

# Multicultural Ministries

## Global Context

6.5 billion people in the world

6,000+ languages

198, or 202 countries (number count varies)

## 2000 U.S. Census:

- People of African descent represent 13% of U.S. population
- People of Latino descent make up 12.5% of U.S. population
- Concluded that 10% of U.S. population was not born in the U.S.
- People of Hispanic/Latino origin make up 44.6% of Los Angeles population

“Though nearly 90 percent of the GI generation [born 1901-1924] was white, it was diverse for its time. Many members were immigrants or the children of Catholic and Jewish immigrants. About 40 percent of Millennials are of African American, Latino, Asian or racially mixed backgrounds. Twenty percent [of Millennials] have at least one immigrant parent.” Washington Post, 3 Feb 2008

By 2050 some researchers and demographers are projecting that there will not be one majority ethnic group in the U.S.

2 very important qualities of leaders in multicultural context: **self-awareness and personal commitment** (personal commitment to ongoing self-awareness and to multicultural ministry)

## Culture:

- We are all cultural beings – all of us have heritage(s) and context(s) which help shape who we are culturally, ethnically and racially as individuals and as members of communities.
- Culture is fluid – changing with our context, learnings and life experiences
- There are universal elements of culture:
  - Spirituality; rituals around death, birth, partnering, puberty; rituals around food; government structures and rules; relationships of parents and children; communication/language
- There are context specific elements of culture. Here are some examples:
  - Understanding and names for God
  - “Children should be seen and not heard”
  - Czar/President/Dictator makes all rules for society
  - Men eat first, then the women, then the children

## DEFINITIONS of SOME TERMS

**Culture** – The totality of our worldview – our beliefs (including religious and spiritual ones), behavior patterns, values, arts, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought. Our culture is formed and informed by our history, economics, physical environment (climate, landscape) and politics. Culture is fluid.

**Multicultural** – I see the U.S. as having 2 definitions of this term. One is “of or relating to or including several cultures.” The other, deeper one, that I use is that embedded in multiculturalism, to have true multiculturalism, all involved need equal participation (voice, contribution, decision-making, etc.). Single-culture approaches/ways should not be forced on a multi-cultural situation/setting.

**Race** (from American Psychological Association, 2002 [APA]) – biological basis of race has been source of heated debates. Race is socially constructed, rather than biologically determined. Race, then, is the category to which others assign individuals on the basis of physical characteristics, such as skin color or hair type, and the generalizations and stereotypes made as a result.

**Ethnicity** (APA) – “The acceptance of the group mores and practices of one’s culture of origin and the concomitant sense of belonging. . . . Individuals may have multiple ethnic identities that operate with different salience at different times.”

**Diversity** – today we often use this term to refer to as many kinds of differences as possible. Example: “When we say ‘diversity’ we mean all kinds, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, marital status, religious or non-religious background, and mental and physical ability, to name just a few.” (College at Oneonta)

**Creating and living in multicultural settings** is about:

- Listening in ways we normally don’t listen, and listening for things we usually don’t hear
- Respecting people, ideas and solutions that are not like us or ours
- Seeing outside the box of what appears to be in front of us so that we can experience new opportunities and solutions
- Learning new forms of communication besides what we are used to (our 1<sup>st</sup> spoken language)
- Understanding that everyone in the community/room brings something of value to the context, conversation and outcome

**Main challenges in multi-cultural situations**, from *HBR*, Nov. 2006. “Managing Multicultural Teams,” by Jeanne Brett, Kristin Behfar, and Mary C. Kern

- Communication styles, example: direct vs. indirect communication
- Trouble with accents and fluency
- Differing attitudes toward hierarchy and authority
- Differing views on how decisions should be made and who should make them

As humans, we always approach a conversation from our own perspective and cultural context – our own set of beliefs and values. This is not good or bad; it is. It is important for us to know the lens – its boundaries and preferences – through which we view the world. And, it is important for us to know that we carry our particular lens to every conversation.

Hidden resentments and misperceptions can impact relationships and ministry effectiveness. Multiculturalism is about learning to truly communicate with one another. It is about learning to value the contribution each person brings to the process.

We can work to view and experience the world through other lenses as well. To create multi-cultural or cross-cultural community is best done when we see the world and our own context and reality, through the eyes and values of other groups. To create these opportunities, really takes letting go of our preconceived ideas of what we think is right and wrong, best and worst, beautiful and ugly, good and bad, smart and stupid, rational and irrational, slow and fast; and opening ourselves to new perspectives and possibilities. This release of all preconceived notions is akin to releasing all of who we are to God and allowing God to transform us. There is a similar process of transformation within true community – especially multicultural community. As we learn from others, God transforms and the community as well.

### **Multicultural community is about:**

Lifelong learning together – from each other, from shared experiences, from outside community/world

Becoming knowledgeable about various differences and similarities

Exhibiting genuine care and concern for all people in the community

Being actively involved in community life

Being respectful of all backgrounds present

Using a variety of learning and worship styles

Everyone understanding their responsibility in the formation of multicultural community

Everyone having equal voice and representation – working to allow the multicultural facets of a community/congregation really shine through, and not make one more dominant than another.

## Beginning to Build Relationships

Doing things together is a great way for your ministry to begin to develop relationships with people of other cultures. Here are a few ideas:

1. Attend a program presented by people of a different ethnicity or culture in their context
2. Invite an ethnic organization to present a program in your setting
3. Share a meal with a young adult group or youth group of an ethnic church or organization
4. Do a work project in the community, to benefit a family of recent immigrants
5. Have groups of young people from 2 or 3 various cultures come together to do a service project.
6. Share a meeting or special event of your youth group, or young adult group
7. Plan a picnic or outing together
8. Share a film series that looks at cultural diversity topics
9. Plan a special class in your Sunday School; invite ethnic leaders to speak
10. Pulpit exchange
11. Teacher or worker exchange
12. Plan a joint youth night or young adult activity
13. Share sports activities
14. Sponsor an immigrant family
15. Offer English classes at your church

adapted from, "The Stranger Who Is Among You," James Duren and Rod Wilson, William Carey Library, 1983.

## Possible Ways to Begin to Embrace Multiculturalism in Your Ministry

- “Who are the people in your neighborhood?” Get to know who is around you and what their needs, desires and dreams are – don’t assume, based on your world view.
- Listen to stories of their faith and their faith journeys.
- Create and foster community
  - Develop friendships – relationships of trust, caring, sharing; prayer partners; Bible studies
  - Have conversations that matter – talk about inequalities, injustice, race, poverty, health care, violence, education, technology, leadership, authority, power – who has access to what and why. What are some ways the church can move toward greater equality in its work and help the community move towards equality also?
  - When tensions arise, address them; don’t ignore them. Find safe ways to dialogue so all are heard and the community can move forward together in depth of learning and action.
- Understand and embrace the layers of community that will emerge
- Respond appropriately to racial or ethnic comments/jokes:
  - **Take a minute to collect your thoughts** – it’s okay to say, “Your comments are difficult for me. Let’s meet again tomorrow to discuss it in more depth.”
  - **Practice** – knowing what you will say before a difficult cultural situation occurs can give you courage to speak up when the time is right.
  - **Allow time and space for all voices.** Use "I" statements rather than "you" and "we."
  - **Assert your rights.** Each of us has the right to our own beliefs, while maintaining an environment that is safe and supportive of all peoples.
  - **Be intentional about congruence** – having your words and actions be consistent with each other

## **By-Products of Multicultural Ministries**

- Majority ethnic group often reduces their stereo-types of minority group(s)
- Minority groups experience empowerment in the group and increased self-confidence
- Minority groups develop more trust, in general, of people in the majority group
- Deeper understandings of God for all through the eyes, hearts and languages of other people and cultures

## **Cultural Preference and Prejudice**

We humans have a natural tendency to bond with “our own kind” – people who are like us and who are familiar to us. Sometimes this similarity is color of skin, at other times it may be politics, cultural rituals, language or common experience (especially a tragedy). This is normal for us. It helps us survive and preserve personal identity and cultural heritage.

At the same time, we need to be careful. Our natural tendency to be with others like us, can easily lead to prejudice. Cultural preference becomes prejudice, when I decide that my ways are better, superior or should be preferred by all; over the ways of another person or group. We must intentionally keep an open mind, to try new things, in order to avoid our own unconscious tendency to prefer things familiar to us. It can become very easy for us to teach our ways and our beliefs as the right ways. Sometimes we do this unconsciously, creating church on our terms, without even asking and dialoguing with others about what the important qualities of church/worship/spiritual formation would be for them.

Christianity is not about

- How one dresses
- What one eats
- Music style preference
- Worship time
- Worship location

Therefore, being multicultural is not just about sharing recipes and having multicultural meals, doing a variety of music styles in worship, and holding a worship service in which there is simultaneous translation. These are important ways to begin to learn from each other and from each other’s culture. However, to create multicultural community means forming true relationships in which community members explore differences and engage the difficult conversations of how we respect each other and worship and work together so that our differences become our community’s strengths.

# RESOURCES

## Websites

[www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org), a site whose goal is to dismantle bigotry (focuses on students)

### General Board of Church and Society (GBCS)

[www.umc-gbcs.org](http://www.umc-gbcs.org)

Resources on The Social Principles, environmental justice, peace with justice, civil and human rights, advocacy, economic justice, health and addiction, Christian social action

Poverty Bible study series. Here's the link to session 2 of 5:

<http://www.umc-gbcs.org/site/apps/nl/content.asp?c=frLJK2PKLqF&b=3832201&ct=4959215>

[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0LAL/is\\_3\\_35/ai\\_n15674958/print](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0LAL/is_3_35/ai_n15674958/print), "Jesus in Samaria: a Model for Cross-Cultural Ministry," an article from Biblical Theological Bulletin by Eric John Wyckoff

"Multicultural Ministry: Finding your Church's Unique Rhythm," at:

[http://www.ccn.tv/programming/event/evt\\_06may04.htm](http://www.ccn.tv/programming/event/evt_06may04.htm)

## You Tube videos

A message against intolerance, January 2007 <http://youtube.com/watch?v=MLa1gLVK2AA&feature=related>

April 2007, Student created video on prejudice and hate, 7 minutes <http://youtube.com/watch?v=ODP6VeMY1ZI>

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=uhZz9Pz6Wr0&feature=related>

Oct 2006, 2 minutes, "We are all foreigners almost everywhere in the world" Students from Europe, Asia and Africa at the Dutch University of Groningen expressed this statement in their mother tongue. Languages: English, Czech, Swahili, Polish, Swedish, German, Turkish, French, Dutch, Finnish, Hindi, Indonesian.

## Books

*A Mosaic of Believers: Diversity and Innovation in a Multiethnic Church*, by Gerardo Marti, offers an in depth case study of a large and innovative multicultural church in Los Angeles, Mosaic. Written from a sociological perspective, the book includes stories and interviews along with a bibliography for further study. An interesting profile of a church that has been successful in bringing diverse peoples together, 2005.

*Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*, by Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin Keene Mayers, have fascinating information about six common areas where values and perception differ between cultures, along with strategies for improving communication. The book includes a simple survey which will help you identify your own cultural values, 2003.

*Mission Trips That Matter: Embodied Faith for the Sake of the World*, by Don C. Richter, 2008.

*Serving with Eyes Wide Open: Doing Short-Term Missions with Cultural Intelligence*, by David A.

Livermore. Livermore takes a broad look at what the twenty-first-century church is doing on the mission field, the assumptions people make about Christianity, and what it takes to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts. Perfect for all who engage in short-term missions trips--either at home or abroad. This book can help equip readers to serve more sensitively, 2006.

*The Wolf Shall Dwell With the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*, by Eric H. F. Law, is a book which will sharpen your understanding of cross-cultural dynamics and help you learn techniques for leading multicultural groups. Law looks a lot at power in the context of multicultural community, 1993. (This book could be used in a discussion group to prepare your leadership team.)

## **Congregations**

Capitol Hill UMC <http://www.chumc.net/cooperativeparish>

<http://www.djchuang.com/multi/>

A list of many articles from various denominations regarding the many facets of multicultural ministry

<http://www.middlechurch.org/>

Middle Collegiate Church in New York City

## **Denominational Offices**

Evangelical Lutheran Church's multicultural ministries resources: <http://www.elca.org/multicultural/>

Presbyterian Church, USA: <http://www.pcusa.org/multicultural/>