ordinary human life.”³² The word *'other'* can be problematic if understood as the subject of a mission; there is a way to understand it as *'the Other.'* The ‘thou’ of the other person presents the ‘I’ with a barrier beyond which ‘I’ cannot go.” There is a need for St. Paul's to grow from owning a building to seeking the “church” as in the community of people.

b) Interculturalism and the call for Justice, equity, and fairness

As many people from diverse walks of life come to St. Paul's United Church for worship, connection, and community building, there should be a safe space that welcomes everyone and treats people with justice and respect. The United Church of Canada defines and characterises an intercultural church, among other things, as “justice-seeking.”³³ Such a church steadfastly and authentically seeks to ensure equal access to power and equal privileges. It is important to note that, at the time of writing, St. Paul's United Church is undergoing a transition as it becomes a home to new residents. How is St. Paul's welcoming new people? Is repeating the word *'all are welcome'* enough to make someone feel welcome? How does a justice-seeking intercultural church demonstrate welcome? The book of Isaiah can help shed light (Isaiah 64:5 says, “*You welcome them who rejoice to do justice*”). The joy of welcoming people and opening doors must go hand in hand with a commitment to doing justice. As a Christian, doing justice is part of my calling and duty. “Justice means equal distribution of power and privilege among all people.”³⁴

³¹ Hinkle, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer Quotes.”

³² Hinkle, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer Quotes.”

³³ Fennell, “Intercultural Visions: Called to Be the Church (e-Book) – United Church Bookstore.”

³⁴ Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

Even as St. Paul's United Church makes significant strides towards justice and equality, there is still a long way to go and much work to do. To achieve this goal, St Paul's continues to teach and engage its members on issues of justice and equality through *understanding*.

The church strives to become a more inclusive church and must grapple with many theological, ethical, and political questions. Some of these questions are explored here through the lens of the United Church's New Creed: "We are called to be the Church: ...to seek justice ... God calls people, churches, and communities to welcome people as they are and to seek justice."³⁵ To further understand the church's call to embrace interculturalism and walk on the path of justice, let us allude to Romans 8:28-29. We know that all things work together for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose. For those whom God foreknew, God also predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. Being conformed to the image of Christ raises the question of what that image is in the world today. It is important to note that, when people from diverse cultures come together, "the power dynamic in which one group dominates and claims more power than others is inevitable."³⁶

In this noble calling, St. Paul's United Church, how does the Church take the form of Christ in the world? The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer answered that Christ takes the form in the world as *church*: For Bonhoeffer, "Christ exists as church-family or church-community."³⁷ Furthermore, the church conforms to the image of Christ when it is for others as Christ is for others. In Bonhoeffer's view, Jesus of Nazareth, "the human being for others," is the defining characteristic of the church in the image of Christ. The church and

³⁵ Bardswich, "Intercultural Ministries Living into Transformation," "Vision for Becoming an Intercultural Church,,"

³⁶ Law, "Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store."

³⁷ "Ethics After Devastation - International Bonhoeffer Society, English Language Section."

community metamorphose and remodel through human interaction, encounter, and engagement with one another in the spirit of Jesus, the Emmanuel: God with us, God for us. This call to conform to the image of Christ has a social intention, and this intention is at the heart of what it means to seek justice. When God calls the church to seek justice, the church acts by the justice of God's covenant, which is expressed in the commandment to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and to love your neighbour as yourself. "Loving your neighbour means making room for your neighbour as yourself, making room for your neighbour in your heart, mind, and soul, and eventually loving your neighbour as yourself, just like God has made room in covenantal care for us human beings."³⁸ Loving the other is a single word of *justice* that we are all called to seek. Who is the other? The other is the stranger, the new person who is also unknown. We are not naturally comfortable with this other person, and therefore, embracing them would require a shift in our mindset. Eric Law looked at the teachings of Jesus that advocated for justice. Jesus Christ lifted his eyes on the disciples and said, "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh...but woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep."³⁹ In Luke (6:20-26), using folklore, Luke recorded the following parable to deepen the meaning of the passage above, using images of the afterlife. "There was a rich man who was wearing fine purple linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores, who desired to feed on what fell from the rich man's table; moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his

³⁸ "The Moral Meaning of Loving One's Neighbor - Christ Over All."

³⁹ Law, "Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store."

bosom.”⁴⁰ And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy upon me,’ and he sent Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, ‘for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. In these stories, such as Luke 16:19-30 and Luke 18:18, those of prestige, wealth, power, and privilege are discouraged. “They also had the additional responsibility of giving up and redistributing their wealth and power, but the poor and the oppressed did not have to do anything. They were simply blessed.”⁴¹ They were demonstrating righteousness, endurance, and faithfulness. In becoming an intercultural church, those with power must be willing to share it with those without power. Furthermore, Jesus also taught that “He who is the greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”⁴² (Matthew 23:1-12) Jesus even went further, saying that those who serve and humble themselves are the greatest. “These passages also point out and confirm that, in the Christ community, there was to be even distribution of power among the people ...the only one who had more power was God in heaven.”⁴³ Even so, God became human through Jesus, who exemplified greatness in serving and being powerless on the cross. “The powerful in churches, societies, and governing bodies are being challenged to give up their power and wealth and redistribute it to achieve equality among the people of God.”⁴⁴ The powerful will face the judgment of God for their use of power and privilege. In some places in Scripture, the powerful face deposition. “ ... It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a

⁴⁰ Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

⁴¹ Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

⁴² Bible Gatew., “Bible Gateway Passage.”Historical

⁴³ Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

⁴⁴ Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of God”⁴⁵ (Matthew 19:24). To the powerless, the emphasis is on endurance and faithfulness. In the Bible, God sides with the weak, the oppressed, the suffering, the poor, and the downtrodden. They are loved by God, even though they have no worldly goods or power. “They are blessed even though they are suffering now... they are powerful in God’s sight even though they are oppressed now.”⁴⁶ God will deliver them as he did the Israelites in Exodus 14:13-14, “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today ... The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.”⁴⁷ Jesus never told the poor to sell their possessions and give to the poor; rather, he loved them, blessed them, comforted them, ate with them, taught them, served them, and healed them. liberated them, died for them, and resurrected them. He infused them with the power of the Holy Spirit and empowered them to teach, heal, and forgive in God's name. The gospel challenges the powerful to take up the cross and follow Jesus. “Salvation for the powerful comes with a decision: to give up and to take the cross, and the powerless have no choice to make because they are already on the cross .”⁴⁸ In my experience at St. Paul’s United Church, the church board permitted me to initiate intercultural services in their building. They have old musical instruments to facilitate this. They gave \$1800 to support that new ministry. More than eight board members and other church members attended the first gathering, welcomed people, and provided coffee and tea. The growth of the intercultural ministry at St. Paul’s United Church is also attributable to the church's attitude toward newcomers. Although some people struggle to welcome strangers, and a few have left the church because of this, the church is generally loving,

⁴⁵ Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

⁴⁶ Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

⁴⁷ Bible Gatew., “Bible Gateway Passage.”

⁴⁸ Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

accepting, and welcoming. There are people with an amazing attitude who helped me to impact on other people's lives. One's attitude can be a game changer in ministry. Many immigrant communities worship in basements of churches and other buildings. The basement is cheaper to rent. Most white churches do not want to worship with African groups because their music is loud and undocumented. Most Africans and other immigrants cannot read music; they cannot sing in white choirs or sing hymnal songs. Yet Africans sing from their hearts and play instruments in time with their songs. They know their songs well. While white people know their music and can read it well, Africans find that music cold, unspiritual, and unattractive. It is in such cases where understanding is needed. Many churches want to grow, but they are rigid and cannot understand the culture, worldview, music, and religiosity of other people.

At St. Paul's United Church, the establishment of intercultural services, supported by a \$ 1,800 donation from the church board, has been crucial in fostering a welcoming environment for newcomers, especially those from immigrant communities. While challenges exist, such as reluctance among some members to embrace diversity, the overall church culture promotes acceptance. The integration of the African Choir has been significant; initially met with mixed reactions, their presence is now celebrated, demonstrating a shift in attitude towards cultural inclusivity. There is an emphasis that, for churches to grow interculturally, they must adapt their practices, be open to sharing spaces and privileges, and prioritise love and acceptance over rigid adherence to tradition, aligning with Jesus' teachings on equality and justice. In another discussion, someone said to me, "In this church, there is only one choir director, and all music worship must be under the management of that director; no one should do a choir or ever sing music." Such laws are put in place to protect a job rather than to expand a ministry. For me, church laws and dogma should not focus on exclusion, prohibition, or building walls. They must

not be draconian and inhuman, especially at a time when the church is facing extinction due to decline. Such is not the time for dogmatic, theological, and doctrinal rigidity and inflexibility, but a time of self-introspection. A time to pivot away from unproductive, habitual practices that have ruined the once great church and brought it to its knees and near extinction. It is a crucial time to rebuild formulas and examine what works. I advocate for new ways of doing church with bold discipleship, deep spirituality, and daring justice. A time to operate from the position of weakness and answer the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”⁴⁹ This is a calling to ministry, to evangelism, to interculturality, to discipleship, and to teaching and faith formation. Without the willingness to understand, the willingness to stand for justice, and the spirit of fairness, interculturality and growth remain very difficult and illusory. “The United Church of Canada encourages building relations without breaching the other’s identity.”⁵⁰

Chapter 5

a) The Historical Development of Intercultural Theology

Historical background will help us be more grounded and provide better insights into intercultural theology. The term "intercultural theology" encompasses diverse interpretations and theological perspectives that advocate for genuine inclusion. Originating in linguistics and international pedagogy, it emphasises a decolonised theology that integrates overlooked concepts

⁴⁹ Bible Gatew., “Bible Gateway Passage.”

⁵⁰ “Sharing Concern for Justice: Becoming an Intercultural Church as a Postcolonial Mission Practice in the Canadian Context of Integrative Multiculturalism.”

from Western traditions. Various non-Western theologies, including Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology, contribute to this field. Swiss missiologist Richard Friedli, recognised by some as a founding figure of intercultural theology, aims to address the complexities of global cultural dynamics and the notion of irreducible otherness within societal and religious contexts.⁵¹ Margull was hypersensitive to anything reminiscent of fascist thought, and his views were profoundly transformed by his encounters with Buddhism in Tokyo and Kyoto, as well as by his involvement in establishing the World Council of Churches' sub-unit on religious dialogue. "This collaboration led to the trilingual book series they edited from 1975 on: *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity*, which currently comprises 150 or more published volumes, mostly in English, French, and German texts as well."⁵² Nowadays, the term "intercultural theology" is used without reference to its history in the 1970s and 1980s. Although the term was publicly introduced in 1975, it was not immediately adopted in the English-speaking world because it was not yet in English dictionaries. In addition, "the term 'intercultural' had not entered the English language in any specific sense, and even less so had the combined term '*intercultural theology*!'"⁵³ The term did not appear in the most well-known theological dictionaries and handbooks, such as the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Lossky, 1991) or the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Cross, 1991), and is silent on this issue. From 1975 to the mid-1990s, "the word 'intercultural' was mainly to be found in the theological discussions of Europe and the international educational discourses."⁵⁴ Hollenweger produced a

⁵¹ Justine and John, "Intercultural Theology, Contextual Theology, Intercultural Hermeneutics."

⁵² Justine and John, "Intercultural Theology, Contextual Theology, Intercultural Hermeneutics." Hermeneutics." JustineJustineJustine

⁵³ Justine and John, "Intercultural Theology, Contextual Theology, Intercultural Hermeneutics."

⁵⁴ Justine and John, "Intercultural Theology, Contextual Theology, Intercultural Hermeneutics."

three-volume study, *Interkulturelle Theologie*, in 1979, 1982, and 1988. Later, the Friedli in 1987 and 1997. At the same time, the Catholic Theological Faculty of Frankfurt University established an academic association, *Theologie Interkulturell*, which, a year later, began publishing a series of books under this title. In October 1986, Tho Sundermeier, a missiologist from Heidelberg University, was considering establishing a Department of Intercultural Theology within the university's theological faculty. Likewise, a preliminary report was published in 1989, but institutional plans never materialised. “The term he chose to describe the step from local incarnation (intercultural) of faith to that of its participation in the ecumenical conversation with other local incarnations was already around, namely *inculturation*.”⁵⁵ Bosch acknowledges that theological perspectives differ when we think interculturally, cross-culturally, or contextually. A prominent example is the name change at the end of 2003 at Fuller Theological Seminary, from the School of Mission to Fuller Intercultural Theological Seminary in 2005. That was important still; just as Fuller switched from mission to intercultural theology, “the declaration seems to suggest a tactical update of the toolbox of missionary theology, without changing its basic parameters.”⁵⁶ This usage of the intercultural theology term falls short of the momentum that was achieved in the 1970s when Richard Driedli called it “false labelling.”⁵⁷ In the meantime, social sciences, medicine, business studies, and education have adopted the objective ‘intercultural’ term. At this juncture, we want to discuss intercultural theology.

⁵⁵ Bosch, “Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission.”

⁵⁶ Paas, “Intercultural Theology and Missiology.”

⁵⁷ Paas, “Intercultural Theology and Missiology.”

b) What is intercultural theology?

Cities are places where people can easily become isolated, which helps explain how interculturalism can build community and reduce isolation in culturally diverse cities. There is a strong belief that we all benefit when we actively encourage connections among people from different cultures. Intercultural theology is, for some, a theological reflection upon “the process of interculturalization, the interconnectedness of cultures, and the ‘global ecumene’ or ‘correlation of cultures,’ as described by Ulf Hannerz in his book *Cultural Complexity*. Intercultural theology is not a theological reflection about “the differences between Western thinking about the factual overlaps between people or the existing cultural universals and anthropological constants, knowing that cross-cultural communication does not show differences but brings them about, as Fredrick Barth shows in his groundbreaking book on *Ethnic Boundaries*.”⁵⁸ Just like intercultural philosophy, intercultural theology assumes that “common heritage could face reconstruction to a much larger degree than would be suggested by emphatic affirmation of a difference that is irresolvable.”⁵⁹ For Klaus Hock Rostock and Volker Kuster, intercultural theology is contextual theology derived from human experiences, which differ. Fremdheit als Heimat, another founding father of “intercultural theology,” argued that “cultural circulation was happening between the Central African concept of *imana* and the “Indonesian complex in Africa.”⁶⁰ That said, intercultural theology needs to combine story, analysis, dream, and critical interpretation in theological interpretation and articulation. For him, “intercultural theology is both global and ecumenical and relies significantly on the narrative

⁵⁸ Griswold, “Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning.”

⁵⁹ Bewaji and Ramose, “The Bewaji, Van Binsbergen and Ramose Debate on Ubuntu.”

⁶⁰ Bewaji and Ramose, “The Bewaji, Van Binsbergen and Ramose Debate on Ubuntu.”

within cultural settings.”⁶¹ The Bible serves as a foundational source for intercultural theology, not merely as proof texts for dogma, but as a universal collection of writings whose meanings emerge through diverse community engagement. This form of theology addresses various questions influenced by context. Liberation theology, connected to sociology, economics, and political science, as well as to intercultural theology, also incorporates insights from communication and migration studies. Notably, it has evolved within German faculties from missiology to intercultural theology, with figures like liberation theologians and charismatic preachers using Scripture to engage with their understanding of God. “Objectivity is ultimately a matter of personal relations and communicative interactions.”⁶² Similarly, intercultural theological dialogue has a similar critical function. It is an unavoidable reality that every Christian community reads the scriptures contextually, understands the triune God using the idioms and images available in that environment, and shapes discipleship in a manner that fits the particular context. Christian communities and theologians have always had a certain means of limiting the distorting influence of culture through their engagement with the Scriptures and their participation in a Christian community that stretches across history.⁶³

c) Connections between Intercultural Theology, Ubuntu philosophy.

Intercultural theology is the integration of Ubuntuism with various African theological expressions, moving beyond Western dominance by engaging local cultural contexts, African philosophies, and oral traditions, as well as academic and non-academic sources integral to the

⁶¹ Justine and John, “Intercultural Theology, Contextual Theology, Intercultural Hermeneutics.”

⁶² Toren, “Intercultural Theology as a Three-Way Conversation: Beyond the Western Dominance of Intercultural Theology.”

⁶³ Toren, “Intercultural Theology as a Three-Way Conversation: Beyond the Western Dominance of Intercultural Theology.”

African worldview. My version of intercultural theology is, in a sense, part of contextual theology, which recognises that all theologies are contextual and drawn from diverse ethnic, social, political, and religious backgrounds. “It is a theology that fosters religious dialogue between religious pluralism and cultural diversity within Christianity.”⁶⁴ As an approach to doing theology, “intercultural theology can be seen as a postcolonial response or post-Vatican II development in the world and in the church, respectively.”⁶⁵ In this discussion, I will refer to several African scholars who have contributed to the development of African intercultural theology and Ubuntu philosophy. Stanlake Samkange is a Zimbabwean historian and philosopher, among the first to refer to Ubuntuism, which he termed Hunhuism, defining it as the recognition and affirmation of others' humanity to establish respectful relations. Although Samkange did not engage directly with intercultural theology, his contribution to Ubuntuism remains foundational to the discourse. Desmond Tutu is a well-known theologian and Nobel Prize winner. Tutu was instrumental in popularising Ubuntu in the public sphere, particularly as the ethical foundation for South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He emphasised its role in restorative justice, forgiveness, and interconnectedness. Desmond Tutu's theology aligns well with the principles of intercultural theology through his integration of African beliefs and African spirituality, particularly ubuntu, and his universalistic commitment to justice, reconciliation, and human dignity across cultural and religious boundaries.

Some of the key tenets of Tutu's theology include ubuntu, inclusive love and interfaith engagement, practical theology, and a fusion of Black and African theologies. Tutu is important in the intercultural theological discourse, as he emphasised, “one's interconnectedness with

⁶⁴ Toren, “Intercultural Theology as a Three-Way Conversation: Beyond the Western Dominance of Intercultural Theology.”

⁶⁵ Toren, “Intercultural Theology as a Three-Way Conversation: Beyond the Western Dominance of Intercultural Theology.”

everyone and everything.”⁶⁶ Other important scholars in the development of intercultural theology in Africa include Nelson Mandela. The first post-apartheid president of South Africa, who embodied and promoted both Ubuntu and interculturalism as true and guiding principles for an open, inclusive, compassionate, reciprocal, respectful, and dignified society. Mogobe Ramose, a prominent African philosopher; John Mbiti, a modern Kenyan theologian; Sylvia Tamale; Paul Nnodin; Austin Okigbo; and Fainos Mangena are also well-known contributors to the development of both Ubuntu philosophy and African intercultural theology. John Stewart Mbiti is more prominent and pivotal in both African theology and intercultural theology. His work is foundational to contextualising the Christian faith within African thought forms and idioms, challenging Western theologies and their assumptions, and advocating for a genuine “Africanization” of Christianity. His work includes African religion and philosophy, the concept of time, and the contextualization of African theology. Mbiti is recognised in intercultural theology. discourses for his writings on dialogue and exchange, and for bringing African perspectives into the global intercultural conversations. He is the foundational figure whose work provides the cultural origins of intercultural theology, and his method of blending Christian theology and African traditions to create an authentic new “socio-cultural and religious product within a sound biblical framework is a core tenet of modern intercultural theological study.

⁶⁷Kwame Bediako is another scholar who contributed to the development of African intercultural theology. Bediako argued that “there is no context-free gospel, since we always receive the gospel as culture-bearing humans. God is outside creation, but his divine revelation takes cultural forms.”⁶⁸ African Christianity, which is ethnocentric in nature, provides “ingenuity necessary for Christianity across the world ... He argued that African Christianity provides models for

⁶⁶ Suderman, “‘Lessons Learned from Tutu’ by Professor Andrew Suderman – PXD.”

⁶⁷ Griswold, “Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning.”

⁶⁸ Bediako, “African Theology for a World Christianity.”

engaging religious pluralism, cross-culturalism, and not being beholden to imperialism.”⁶⁹ Other Africans who contributed to the emergence of African intercultural theology include Charles Nyamiti (Tanzania), Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Ghana), Musa Dube (Botswana), Kasimbi Kanyoro (Kenya), Lamin Sanneh (Gambia), Justin Ukpong (Nigeria), and M.L. Daneel (South Africa).

d) The Biblical Origin of Interculturalism

The biblical and theological foundations for interculturalism, mission, and ministry are deeply intertwined in the rich tapestry of Scripture, from Genesis’s first breath to Revelation’s prophetic culmination. “These foundations anchor the essence of intercultural theology, mission, discipleship, and ministry, articulating God’s profound inclusivity and boundless love for all humanity.”⁷⁰ The book of Genesis lays a fundamental foundational premise that undergirds the value of cultural diversity. When God creates humanity ‘in God’s image’ (Genesis 1:27), every human being, irrespective of cultural or ethnic identity, bears the image of God, the *imago Dei*.

This seminal concept lays a cornerstone for a theology that regards cultural diversity not as a divide but as a beautiful reflection of God’s multifaceted creation. Furthermore, as Genesis unfolds, we see the offspring of the first family forming diverse nations and peoples. Each has a unique colour, culture, and language. (Genesis 10) The Tower of Babel incident (Genesis 11:1-9) may have dispersed humans and instigated linguistic diversity, but it still laid the groundwork for the divine plan to unite all in love. The Old Testament frequently echoes God’s concern for all nations. In addition, the lives of Abraham and Sarah illustrate the Bible's intercultural motif.

⁶⁹ Bediako, “African Theology for a World Christianity.”

⁷⁰ Hill, “Intercultural Mission and Ministry – ‘Unity in Diversity, Embracing All Cultures.’”

e) Abraham and Sarah as Intercultural Ambassadors

The Biblical stories, particularly that of Abraham and Sarah, illustrate valuable models for establishing intercultural ministries at St. Paul's United Church. Their journey from Mesopotamia to Canaan serves as a metaphor for immigration, highlighting the importance of inclusivity and openness in ministry. (Genesis 12:9) Notably, they encountered various tribes in Canaan, such as the Hittites and Canaanites, who welcomed them, demonstrating a narrative of hospitality towards immigrants. They settled at Bethel, Ai, Negev, Beersheba, and Egypt (Genesis 13:18, 13:3, Genesis 22:2, Genesis 21:33). This reflects Paul's intercultural mission, emphasising the need to open doors wider for all. Throughout the narrative, Abraham and Sarah's portrayal is that of a "model of how to live at peace with the host peoples of the land and share ownership of the land."⁷¹ There is no explicit indication from the author of Genesis that people of the land should be expelled or destroyed, or that strangers were posing a threat. The immigrant couple demonstrated respect, showing deep regard for the local people and their rituals and practices. According to Carroll Stuhlmueller, "Israel's ancestors accepted and interacted with Canaanite forms of worship and lifestyle and even worshipped at traditional Canaanite shrines."⁷² That is a clear demonstration of intercultural mutuality and cultural exchange. "Abraham and Sarah were able to share the benefit of the land, overcome conflict and cries, and even mediate blessings to the inhabitants of the land."⁷³ The story of Abraham's encounter and interaction with Melchizedek, the king and priest of Salem, or Jerusalem, is a

⁷¹ Nguyen, SVD, vanThanh. "Biblical Foundations of Interculturality," n.d., "Biblical Foundations of Interculturality."

⁷² Nguyen, SVD, vanThanh. "Biblical Foundations of Interculturality," n.d., "Biblical Foundations of Interculturality."

⁷³ Nguyen, SVD, vanThanh. "Biblical Foundations of Interculturality," n.d., "Biblical Foundations of Interculturality."

good illustration of an ideal intercultural encounter. In this short, intercalated vignette about rescuing his nephew Lot (Genesis 14:18-20), Melchizedek, a Canaanite king and priest from a different religious tradition and culture, is mentioned. The intercultural exchange reveals that Abraham respected local customs by accepting his host's hospitality. The king then blessed Abraham with these words: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth; blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand"⁷⁴ (Genesis 14:19-20). By gladly receiving a blessing from Melchizedek, Abraham acknowledged the power and legitimacy of the Canaanite "God Most High" (in Hebrew El 'Elyon). Norman Habel correctly noted, "For Abraham to accept the blessing from Melchizedek is to acknowledge his power and authority and his rightful priesthood of the sacred site in Canaan and his right to rule the territory of the Jebusites."⁷⁵ Abraham's cultural adaptation and sensitivity are startling, to say the least. But that is not all. Abraham even responded with a gesture of mutuality by offering a generous tithe, presumably from his looted treasures. "Abraham's interaction led to the promotion of peace with the settled inhabitants, and consequently, he was welcomed as a friend in the new host country and culture." Abraham always recognized himself as a 'resident alien' and identified himself as such. At the end of his life he pleaded with the Hittites, saying, "Although I am a resident alien among you, sell me from your holdings a piece of property for a burial ground, that I may bury my dead wife"⁷⁶ (Gen 23:4). This is a clear indication that even until the very end of his life, Abraham never ceased being a stranger in the land of promise. In this episode, Abraham is portrayed as respecting the law of the land and as willing to purchase property on the terms set

⁷⁴ Nguyen, SVD, vanThanh. "Biblical Foundations of Interculturality," n.d., "Biblical Foundations of Interculturality."

⁷⁵ Nguyen, SVD, vanThanh. "Biblical Foundations of Interculturality," n.d., "Biblical Foundations of Interculturality."

⁷⁶ Nguyen, SVD, vanThanh. "Biblical Foundations of Interculturality," n.d., "Biblical Foundations of Interculturality."

by the residents. The bottom line is that Abraham and Sarah interacted amicably with the inhabitants from diverse cultures and tribes. Moreover, wherever they moved and lived, the immigrant couple fostered a way of life that mediated blessing. They did not simply coexist but became ambassadors of goodwill to the people they encountered, seeking to transform their own lives and those of others. As bridge builders, they shared their resources and adhered to applicable local protocols and laws. Assessing their behaviour and attitude, Abraham and Sarah fulfilled the three criteria or characteristics of real interculturality that Fr . Pernia has proposed, namely a) recognition of other cultures, b) respect of cultural differences, and c) promotion of healthy interaction between cultures. Since they sought to create an atmosphere in which each culture could transform or enrich the other, Abraham and Sarah are considered paradigmatic figures of interculturality. Furthermore, from a theological-missiological perspective, one can discern the biblical foundations for the interaction, exchange, and mutual enrichment of all nations in response to God's mission and calling. The call to Abraham, in which God promises that all nations will be blessed through him (Genesis 12:1-3), and the book of Jonah, in which God's compassion extends to all the people of the gentile city of Nineveh, testify to God's overarching plan that transcends cultural and national boundaries. In the New Testament, Jesus embodies this intercultural mission. Jesus crosses societal, cultural, and religious boundaries, engaging in dialogue and offering love to all. Jesus of Nazareth was born and raised in a particular culture. He was a Jew who spoke Palestinian Aramaic and a Semitic way of speaking and thinking. One must realise that Jesus dressed like a Jew, prayed like a Jew, and taught and argued like a Jewish rabbi. His life, mission, thinking, and teaching were rooted in the Jewish culture and identity. The Evangelist John puts it very plainly: "The Word was flesh" (John 1:14). The simple yet profound statement indicates that the Word found human expression within

Jewish culture. Jesus was a Jew, and within his Jewishness, he found his identity and a sense of belonging. Over the past several decades, New Testament scholars have correctly stressed that understanding first-century Judaism is crucial to the historical Jesus and the origins of early Christianity. Likewise, if we wish to understand and appreciate Jesus's intercultural dialogue or interculturability, we must first recognise his deep Jewishness. Jesus' mission was primarily to the Jews, typically within Jewish territory (Mark 6:7-13). He clearly said that he "was sent only to the lost sheep in the house of Israel" (Mt 15:24) even though he healed both Jews and Gentiles (Mk 5:1-8; 7:31-37). The story of Jesus healing the daughter of the Syrophenician (Mk 8:24-30) or Canaanite (Mt 15:21-28) woman is a good example of mutual intercultural exchange. The belief and strength of this poor and widowed foreigner compelled Jesus to the point of attributing to her 'great faith' and granting her whatever she wished. His attitude towards Gentiles was favourable, followed by the commissioning of his disciples to inaugurate a universal mission (Mt. 28:18-20). Furthermore, Jesus healed people from other races; his dialogue with the Samaritan woman is a typical example of cross-cultural exchange. His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42) shatters the cultural gender barriers of his time. In this interaction, Jesus doesn't merely tolerate other cultures; he engages, understands, and validates them. Other narratives, such as the healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter (Mark 7:24-30) and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), further exemplify Jesus's disregard for cultural prejudices. When Jesus asked her for a drink, her first reaction was disbelief that he, a Jew, would even talk to her, a Samaritan. The disciples' shocking discovery of Jesus conversing with the woman at the well indicates that Jesus is behaving unusually. "Jesus took the initiative and broke cultural barriers of race, gender, and religion. Despite her seemingly tarnished past, Jesus accepted her as she was without judgment and condemnation. I believe it

was through open dialogue and respectful exchange that Jesus transformed the Samaritan woman into a missionary and an evangelist (4:39, 42). The story ended with the whole town coming to know Christ and believing in him. I believe even Jesus was transformed in the unique intercultural encounter, for he no longer remained at the edge of town but accepted their hospitality and stayed with them for two days. (4:40) Interculturalism is also demonstrated in Jesus's teaching, especially in his parables. The central message of Jesus' ministry was "the coming of the Kingdom of God" (Mk 1:14-15). One way to get this message across was through storytelling. Like a storyteller, Jesus loved to tell stories and was very good at it. His stories were unique, had unexpected twists, and were often subversive. More than just telling stories, he also spoke in parables. He touched lepers, befriended sinners and outcasts, and liberated those who were under bondage by impure spirits. Jesus participated in meals with them, a radical move for people in Jesus' time who did not eat with others. He sat down and ate with everyone, without excluding anyone. To sit at the table with anyone was a sign of respect, trust, and friendship. Jesus surprised everyone by sitting down to eat with anyone. Jesus excluded no one at the dinner table. Moreover, Jesus offered himself as food and drink to those who were hungry and thirsty for the Kingdom of God. Many who came into contact with Jesus were transformed, for example, Zacchaeus the tax collector (Lk 19:1-10), the woman who anointed Jesus (Mk 12:3-9), Martha and Mary (Lk 10:30-42), and the two distressed disciples from Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). Jesus was an intercultural Jew who interacted with people from diverse cultures, economic backgrounds, religions, and races. "God's mission includes all people, and this lays the biblical foundation for intercultural exchange and mutual enrichment of all nations in response to God's mission."⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Law, "The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb by Eric H. F. Law | Open Library."

f) The Day of Pentecost

On the day of Pentecost, all the believers were together when a sound like a powerful wind filled the house. Tongues like fire appeared and rested on each person, who then spoke in different languages as the Holy Spirit enabled them. Many Jews from various nations were in Jerusalem and gathered at the sound, amazed to hear the believers speaking in their own languages. They wondered how Galileans could speak to them in Parthian, Median, Elamite, Mesopotamian, Judean, Cappadocian, and other languages, sharing God's mighty works. (Acts 2:1-11) ⁷⁸ Jesus' ministry paints a vivid picture of God, who sees beyond cultural distinctions and loves unconditionally. This theme continues in the Book of Acts, where the church embodies this inclusivity. “The day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13) presents a remarkable picture of interculturality at the beginning of the church, providing the ideal image of how people from different cultural backgrounds should be able to live together.” ⁷⁹With the power of the Holy Spirit, “they could understand each other in this miracle of communication.” The church. Ever since Pentecost, the church has striven for this ideal but has never quite accomplished it. “The miracle involves putting our words in other tongues, being action-oriented, and giving information.” ⁸⁰ The miracle of the ear is more “passive.” It involves listening and receiving information. “Using Pentecost as an ideal, the church in the West took the active, miracle-of-the-tongue approach.” ⁸¹ The pattern was that if you were to spread the gospel, you must learn the language of the people with whom you were trying to communicate and then preach to them about the “mighty works of

⁷⁸ Bible Gatew., “Bible Gateway Passage.”

⁷⁹ Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

⁸⁰ Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

⁸¹ Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

God.”⁸² The traditional missionary approach is criticised. History shows negative results from the miracle-of-tongue approach, while diverse groups experience the Holy Spirit's power in their languages, leading to a multicultural church. “We read in Acts 2 what it looks like when the Spirit of God descends and establishes a community of believers.”⁸³ It further affirms that the gospel message is not limited to a single culture but is universally acceptable. “In Acts, we get a vision of a beautiful community of diversity, reciprocity, and interdependence.”⁸⁴ The miracle of glossolalia in the book of Acts is a miracle of interculturalism. Folks begin to hear the gospel in their own tongues; we get to see the church as it could be. “The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 sets a significant precedent for intercultural dialogue within the church, as people with diverse perspectives are present at the table. The lessons we learn from this experience are being together in unity, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and beginning to speak in other tongues, with each hearing in their native language: Pamphylia, Egypt, Asia, Phrygia, and parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome. “Both the Jews and the proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking in their own tongues the mighty works of God.”⁸⁵ Pentecost, which marked the beginning of the church, provided the ideal image of how people from different cultural backgrounds should be able to come together. “With the power of the Holy Spirit, they could understand each other in this miracle of communication.”⁸⁶ For an intercultural encounter to be truly “Pentecostal,” the church must first value monoculture gatherings. “For people of colour, a monocultural gathering serves as a time to be in community, to gain self-esteem in the context of the collective, and to gain strength before moving into a world that does not value who

⁸² Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

⁸³ Ji-Kim and Aldredge-Clanton, “Intercultural Ministry: Hope for a Changing World.”

⁸⁴ Ji-Kim and Aldredge-Clanton, “Intercultural Ministry: Hope for a Changing World.”

⁸⁵ Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

⁸⁶ Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

they are.”⁸⁷ Intercultural churches need the capacity to be multivocal; they must speak in tongues. “To speak the language of others, you need the Holy Spirit just like the disciples; they found not their own but ‘the language of others,’ and they opened their mouths to speak someone else’s language.”⁸⁸ “The diversity in language, culture, style, and expression was expansive and moving, as worship leaders sang in multiple languages while blending diverse cultural musical genres.”⁸⁹ Since the advent of Pentecost, the church has been striving for universal participation and inclusion. Here, Jewish and Gentile Christians wrestle with cultural differences and land on a decision that doesn’t burden the Gentile believers with Jewish cultural practices, showcasing an early example of cultural sensitivity in the Christian faith.”⁹⁰ Theologically, the concept of the ‘Kingdom of God’ (or the ‘community of creation’) is critical to understanding the value of intercultural ministry and mission. The Kingdom of Jesus is like a banquet to which all are invited (Luke 14:15-24). It's where people from the East and the West, North and South, will dine together (Luke 13:29), an image of the intercultural community that St. Paul’s aspires to become.

g) Paul, An Intercultural Theologian and Missionary

Paul is undoubtedly the most influential early Christian writer and missionary. He was a diaspora Jew born in Tarsus (Acts 21:39), a city known for its intellectual environment. He eventually moved to Jerusalem to attend “the feast of Gamaliel,” a leading Jewish scholar of the time (Acts 22:3) . Paul personally admitted that he was a thoroughly a Jew, saying, “Circumcised on the

⁸⁷ Law, “Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, The eBook : Law, Eric H F: Amazon.ca: Kindle Store.”

⁸⁸ Ji-Kim and Aldredge-Clanton, “Intercultural Ministry: Hope for a Changing World.”

⁸⁹ Ji-Kim and Aldredge-Clanton, “Intercultural Ministry: Hope for a Changing World.”

⁹⁰ Hill, “Intercultural Mission and Ministry – ‘Unity in Diversity, Embracing All Cultures.’”

eighth day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew parentage, observant of a Pharisee” (Phil 3:6) But that was before his encounter with Christ on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus. Paul’s revelatory experience dramatically transformed his life. He was no longer the old Saul that he once was; instead, Paul was commissioned by the risen Lord to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 1:12). Filled with zeal, he embarked on various missionary journeys, and the book of Acts neatly arranged them into three journeys; he founded many Christian communities, or ecclesiae. Paul also wrote many letters to the Gentile churches he had visited, teaching, encouraging, and admonishing them in their infant faith. Fourteen letters were attributed to Paul of Tarsus, and through his missionary activities, writings, and work, he ultimately altered the landscape and transformed the religious character of the Mediterranean Basin. Gentiles gradually embraced monotheism and, more importantly, came to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. One doubts that Paul was involved in the expansion of early Christianity. How did Paul influence and convince Gentile communities with different beliefs and customs to adhere to the Christian faith and way of life? I believe Paul was able to plant the gospel of Jesus Christ in ways that made sense and intersected with the concrete aspects of his listeners' lives. As a context theologian and missionary, he applied an “audience-sensitive approach” to his evangelism. In other words, Paul contextualised the gospel within his audience's cultural setting. This approach requires flexibility, creativity, and humility. To the intellectual Greeks, he used sophisticated rhetoric to persuade effectively (1 Corinthians 1:17-31). To conservative and observant Jews, he appealed to the Hebrew Scriptures and applied Hebraic Midrash to explain the Torah (Gal 2:19) . To those who are familiar with sports and tools of warfare, Paul used images of body parts (Romans 12:4; 1 Cor 12:12-17; Eph 4:11-16) or everyday tools (e.g., a mirror in 1 Cor 13:12 and earthen vessels in 2 Cor 4:7) that everyone

could understand. Flemming rightly notes that Paul was “audience sensitive without being audience-driven” because he had the right attitude toward culture: he affirmed it and confronted it. Because of these attitudes, Paul was able to be “a Jew to the Jew and as a Greek” (1 Cor 9:19-23). Flemming further states, “Paul’s ‘at-homeness’ within overlapping Jewish, Greek, and Roman environments put him in a singular position to contextualize the gospel for both Jews and Gentiles, not as a foreigner, but as a cultural insider.” Paul’s Areopagus speech to the Athenians (Act 17:22-34) demonstrates his cultural sensitivity and “at-homeness” with his audience and therefore serves as a compelling example of ideal cross-cultural exchange. While this comes from the book of Acts, Luke nevertheless depicts a genuine character of the historical Paul. In his missionary sermon, Paul demonstrated a desire to interact with his audience's worldview, beliefs, and practices. He begins the speech by saying, "You Athenians, I see that in every respect you are very religious." ⁹¹As I carefully walked around your shrines, I discovered an altar inscribed with the words ‘To an Unknown God’ (Acts 17:22-23). Paul was aware of Athenian culture, religious beliefs, and practices. He also demonstrates a remarkable familiarity with Athenian philosophical traditions by quoting well-known sayings from Athenian philosophers and poets. Flemming summarises the speech in this way: “(Paul) uses this insight to respectfully engage their worldview, drawing upon indigenous language, images, and concepts to communicate the gospel in culturally relevant forms.” ⁹² While Paul takes a respectful and conciliatory approach by beginning where the audience is, he does not simply conform to the worldview and beliefs to comfort, correct, and transform their understanding of God.

⁹¹ Nguyen, SVD, vanThanh. “Biblical Foundations of Interculturality,” n.d., “Biblical Foundations of Interculturality.”

⁹² Nguyen, SVD, vanThanh. “Biblical Foundations of Interculturality,” n.d., “Biblical Foundations of Interculturality.”

The intercultural vision is further articulated in Paul's epistles, particularly in Galatians (3:28), where Paul asserts that in Christ, cultural, social, and gender divides are no barriers to unity. He reminds the Ephesians church that previously separated groups are brought together in Christ, creating one humanity (Ephesians 2:15). Finally, in the book of Revelation, John's apocalyptic vision culminates in a profound scene of an intercultural gathering. "From every tribe, tongue, nation, and gender, nations gather around the throne of God (Revelation 7:9), emphasising that the gospel scope is global and God's love is all-encompassing."⁹³ The vision of heavenly oneness in Revelation 7 has engaged followers of Jesus throughout the centuries in the pursuit of reconciliation and unity in their earthly realities, and "by building intercultural churches we keep our end goal."⁹⁴ The intercultural endeavour, therefore, is not a peripheral aspect of Christian theology and practice but a central, indispensable feature. It invites us to celebrate and engage with God's diverse creation, uniting us all in love and grace. This engagement with diversity is what St. Paul's United Church desires; it deepens our understanding of God, broadens our love for our neighbours, and enriches our shared spiritual wisdom. Intercultural theology, ministries, and missions are not just significant; they are essential and valuable to our divine calling in an increasingly interconnected world.

h) Conclusion

The Bible underpins the view that genuine interculturality is more than simply coexisting with people from different nationalities and cultures. "Rather, an ideal intercultural setting of interculturalism provides a space and an opportunity for people from different cultural

⁹³ Hill, "Intercultural Mission and Ministry – 'Unity in Diversity, Embracing All Cultures.'"

⁹⁴ Nguyen, SVD, vanThanh. "Biblical Foundations of Interculturality," n.d., "Biblical Foundations of Interculturality."

backgrounds to interact with each other and those around them.”⁹⁵ With this understanding, I have turned to the Bible, exploring three paradigmatic examples that illustrate the ideal intercultural encounter. The findings indicate that Abraham and Sarah, sent by God to the land of Canaan, showed deep respect for the local inhabitants and their rituals and practices. The immigrant couple’s friendliness fosters peaceful relations with settled inhabitants, and they are welcomed as friends in the new host country and culture. The stories of Abraham and Sarah, Paul, and Jesus shed light on and draw connections to Biblical intercultural culture. However, they are not the only ones. Many passages from the Bible can provide an understanding and appreciation of interculturalism, inspiring St. Paul’s United Church Community towards understanding and transformation.

Chapter 6

Congregational Implementation of Interculturalism at St. Paul’s United Church

This chapter looks at some of the tangible work activities happening at St Paul’s United intentionally to establish, grow and promote intercultural worship and theology.

a) The Creation of the African Choir: Music as healing medicine.

In this chapter, the focus is on the initiatives at St. Paul’s United Church aimed at fostering intercultural worship and theology. A key initiative is establishing the African Choir, a vital aspect of ministry. The choir emphasises the importance of music in attracting a diverse membership and integrating families of all generations. It began with 5 members and has grown to 36, representing seven African countries. The choir provides a supportive environment for

⁹⁵ Nguyen, SVD, vanThanh. “Biblical Foundations of Interculturality,” n.d., “Biblical Foundations of Interculturality.”

sharing experiences. It promotes healing through religious music, recognised for its therapeutic effects, helping individuals cope with trauma and cultural challenges, celebrate work permits, birthdays, graduations, new jobs, new houses, and new babies. The people attending these prayers are students, new immigrants, refugees, or individuals following a specific immigration pathway. Canadian immigration is a challenge and a nightmare. Students must cover school fees and pay for work, rent, food, and family expenses, which are among the challenges immigrants face in everyday life. They are a safe space and a relief from life's daily challenges. This attitude and the climate created in such worship services enable participants to respond to the preacher by shouting 'Hallelujah' and 'Amen' or by clapping. People from other denominations, universities, and colleges have also attended these services. The choir is strategically positioned and critical to the building of interculturalism at St. Paul's United Church.

b) The Characteristics of Intercultural Prayers at St. Paul's United Church

The introduction of intercultural worship services at St. Paul's United has significantly transformed the church, fostering growth through these monthly gatherings that unite people from diverse backgrounds. These services, featuring participation by individuals from various African nationalities, emphasise loud music, dancing, and cultural expression, providing a joyous space for attendees with shared histories of hardship. The services prioritise community, unity, and spiritual fulfilment over traditional, rigid religious practices, emphasising celebration through music and dance. This approach aligns with African spiritual traditions, making singing and communal joy central to the worship experience and thus responding to participants' social

and emotional needs. In Ubuntu, an African philosophy, the saying goes, “you are because you are; an individual cannot exist without others.”⁹⁶

The introduction of intercultural worship services at St. Paul's United has significantly transformed the church, fostering growth through these monthly gatherings that unite people from diverse backgrounds. Attendance at these prayers is inconsistent, ranging from 50 to 100 people, and even over 100 on a good day. Sunday Service continues to range from 50 to 130 people. These services, featuring participation by individuals from various African nationalities, emphasise loud music, dancing, and cultural expression, providing a joyous space for attendees with shared histories of hardship. The services prioritise community, unity, and spiritual fulfilment over traditional, rigid religious practices, emphasising celebration through music and dance. This approach aligns with African spiritual traditions, making singing and communal joy central to the worship experience and thus responding to participants' social and emotional needs. These are loud group prayers that we say together. They worship services uplift, encourage, guide, and inspire people to move on with their lives. “They serve as centres of social and civic engagement, platforms for cultural expression, and places of spiritual and material support for their communities.”⁹⁷ African worship transcends intellectual faith, focusing on emotional and personal connections with the divine. Participants often carry the weight of historical hardships like colonialism, discrimination, and poverty, compounded by challenges such as immigration and communication barriers in their new environments. Many congregate in affordable basement spaces, fostering community despite struggles with English and economic burdens. Worship experiences involve deep emotional expressions, prayer, music, and dance,

⁹⁶Appiah-Kubi, “(PDF) AFRICAN TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEW: INDIGENOUS RESOURCE FOR RE-THINKING GLOBAL FAITH AND ECO- CULTIC SPIRITUALITY.”

⁹⁷ “African Millennial Christians in the Diaspora and the Identity Question - Church Mission Society (CMS).”

serving as a means of sharing burdens and seeking solace. They resonate with the Bible verse in Matthew: "Cast your burdens upon Jesus; he cares for you."⁹⁸

c) Food and intercultural prayers

In all cultures, food attracts people; it is a game-changer, cementing friendships and building connections. Sharing food during the agape hour is an essential part of these intercultural services, often followed by a social hour with food and drinks. A Zimbabwean saying goes, “ukama igasva rinozadziswa nekudya, meaning food nourishes friendships.”⁹⁹ People build connections and friendships through shared experiences, particularly during communal prayers, where food from various African countries is enjoyed. Dishes such as spicy Nigerian and Ghanaian dishes, cassava from Central Africa, and Southern African cuisine symbolise the Ubuntu philosophy, fostering unity and interculturalism. Popular foods, such as Jollof rice and fried Tilapia, enhance communal bonds and appeal to all ages. The atmosphere at St. Paul’s United promotes collaboration and acknowledges diverse cultural expressions, highlighting respect and appreciation within the community. God is universal and operates across all cultures. “It offers and instills a positive, holistic community that fosters critical engagement across and between cultural perspectives.”¹⁰⁰ At St. Paul’s, we have enjoyed such engagements during our coffee hour after the leading service and the intercultural services. The church community is growing in diversity by developing models that welcome new people from other countries, with diverse ethnic backgrounds and cultures, and by fostering relationships among them.

⁹⁸ “African Millennial Christians in the Diaspora and the Identity Question - Church Mission Society (CMS).”

⁹⁹ “Food and Relationships in Zimbabwe – Boyle McCauley News.”

¹⁰⁰ Fennell, “Intercultural Visions: Called to Be the Church (e-Book) – United Church Bookstore.”

d) Joyful attitude and welcoming worship and candle lighting as a prayer response to the sermon

Intercultural worship fosters joy through welcoming strangers and appreciating shared experiences. A positive attitude, particularly from the minister, is crucial for transformation. Despite challenges, attendees are encouraged to approach the church with joy. Philippians 4:4 says, “Rejoice in the Lord, and I say rejoice.”¹⁰¹ The passing of peace has become a tradition at St. Paul’s United Church. It’s a joyful gesture that warmly welcomes everyone, making them feel loved, appreciated, valued, and good. On the same note, my happy attitude as the minister is key. To demonstrate my leadership and my love for my ministry, I maintain a happy attitude. I try, through my services, to spread joy, love, and hope. Giving hope, encouragement and inspiration. Attitude is a great game changer. A happy attitude can be contagious. Many ministers are not joyful or jovial; they are too serious and sad. According to the Broad View, a United Church-related magazine, “United Church of Canada ministers are facing a period of significant stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction, driven by changing demographics, dwindling congregations, and increased administrative burdens. Many feel isolated, particularly following structural changes in 2019 that eliminated the regional presbytery system, which formerly provided collaborative support.”¹⁰² The place of worship is safe for everyone because all participants contribute to this safety. “Intercultural churches and ministries bring various cultures together to learn from each other, giving equal value and power to each culture, preserving cultural differences, and celebrating the variety of cultural traditions.”¹⁰³ This intercultural pathway reflects St. Paul’s United Church’s commitment to an inclusive worship environment, actively

¹⁰¹ “Philippians 4:4-8 KJV - Rejoice in the Lord Always: And Again I - Bible Gateway.”

¹⁰² “United Church Ministers Are Burning out | Broadview Magazine.”

¹⁰³ Wronemann, “Intercultural Theology.”

welcoming newcomers and supporting refugees. The church fosters dynamic discipleship engagement through lively preaching and music, emphasizes a prophetic approach to social justice, and prioritizes community outreach. This approach contrasts with traditional practices in many white Protestant churches without a discipleship strategy, as St. Paul's cultivates a vibrant community dedicated to intercultural worship and outreach.

e) The use of many languages in intercultural places of worship.

Rev. Michael Blair, preaching at St. Paul's United Church on October 5, 2025, defined an intercultural church "as a church whose hands are not clenched but are open to welcome, accept, embrace, and invite with joy."¹⁰⁴ Michael also highlighted that some United Church ethnocentric congregations used multiple languages in their worship services. An intercultural church employs numerous languages and has various names for God. It is a multilingual church that uses many languages. Today, St. Paul's United Church is not lagging in this regard; people speak multiple languages, and many of them sing in the African Choir, which is part of the intercultural community. The African Choir is now popular in Thunder Bay, singing at St. Paul's United Church Services. They sing in their languages. We also have members who speak French, Swahili, Shona, Chinyamulenje, Lingala, Gujarati, Spanish, Ewe, Fante, Asante, Twi, Igbo, Yoruba, Kirundi, Luganda, Runyankole, Kikongo, Oshiwambo, Rukwanhali, Kwaekhoegowab, Silozi, Mende, Temne, Limba, and Ojibwe. We do have Chinese people whose first language is Mandarin, Indians who speak Hindi, Mexicans who speak Spanish, and Israelis who speak modern Hebrew. Recently, two exchange students, Sofia from Spain and Emma from France, joined our youth group. They do not speak English very well, but they found other youth members who could speak to them in their languages. Yuriko, who also participated in an

¹⁰⁴ Michael, "Intercultural Languages."

exchange program from Japan, developed strong connections with the youth and the church. I am about to do a historic baptism of a Chinese family. Historic because it's my first time baptising Chinese people, I am excited.

Youth activities are remarkable for the breadth and depth of their diversity, internationalism, and interculturalism. Occasionally, the church organises intercultural services that encourage many people to speak or sing in their native languages. The intercultural community at St Paul's United Church is an emerging community of faith and is part of the Emerging Communities of Faith, coordinated by Emo Yango. St. Paul's United Church fosters an intercultural community encompassing diverse groups, including Africans, Canadians, Jamaicans, and Mexicans. It features structured leadership, including roles such as lay leader, finance committee members, and youth leadership. The church's growth focus lies in promoting intercultural engagement, as evidenced by significant attendance by people of colour and a vibrant youth presence within the community. Inclusivity is prioritised, as evidenced by the use of multiple languages and the inclusion of youth in decision-making bodies such as the Church Board and Worship Committee. The youth's involvement has notably increased since 2022, with members actively participating in leadership roles and committee activities.

f) Difficult Conversations at Intercultural Churches

Additionally, rather than focusing solely on speaking and teaching, St. Paul's United Church has evolved into a church dedicated to listening and learning. When we create a dialogue, we invite everyone to the table. On Monday, September 8, 2025, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee organised a screening of the movie "Walk a Mile," which addresses racism. The deliberation followed the United Church's pledge to support the 40 Days of Anti-Racism campaign. Many

people from all walks of life—white Canadians, Africans from many countries, Jamaicans, people from Mexico, and Indigenous First Nations—attended the movie and the discussion on racism. The debate was both educational, informative, intriguing, and challenging. There was full engagement across all groups, with unanimous support from most of the people groups represented in the church, including the youth and children. During the Youth Go Project, the Diversity and Inclusion committee engaged youth in discussions about the meaning and significance of PIE, the meaning of the acronym 2SLGBTQIA+, and the need to create a safe space.

Furthermore, we can learn from St. Paul's experience that God values a variety of expressions and provides diverse contexts for diverse communities, from which human experience originates. “Interculturalism offers a positive vision of the whole community, united in its diversity. It fosters constructive criticism of each other's perspectives and upholds a reciprocal, respectful, and equitable relationship with all aspects of creation.”¹⁰⁵ I am convinced that full interculturalism can only be achieved when there is justice, fairness, equality, equity and equal access to privileges. In addressing these justice issues, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee takes a few minutes to provide educational information on topics such as racism, homophobia, inclusion, gender and sexuality, women, and many others. Such an ongoing education process that supports the intercultural vision of becoming a welcoming, joyful, and inclusive community.

g) Intercultural communities are dynamic.

St. Paul's United Church is learning from the ever-growing, ever-changing, and dynamic intercultural community, which is adapting to changing circumstances. The church is flexible in

¹⁰⁵ Ji-Kim and Aldredge-Clanton, “Intercultural Ministry: Hope for a Changing World.”

adopting, adapting, and learning new things. With the advent of interculturality and interculturalism, the church has shown a willingness to change its worship style, the songs we sing, the church's culture, and certain traditions to accommodate others. “The intercultural or ethnocentric services are vibrant, featuring loud dance music, hand-clapping, responsive preaching, loud prayers, dancing, crying, shouting, and ululation.”¹⁰⁶ When Africans meet for worship, the space should be a safe space; they display certain freedoms and liberties in worship. Services are vibrant, often characterised by powerful singing, emotional preaching, and call-and-response chants, reflecting the religion's West African roots.

h) African Communal World View

The Intercultural Services at St. Paul’s United Church have become a source of community and support where people come to find and receive solidarity.

When we understand people’s cultures and world views, we see things from their perspectives, which is needed at this time of transitioning.

The prayer services and choir practice are safe spaces free from judgment, homophobia, hate, and discrimination. These are spaces that should be free of prejudice and judgment, such that people are free to share stories, ask questions, and confide in someone. African choir practice is far beyond ordinary singing and practice; it is a fellowship and a hub of connection. It is an opportunity to share problems and discuss solutions. Why do Africans come to church in families? Why do they African consult each other before finding a solution to a problem? “It is important to know their culture and understand how they look at things from the standpoint of their worldview. The community provides the platform to consult, ask questions, raise queries and get moral, spiritual, and emotional support and to share experiences.”¹⁰⁷ The African

¹⁰⁶ Ejiaga, “African Worldview.”

¹⁰⁷ Ejiaga, “African Worldview.”

worldview, African culture, and African religion are communal and grounded on the Ubuntu philosophy: goodness for one is goodness for all. “The African worldview is communal, emphasising the well-being of the group over the individual and defining personhood through one's relationship to others, as summarised by the Nguni term 'Ubuntu,' which translates to 'I am because we are, ' and reflects the interconnectedness of individuals within their community, including ancestors, the living, and the spiritual realm.”¹⁰⁸ They serve as vital community centres,

fostering a strong sense of belonging, particularly for immigrants who may face rejection in mainstream churches. “Africans love community; they eat together, sharing joys and sorrows.”¹⁰⁹

The African worldview conveys a conception of the universe in which the worlds of spirits, human beings, and nature are united in vital or organic communion. “The characteristics of African communalism include communal self-respect, interdependence, survival of the community, group assurance, cooperation and harmony, affiliation, and shared duties.”¹¹⁰ Third is *belief in mystical powers*. The African worldview holds that human events, such as birth, death, health, harvests, and thunderstorms, are controlled by spiritual forces. “The fourth is *the concept of time as made up of events defined by relationships* rather than something existing in and of itself.”¹¹¹ Knowing the worldview is important for the establishment of the intercultural community.

¹⁰⁸ Appiah-Kubi, “(PDF) AFRICAN TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEW: INDIGENOUS RESOURCE FOR RE-THINKING GLOBAL FAITH AND ECO- CULTIC SPIRITUALITY.”

¹⁰⁹ Appiah-Kubi, “(PDF) AFRICAN TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEW: INDIGENOUS RESOURCE FOR RE-THINKING GLOBAL FAITH AND ECO- CULTIC SPIRITUALITY.”

¹¹⁰ Ejiaga, “African Worldview.”

¹¹¹ Ejiaga, “African Worldview.”

i) The Church Family Concept in Intercultural Worship

About 50-60 people took out to Can Duncan for the family camp, including people of different races, genders, and sexualities, and of all ages. Such is an intentional move to bring families together, allow them to learn from each other, and build a church family. The Camp gathering was Intercultural, providing a network of support and offering social, emotional, and tangible assistance to members and, in some cases, to the broader community. Spending time together away from home helps to ease pressures such as depression and anxiety. It helps people to make new relationships and build connections. Through intercultural prayers, the concept of the church as a "family" is shared, creating a sense of solidarity and mutual support that extends beyond kin-based relationships and has been strengthened and solidified through cultural and political engagement. As lived experience, ethnocentric gatherings help the church love, celebrate, embrace, and preserve diverse cultures. Such communities are open “to radical inclusion, radical love, courageous social justice activism, and compassionate interfaith collaboration.”¹¹²

Family is central, and with strong family involvement, intercultural worship is much easier. Immigrant communities often serve as a platform for civic engagement, activism, and social justice, sometimes addressing issues of concern to their specific diasporic community. The church brings awareness to social justice, with topics such as racial exclusion, discrimination, segregation, and other forms of exclusion taking centre stage at these meetings. People offer each other spiritual and emotional support. To assist them in navigating immigration and settlement issues, new immigrants or those still navigating immigration pathways who are struggling with

¹¹² Ji-Kim and Aldredge-Clanton, “Intercultural Ministry: Hope for a Changing World.”

employment find these gatherings to be a hub of social support. The church becomes a family, a safe space where you can share your problems and find support and consolation. Intercultural gatherings are sites of solidarity and support during trying times. It is possible for a community to love and serve God apart from the cultural discord and theological dogma that can make religion so dangerous. There is a strong resolve in the church to continue seeking ways to share resources, redress power imbalances, and challenge unfair systems, thereby promoting equitable participation for all. Both St. Paul's United Church and the Intercultural Community share the key characteristic of valuing all individuals and their cultures, building relationships across cultural divides, and striving to become an inclusive and equitable church that ensures uncompromising equal access to justice, equity, and privileges.

j) Radical Hospitality in Intercultural Worship

In developing interculturalism, St. Paul's United Church applied some of Robert Schnase's ideas from his book, *The Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*. He argues that “the church is a place for sharing love and welcome.”¹¹³ Schnase's notion of radical hospitality is distinguished and characterised by a warm welcome and a genuine desire to extend hospitality. The radical hospitality idea for Schnase is “radical welcome, the burning desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers.”¹¹⁴ Somebody must note that congregational fruitfulness is multivalent and takes many forms—the growing care for one another in a congregation, “the deepening of faith of a group that matures in faith together, the increasing effectiveness of a

¹¹³ Schnase, “Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations.”

¹¹⁴ Anschutz and Cummings, “9 Essential Steps for the First 90 Days in a New Ministry - Lewis Center for Church Leadership.”

mission that embraces people and changes their lives.”¹¹⁵ This change of attitude towards other people in the church, and towards those who are joining, visiting, or likely to join, is inviting and transformative. The church gradually grows into a welcoming, warm community that breathes life into its new members. Even in these contexts, growth in love, faith, and service does not justify neglecting the God-given mandate to invite others and involve people, regardless of their differences in sexuality, gender, race, or language, to share the good news that God has met our highest hopes and deepest needs in Christ. Although Bishop Robert Schnase does not use the term "interculturalism" directly, his use of all-embracing terms such as "all," "everyone," "inclusive," and "diversity" conveys a strong intercultural tone. The major thrust of his book is the fruitfulness of a congregation, and arguably, interculturalism also thrives in such an environment. Fruitfulness is a desired outcome in interculturalism; “when congregations are unclear about outcomes, goals, and objectives, they resort to measuring inputs rather than outcomes, efforts, and resources to evaluate ministry success.”¹¹⁶ Robert Schnase’s five practices capture the core process by which God uses congregations to make disciples of all nations. Such a universal mandate and comprehensive mission apply to all Christians and are biblically supported by Matthew 28:18-20: “Go ye therefore and preach the gospel to all nations.”¹¹⁷ Through the practice of interculturalism, congregations are encouraged to invite graciously and provide Christ’s hospitality to all people, allowing them to experience love, welcome, and a sense of belonging.”¹¹⁸ By practising interculturalism, St. Paul’s members are taking part in the Great Commission. To firmly instil an intercultural welcoming attitude, the

¹¹⁵ Schnase, “Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations.”

¹¹⁶ Schnase, “Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations.”

¹¹⁷ Schnase, “Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations.”

¹¹⁸ Schnase, “Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations.”

church practices the passing of the peace ritual, which allows participants time to greet, converse, and hug as many people as possible. Many people have started inviting people to church; this is becoming a culture of inviting.

k) The passing of peace as a gesture of welcome.

The passing of peace is a popular ritual at St. Paul's United Church of Canada at the beginning of each service. It is a greeting ritual and beautiful words in the song read: Hold somebody, tell them how much you love them, lift your hands together, and praise the Lord. I have people who have not hugged in their lives, hugging and loving other people and making them feel at home. That is a culture that the church borrowed from our African intercultural experience of always starting. It had its roots in Ubuntu, the social well-being. We have achieved peace in Congo, and we are achieving peace in Canada. Through the Passing of Peace, the church intentionally embraces and incorporates people from diverse cultural backgrounds into its communal life. It boosts morale, brightens the mood, breaks the ice, clears the air, relaxes the atmosphere, and spreads a loving, welcoming message. We faced stiff resistance in the first few days and weeks from people who are not used to hugging, but we did not stop, and now everyone looks forward to the passing of peace. This passing of peace is the act of greeting in church under the song "Hold Somebody, Tell Them That You Love Them, Lift Your Hand Together, and Praise the Lord." "As people sing, they shake hands, hug, smile at each other, and take. "This is a powerful multi-sensory experience that triggers significant physical, psychological, and social benefits, acting as a technology of belonging."¹¹⁹The combination of vocalising and physical touch releases an experience that helps build bridges and facilitate connections. "It is psychologically

¹¹⁹ INTERKULTUR, "6 Benefits of Singing with Others INTERKULTUR."

proven that emotional regulation and bonding happen when people sing and hug in a group, shaking hands and smiling. It boosts oxytocin, known as the cuddle hormone, which reduces stress, lowers anxiety, and increases feelings of security, safety, and trust .”¹²⁰ “Moving together in song, accompanied by physical touch, acts as a powerful icebreaker, allowing strangers to build trust and feel connected, often more than other group activities.” ¹²¹ It reduces stress; smiling, laughing, and loving people release endorphins and increase immunoglobulin A production. It is a significant moment that elicits joy and happiness, fostering a true sense of community and interculturalism. It improves synchronised heartbeats, creating a shared, harmonious physical experience that some said: “In my whole life I have never been hugged and I never hugged my family, now I realise what I lost, this is my best time of church.” ¹²²The passing of peace is meaningful; it is a time of love and embrace, given that St. Paul’s has become a diverse community. This inclusive and welcoming attitude has enabled the church to accommodate children, youth, young adults, adults, and seniors. St. Paul’s holds that the Spirit of God is leading the transition to an intercultural church, on the premise that God exists both individually and in community. The minister and leaders know their members well—active, inactive, present, and absent—through strong record-keeping, which enables them to follow up properly. St. Paul’s United Church has focused on inviting people from outside the congregation with passion, creativity, energy, and effectiveness, consistently exceeding all expectations. Interculturalism has taught the St. Paul’s United Church community and its members to approach all aspects through the lens of diverse cultures. St. Paul’s has become a home for people from diverse cultures and backgrounds. “The church is answering the call to live together in

¹²⁰ FINTERKULTUR, “6 Benefits of Singing with Others INTERKULTUR.”

¹²¹ FINTERKULTUR, “6 Benefits of Singing with Others INTERKULTUR.”

¹²² Unknown, “Interview.”

intentional ways and mutual recognition and understanding of our differences through intentional self-examination, relationship building, and equitable access to power and privileges.”¹²³ The United Church of Canada pins the following characteristics of an intercultural church: welcoming, inviting, persuading, opening, accepting, including, joyful, and life-giving. For St. Paul’s United Church, hospitality means prayer, planning, kindness, friendship, attentiveness, and cordiality. For St. Paul’s United Church, radical hospitality entails an approach that differs from traditional ones; such practices are grounded in and built upon the life and teachings of Christ, radiate into the lives of others, and ‘exceed all expectations.’

I) Diversity in Vacation Bible School, Sunday School and Youth

In the spirit of interculturalism and hospitality, St. Paul's has planned Vacation Bible Schools that are so inclusive and diverse that they accommodate more strangers than their children, more immigrants, and a greater diversity of people from different racial backgrounds. In the same spirit, St. Paul’s United Church has organised an annual community tea and coffee event practicing drawing the community into the church building . Attendance at Vacation Bible School has increased considerably, from 5-8 to 25-33. Weekly Sunday School has increased from 1 or 2,3 in 2022 to 15-20 and 25/26 in some services in 2026. As I write this thesis, a lot is happening at St. Paul's United Church, and I will highlight some of the outstanding developments in a nutshell. Through the introduction of interculturalism, church attendance has increased from 13 on my first Sunday to between 50 and 123 on good Sundays. The attendance of children at Sunday School has increased from 2 or 1 to about 10 to 20, or more, on good Sundays. Significant changes are seen in the number of youth members from 0, 2, or 3 to between 15 and 20 in some

¹²³ Marzouk, “Ntercultural Church: A Biblical Vision for an Age of Migration.”

services or at special youth events. About 26 youth attended the Christmas Party. 30 youth attended the United Church Go Project in March, 2026, prompting someone from the Thunder Bay Youth Hub to say, “We have never hosted such a huge group of youth from a church, this is amazing”¹²⁴ Intercultural theology and worship have helped me establish youth leadership, a youth Bible Study, and a youth Executive. St. Paul's Youth now has a solid program of activities. There is an increase in the number of committees, board members, and committee members at St. Paul's United Church. For the first time in the history of this church, 8 youth travelled to Calgary to attend the youth forum and the General Council 45. The family Camp, held at Camp Duncan in 2025 and attended by 53 people, was historic for the church. The United Church Go Project, a national gathering of youth from various regions, was held at St. Paul's from March 15 to March 21 and included multiple volunteer activities in the city.

After hosting the youth, The Grace Place wrote this on their facebook page , “ We had so much fun with the youth from St. Pauls United Church. All week youth from our community and from out of town have been connecting with various outreach organizations to gain a deeper understanding of the community's needs, and how they can use their own gifts and passions to serve in a variety of ways. They helped us kick off our first Community Drop-In on Thursdays at Grace Place. What a blessing to have them serve with us! The GO Project.”¹²⁵ Intercultural prayers are happening each month-end, bringing together dozens of people to share African music and African food. The African Choir, formed only 2 years ago, has gained significant popularity by performing at all major Thunder Bay City events.

¹²⁴ Unknown, “Interview.”organisationsPaul's

¹²⁵ “The Grace Place in Thunder Bay - Search Results | Facebook.”

The youth are a vibrant, diverse group, comprising about 26 youth and young adults aged 12 to 30 years. They have Bible study every Monday, Movie Nights, Outdoor games, Balling, and other activities. Recently, 8 youth travelled to Calgary for the Youth Forum and the United Church General Council. It was historic to have that many youth come from a church that had no youth three years ago. It's amazing to see the church that practically had no youth now having such large numbers of youth for a week. All these gains speak to the results of intercultural ministry at St. Paul's United Church. These programs have attracted a diverse group of community members, including young and old, members and non-members, new immigrants, and long-time residents. Similarly, the church has organised St. Patrick's Day, a popular holiday in Finland, and attracted large numbers of Finns. In a highly public, intentional, and explicit manner, the church board has rented the church building to multiple groups in the city. It is worth noting that by doing this, the church is opening its doors to everyone.

m) Collaboration and connection with the greater Thunder Bay Community

St. Paul's Church promotes accessibility and intercultural exchange, welcoming all with well-trained ushers. In response to the decline in youth participation, the African Choir was formed to enhance musical contributions during intercultural services and to engage in community outreach. Meeting twice weekly, the choir has performed at various events in Thunder Bay, raising awareness of its services and fostering community ties. Its membership has grown significantly, and it has collaborated with local organisations, receiving financial support for cultural activities. The choir plays a central role in connecting the church to the broader community and promoting interculturalism.

n) Truth and Reconciliation Sunday at St. Paul's United Church

Through land acknowledgements, the church invites Indigenous communities to join an intercultural community, apologising for past wrongs, including its role in residential schools. The United Church, the first to apologise publicly in 1986 and again in 1988, commemorates Orange Shirt/Truth and Reconciliation Sunday, promoting solidarity and collaboration with Indigenous people. The church collaborated with the Healing and Reclamation Department on cultural events, including a feast and the African Choir's participation in the Orange Shirt March. It celebrates diversity through various cultural events and fosters an adaptive intercultural environment that embraces mistakes and growth. The church offers space where each culture is recognised and celebrated through special days such as Black History Month, African Day, St. Patrick's Day, Pride Day, Pie Day, and other events. St. Paul's United is planning a cultural day to celebrate the diversity of countries, cultures, traditions, belief systems, and worldviews. However, we have learned through interculturalism that the process is adaptive: as people grow in God's grace, they begin to accept mistakes, learn from them, and grow from the past. Accepting and welcoming people of different backgrounds is a gift everyone should embrace. "To avoid assimilation into the dominant culture, the process of interculturalism has to remain actively involved in welcoming and affirming people from diverse cultural identities." An intercultural church is not afraid to change and is motivated by the transformation of the heart, mind, structure, and policy, continually adapting as necessary.

The recent election of four racialised Africans to the St. Paul's Board is evidence of the church's commitment to inclusion and a step in the right direction towards shared governance and greater inclusivity. This election demonstrates that the church is committed to pursuing justice and to intentionally creating an environment in which people from the various cultures represented in

the church have equal access to power and privileges. Several young Africans have been appointed to the church's committees as the church undertakes a drive to include and affirm diverse groups. Lately, a new committee, the Fundraising and Stewardship Committee, was formed and is led by a relatively new member, Lizzet Morales from Mexico. Such evidence speaks to the benefits of cultivating an intercultural community within a church that was originally and predominantly white and middle-class. As an affirming church, the church has a history of daring justice; however, in this recent call, the church is justice-seeking: "steadfastly and authentically seeking to share resources, redress power imbalances, and try to do things differently to change systemic injustices, while seeking full equitable participation of all inside and outside the church."¹²⁶ The recent hiring of a new African refugee as a caretaker speaks to the church's commitment to justice, equality, and equity. Such is tangible evidence that the church is walking a mile towards being a safe, free of discrimination based on their race, gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, economic status, or age. An intercultural church is an equal-opportunity provider and a driver of justice and fairness. Additionally, the recent selection of eight St. Paul's racialised youth members as youth delegates to the United Church General Council Youth Forum speaks volumes about the United Church's commitment to interculturalism. The Canadian Regional Council dispatched Rev. Shawn Redden to St. Paul's United Church to train and orient these youth before the general council.

Recent youth activities at St. Paul's United Church, such as the Gammondale Farm Outing, St Paul's Bowling Outing, St. Paul's youth Christmas party, and the recent farewell for Yureko, were very diverse, bringing children and youth from Canada, China, Japan, and more than 12 countries from Africa.

¹²⁶ Leander, "7 Key Characteristics of Diversity-Oriented Churches."

“Interculturalism creates an atmosphere of continuous learning from each other. It is intentional, seeking to be enriched by the perspectives of diverse cultures within historically marginalised and underrepresented communities.”¹²⁷ It engages in self-examination, lifelong learning, and reflection through ongoing prayer, education, training, consultation, monitoring, and evaluation of the intercultural engagements.¹²⁸ “Through the diversity and inclusion committee, the church seeks to faithfully address racism and white privilege, recognise the church’s complicity in historical injustices, and try to do things differently.”¹²⁹ The Diversity and Inclusion Committee is planning to screen a popular film about racism at the church. To create and maintain a safe environment, the committee provides teachings and mini information moments to the congregation on Sundays. The Diversity and Inclusion Committee plays a key role in introducing interculturalism at St. Paul’s United Church. It aims to create an inclusive environment in which individuals from diverse ethnic, racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds come together to worship, learn, and deepen their faith.

The Vacation Bible School program has become more diverse and inclusive, welcoming children from a range of cultural backgrounds. The impact of interculturalism is evident in high attendance at Sunday services and other church-related programs. With the addition of new people and music, our worship services are drawing in more attendees. Worship encompasses a range of elements, including testimonies, stories, dances, liturgy, preaching, and music. Worship has changed over the years to meet the needs of our intercultural church. With the advent of interculturalism, the church has introduced the passing of peace, a responsive and unresponsive

¹²⁷ Leander, “7 Key Characteristics of Diversity-Oriented Churches.”

¹²⁸ Tse, “The Intentionally Intercultural Church: A Place for All Peoples - Northwest Institute for Ministry Education Research Northwest Institute for Ministry Education Research.”

¹²⁹ Tse, “The Intentionally Intercultural Church: A Place for All Peoples - Northwest Institute for Ministry Education Research Northwest Institute for Ministry Education Research.”

call to worship, and an opening prayer accompanied by music. Music has constantly evolved with the incorporation of traditional Canadian hymnals, modern progressive music, African music, and other genres from around the world. Scripture reading has also evolved, with some dramatic performances in the form of skits and short plays, rather than the traditional worship reading, performed by different people.

The prediction has also shifted from traditional homiletical methods to a more audience-oriented, people-engaging preaching style, characterised by less reading from the pulpit and greater emphasis on passionate, audience-centred preaching. The preaching also contains responses such as "The Lord is good all the time," "Hallelujah," hand clapping, and "Amen." Children look forward to their time in worship. The children's time has become an integral part of St. Paul's intercultural worship, with an ever-growing attendance and participation. I have called children to encourage them to attend church, and I plan to visit them at home. We have encouraged various teaching and learning aids, both audio and visual, to make the children's time exciting. The children have also been inviting their friends to church activities. The Sunday school hour reinforces the concepts children learn in church through a variety of activities.

Additionally, St. Paul's United Church has baptised more children, youth, and young adults. Many people have been confirmed as members through confirmation and other processes across the races. The number of women attending the church has increased, and women's meetings have also started. At Christmas and Women's Day in March, about 35 women gathered together to share special times. There is a standing committee to oversee women's activities, and the leadership meets once a week to plan programs.

Chapter 7

The Challenges of Intercultural Worship at St. Paul's United Church

This chapter discusses the challenges of introducing intercultural worship at St. Paul's United Church, highlighting that the transition to an intercultural church is more complex than for traditional churches. Key challenges include navigating cultural differences and language barriers, and fostering trust among diverse backgrounds, encompassing over 12 African nations and various other cultural groups. The chapter highlights the challenges of uniting diverse individuals and preserving cohesion, which requires intentional understanding of different cultural norms and communication styles. Attendees communicate in various languages, including Shona, English, French, and several African dialects, with English serving as the official language of communication in the church. "However, communication breakdown still creates barriers to connection, participation, and communication."¹³⁰ Communication difficulties are exacerbated by variations in accents and word pronunciation. People with a strong background in French, Portuguese, or Latin often find it difficult to communicate in English because English is a multilingual language. I've realised that developing trust is a gradual process. "The procedure requires a reasonable amount of trust in building relationships across cultural boundaries, and in that process, language becomes a medium."¹³¹ This process requires patience, open communication, and a willingness to listen to different perspectives. Introducing intercultural worship at St. Paul's United Church faces societal biases and stereotypes that may hinder community building. "Churches need to be proactive in addressing these issues and

¹³⁰ Stetzer, "Hard Truths about Multicultural Churches."

¹³¹ Leander, "7 Key Characteristics of Diversity-Oriented Churches."

promoting intercultural sensitivity.”¹³² The majority of queer people think Africans are conservative and unprogressive. They struggle with an inclusive theology that accepts and includes queer people.

On the other hand, some traditional Africans struggle with a liberal or progressive theology that seeks to elevate issues of gender and some sexual orientations as more critical than worshipping God. Teaching genuine inclusivity and acceptance takes time and effort, especially for churches facing racism and homophobia. One challenge in intercultural communities is the conflicts that arise from cultural differences. To manage these issues, a conflict management policy is essential. St. Paul’s United Church of Canada has a conflict resolution committee that mediates disputes, organises hearing circles, provides training, and promotes open communication. The church has experienced conflicts as new members arrive and require accommodation. Leaders must embrace the changes brought by intercultural worship, though not everyone is ready for this change. Some individuals cling to traditional systems, resisting progress and new trends.

Additionally, the church's constitutional vision must be reviewed to keep up with intercultural developments and truly welcome diverse groups like Africans, Indians, Jamaicans, Latinos, Chinese, Israelites, and Japanese. Some committees need revitalisation to meet the needs of a growing ministry. Their goals and mandates have eroded over time; they are out of context and require updating to reflect recent developments.

“To be an intercultural church presupposes that, first of all, you are hospitable to people who are unlike the dominant culture in the church. Interculturalism entails going beyond multiculturalism and hospitality to a level where you want to share experiences with other cultures so that the

¹³² Bardswich, “Intercultural Ministries Living into Transformation,” “Vision for Becoming an Intercultural Church,” under

process of learning from each other’s vision of God, their theology, and their world.”Theological questions central to intercultural dialogue include the nature of Christianity, the identity of God, Christian behavior, and Christian moral values. Engaging in this dialogue is often challenging, particularly for individuals in dominant cultures who seek to understand God's vision for Christian life through diverse cultural lenses. While some exhibit a genuine desire to learn and embrace interculturalism, others resist it. Diversity encompasses various dimensions, including race, age, gender, sexual orientation, parental status, culture, disability, and education.

Intercultural interaction aims to celebrate diversity rather than enforce uniformity. “It is not the quality or state of being of a similar kind or of having a uniform structure or composition throughout; it's about being different and celebrating and cherishing the differences.”¹³³ People often hold preconceived ideas and opinions about things and people, which can lead to personal judgments, reliance on past experiences, limited interaction, discomfort with sharing their lives with others, and other barriers.

People have different characters, habits, and choices that often get in the way; learn to accept differences. Philosophical challenges, different politics, reality being different, and worldviews being different—is there richness? Do we live together? Do we spend time together? Language, Alawode, assimilation, and who is the dominant culture? Cross-cultural and life experiences differ. Relational challenges, like how do we relate? Can we connect across racial and religious lines in restoration efforts to work toward reconciliation? Rev Chapter 7: Leaders need to learn about engagement and breaking down barriers. Open-mindedness, cultural intelligence, collaboration, adapting, innovation, cultural sensitivity, the creation of safe spaces for dialogue, and difficult conversations. Dealing with change in the church poses challenges, such as

¹³³ Alawode, “Challenges and Prospects of Christian Missions in a Multicultural Context.”

disrupting stability and increasing stress. The introduction of interculturalism in the Western Church represents a significant, slow and careful change. St. Paul's United Church has transformed into a new congregation, facing difficulties in managing both the realities of change and resistance to it, stemming from fear, poor communication, and inadequate support. To effectively cope, reframing change as an opportunity, focusing on short-term aspects, establishing new routines, and maintaining open communication about uncertainties can be beneficial.

a) Language and Communication Barriers

Growing intercultural churches encounter challenges such as language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and potential power imbalances that affect communication and cooperation. "Language and communication also include non-verbal communication, including body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice, which play an important role in conveying messages."¹³⁴ Communication barriers include language differences, non-verbal cues, and cultural perspectives. Many immigrants at St. Paul's United Church speak languages like French, Portuguese, and Spanish while learning English. Both white Canadians and immigrants faced challenges understanding each other's accents and speech variations in English.

b) Comfort Zones

Many people are uncomfortable outside their comfort zones. Change is difficult, and people often resist it. Let me keep my same old church. Traditional worship mindsets are difficult to deal with and uncover. For such people, the church would rather die than change its mindsets and

¹³⁴ Ye, "The Impact of Language Barriers on Communication and Cultural Integration | Free Essay Example for Students."

invite or include other people. We should remember that “Jesus was a rabble-rouser who challenged conventional comfort zones, especially among those who were accustomed to setting the rules—the rich, the powerful, and the religious elite.”¹³⁵ The gospel mission in Luke (4:18) is to preach the gospel to the poor and proclaim freedom for prisoners. In Matthew 28:19-20, the Great Commission mandates us to go out of our comfort zones. “The mission of the church is to go to the world, preach, heal the sick, make disciples out of their comfort zones, and interact with people of different cultures.”¹³⁶ To be effective, we need to change the norm and move beyond comfort in our social relationships. We probably need to learn to socialise with people of other races and ethnicities. “Moving beyond the traditional mindset will help us create diverse communities. “Such communities unite people across cultures and provide a powerful model beyond the four walls of churches.”¹³⁷

c) Resisting the impulse to include

Many people resist inclusion because of prejudices, sexism, discrimination, ageism, homophobia, and so on. “Religious people always bring God into the act of exclusion.”¹³⁸

I have noticed that queer people from St. Paul's resisted the inclusion of people of colour because they thought that all Africans are a threat to their safety, as they are conservative. So they would not embrace the 2SLGBTQI+ community. While it could be true to a certain extent that Africans are conservative, not all Africans fall into that category. “We discriminate against them,

¹³⁵ Ji-Kim and Aldredge-Clanton, “Intercultural Ministry: Hope for a Changing World.”

¹³⁶ Ji-Kim and Aldredge-Clanton, “Intercultural Ministry: Hope for a Changing World.”

¹³⁷ Ji-Kim and Aldredge-Clanton, “Intercultural Ministry: Hope for a Changing World.”

¹³⁸ Ji-Kim and Aldredge-Clanton, “Intercultural Ministry: Hope for a Changing World.”

segregate them, and impose rules and criteria for acceptance.”¹³⁹ One person from St. Paul's asked me if I was going to convert gays and lesbians and pray for them to be saved. They perceived me as a threat to inclusion and opposed my theology. Another person suggested offering classes to educate new members about diversity, particularly the 2SLGBTQI+ community. Some people think Black people are inferior and inhuman; hence, they are segregated, omitted, erased, ostracised, and deleted. My first intercultural experience at St. Paul's had so many people of colour, and they were people who felt threatened, unsafe and made very negative comments, such as that they felt unsafe, threatened, and uneasy. They were not used to having so many black people. Their music is like a performance, and they were too loud. When describing the inclusion of objects, Eric Law uses words such as "comprise," "consist of," "constitute," "contain," "entail," "cover," "insert," and "interject," and the words that imply the inclusion of people are "embody," "embrace," "encompass," "incorporate," and "involve."¹⁴⁰ Genuine inclusion will involve thinking and listening when considering others' plight. Real inclusion will involve empathy and feelings. "Inclusion requires time to think and readjust positions and shift theological positions to make room for inclusion."¹⁴¹ Including diverse groups in a community can be uncomfortable and challenging. At St. Paul's, some individuals left the church due to their unhappiness about including Africans. Those resisting inclusion may selectively interpret the Bible to justify exclusion. However, the Bible shows Jesus including sinners, tax collectors, and others often marginalised in society, emphasising compassion and justice. When worship uses inclusive language, it helps everyone feel welcome. Some women and lesbians have addressed the issue of male language in worship through their

¹³⁹ Law, "Making Room for Grace."

¹⁴⁰ Law, "Making Room for Grace."

¹⁴¹ Law, "Making Room for Grace."

writings. “Inclusion is a discipline of extending our boundary to take into consideration another person’s needs, interests, experience, and perspective, which will lead to a clearer understanding of ourselves and others, a fuller description of the issue at hand, and possibly a newly negotiated boundary of the community to which we belong.”¹⁴² The inclusion process involves expanding a community's boundaries to accommodate diverse viewpoints and values. This approach is not exclusive to the Christian community, as Christ's actions and teachings invite everyone to enter a space of grace. The invitation to intercultural worship can reflect Christ's invitation, which was “gentle and compassionate; sometimes the invitation was confusing, if not shocking.”¹⁴³ Grace is led, inspired, empowered, and propelled by the Holy Spirit

d) Conclusion

The introduction of interculturalism at St. Paul's United Church has yielded significant benefits, highlighting the church's history and its transition to an Affirming ministry. The paper delves into the definition and analysis of interculturalism and intercultural theology, including its connection to Ubuntu philosophy. Biblical examples of intercultural theology further deepened the understanding of the concept. The study identifies successful intercultural developments at the church, such as increased attendance among children, youth, and diverse groups, as well as challenges faced by intercultural ministries and potential strategies for effective implementation.

¹⁴² Law, “Making Room for Grace.”

¹⁴³ Law, “Making Room for Grace.”

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