Student Cover Sheet and Reflection on Feedback Form

University of Birmingham – School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion

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Many Threads, One Cloth – Building Multi-Cultural Church Leadership Teams

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the MPA for Faith Leaders at the Cadbury Centre, University of Birmingham

'Many Threads, One Cloth' was the name of a weekend celebrating African fashion held at St. James' Anglican Cathedral, Toronto, in October 2023. The title expresses the belief that together people of diverse cultural backgrounds can represent something beautiful. As it happened this particular weekend was also the weekend that I was introduced to the Cathedral community as the new Dean of Toronto, and so I saw some of the event from the edges. This phrase struck me as a great summary of the vision which lies behind this dissertation.

Abstract and Introduction

This piece of research looks at successful approaches to transitioning a congregational lay leadership team from cultural homogeneity to cultural diversity. It does this primarily through semi-structured interviews with two key ordained leaders who have either led a church leadership team through an intentional process of cultural diversification or who have planted congregations within a specific cultural or linguistic group different from that of the host or planting congregations. Key themes that emerge include the importance of intentional leadership, the visibility of different cultural groups as essential in establishing an understanding that members of those groups belong here, the importance of cultural signifiers, especially food and music, the changing role of language, and the issue of generations and their different needs and desires. These themes are then tested out with a small focus group of participants in one of these congregations. The reach of the project is limited to the Church of England.

Schein underlines some of the reasons why multi-cultural leadership teams can be challenging with his concept of 'macro cultures'.

> "Macro cultures are nations, ethnic groups, and occupations that have been around for a long time and have, therefore, acquired some very stable elements, or "skeletons," in the form of basic languages, concepts, and values. At the same time they have evolved and will continue to evolve, primarily from contact with other cultures. To compare macro cultures we need general dimensions that cut across them and that have remained relatively stable in spite of historical experience. *The problems of making multicultural groups work well is that those stable elements can clash in unanticipated ways and can cause both desired and undesired changes*." (Schein p.77, italics mine)

What is required therefore is what Schein, Daniel Goleman and others refer to as 'cultural intelligence'.

> "The concept of cultural intelligence introduces the proposition that to develop understanding, empathy, and the ability to work with others from other cultures requires four capacities: (1) actual knowledge of some of the essentials of the other cultures involved, (2) cultural sensitivity or mindfulness about culture, (3) motivation to learn about other cultures, and (4) behavioural skills and flexibility to learn new ways of doing things (Earley & Ang, 2003; Thomas & Inkson, 2003). For multicultural teams to work, therefore, implies that certain individual characteristics must be present to enable cross-cultural learning." (Schein 108)

This thesis looks at how these qualities of cultural intelligence are expressed in a church context where there is an intent to create a culturally-diverse leadership team. We begin with a literature review which establishes the importance of diverse church leadership teams from a number of different angles before turning to the lived experience of two church communities and their leaders. I argue that culturally diverse leadership teams are important in local churches particularly where they serve culturally diverse communities.

A note at this point about my working definition of diversity. Sinclair and Evans in the literature review (following) challenge the whole notion of 'diversity' as an umbrella term for a whole host of characteristics, and I accept their critique. I am not in this thesis focussing significantly on diversity in gender, educational background, or class, although I recognise these are both significant in their own right and also intersect in varying ways with one another and with other characteristics. My focus is primarily in diversity of ethnic and linguistic background, and I do not make a case as to whether the principles here would apply equally to diversity in other areas.

Literature review: why diverse church teams matter

In this section we review the literature to understand why it matters that church leadership teams, in some contexts at least, should be culturally diverse. We review the literature under four headings, to demonstrate that culturally-diverse leadership teams matter from business, theological, missiological, and anthropological perspectives

1. <u>Business-wise: culturally-diverse leadership teams enable better innovation and decision-making</u>

Many writers on leadership have recognised that culturally diverse teams can be more effective than homogenous ones in some very measurable ways, ways which impact a business's profit margins. Afzula Rahman argues that globalisation has created new opportunities and new challenges for businesses. In this new context, leaders need to understand different cultural values, behavioural attributes, and organisational dynamics as never before. Rahman looks at Hofstede's work on cultural dimensions, and highlights five key dimensions where cultures differ in significant ways. These are:

a. Power distance;
b. Uncertainty avoidance;
c. Individualism and collectivism;
d. Masculinity and femininity;
e. Long and short term perspectives.

He concludes:

> "Strong culturally sensitive leadership can accelerate an organisation towards diversity where all employees are respected and valued, regardless of their age, ethnicity, gender, race, or other dimensions." (41)

Others agree. For example, in an article for Forbes, Lori Harris writes:

> "The results of embracing diversity and having employees extend themselves professionally outside their silos and norms, afford organizations more opportunities for innovation, increased productivity and sales, and higher levels of cross-functional learning experiences." (Forbes 7 ways)

We note, however, that is it not simply having a diverse team which contributes to the success of an organisation, but rather the culturally sensitive (or as others put it, following Schein, Goleman and others, culturally intelligent) leadership that does the hard work to make the diverse team effective.

David Livermore also focuses on the advantages of a culturally diverse team in strengthening innovation. "The more diversity you have within an organisation, the more ideas there are for how things should be done." (12) But again, this only holds true if those individuals have highly developed cultural intelligence, or CQ. Otherwise a culturally homogenous team will outperform a diverse one. This leads him to the equation "Diversity x CQ = innovation." (19)

Raithel et al develop this thought, describing cultural diversity as a "double edged sword". (26) They argue that while a diversity of information and perspective can improve the abilities of a team in problem solving, decision making, creativity and innovation, collaborative effort in a diverse team can be derailed by misunderstanding and bias. Again, culturally intelligent team leadership is key as a moderating influence which maximises the advantages of cultural diversity while minimising its risks. In this leadership work the cultural background of the leader(s) is important, for example whether they have had personal experience of working in a culture not their own, as is the length of tenure of the leader. (These points, especially the first, also came up in focus group discussion.)

A student-authored blog from Penn State University entitled 'Culture Diversity and Leadership' highlights some of the differences in preferred management and leadership styles across cultures, and underscores the need for leaders to be aware and intentional in their response to these.

> "[M]anagers can implement cross-cultural competencies at work when working with individuals from diverse cultures and backgrounds. In order to effectively lead diversity and diverse cultures at work, managers should know that different cultures prefer different methods of leadership."

This also aligns with Hofstede's cultural dimensions, highlighted above.

An article on the Worktable website entitled 'Diversity in leadership: Why it matters and what you can do' highlights the priority that many businesses are giving to diversity *in the organisation* as against diversity *in the leadership* of the organisation. 64.8% of those surveyed highlighted the first of these as a priority, while only 25% highlighted the second. But the second of these is key to fulfilling the first. Leadership diversity is necessary for any organisation that wants to make progress across the whole area of diversity, equity and inclusion. Employees notice when they are not represented at the senior level, and feel excluded. And if those diverse perspectives are not being brought to bear on the most important decisions that typically a senior leadership team will make, then the bottom line is at risk. The same article quotes McKinsey as saying that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity at the executive level are 21% more likely to generate higher profits and 27% more likely to have higher value creation. Companies in the top quartile for ethnic and cultural diversity are even more likely to have industry-leading profitability.

We have seen that scholars generally agree that culturally diversity in the leadership team is essential for an organisation to excel, particularly in areas of innovation. But diversity in itself is not enough. It must also be carefully managed by culturally intelligent leaders who are capable of bringing diverse perspectives together for the sake of the organisation's purpose and overall effectiveness. This is a compelling case. But for Christians it will not be sufficient.

2. <u>Theologically: culturally-diverse leadership teams reflect the nature of the Kingdom of God</u>

While churches may be convinced by the research into the business case for diverse leadership teams, more compelling by far will be the theological case. And here the Christian movement has much to draw on.

First of all, Christians believe that God actually models unity and diversity in God's very nature and essence. This flows from the Christian understanding of the Trinity, explored in particular depth by theologians of the Eastern Orthodox tradition. From a different perspective, Blay George Nyevilley writes, "The fact that God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit coexist in unity and in equality offers unique lessons for the Church who professes it to learn how to exist in unity and in diversity." (8). So the doctrine of God leads Christians to value diversity and seek a creative fusion of unity in the midst of diversity.

Secondly, the biblical understanding of the Church as a sign and evidence of God's Kingdom has diversity woven into it. Grace Milton in 'The Hyphen Report' speaks of "the beautiful, diverse vision of the Kingdom as 'every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb' (Rev. 7:9)" (2) Hill writes:

> "Theologically, the concept of the 'Kingdom of God' (or the 'community of creation') is critical to understanding the value of intercultural mission and ministry. This Kingdom, Jesus teaches, is like a great banquet to which all are invited (Luke 14:15-24). It's where people from East and West, North and South, will dine together (Luke 13:29), an image of a truly intercultural community." (Unity)

And of course the book of Acts with its descriptions of the life of the early church affirm that intercultural community is built into the very design of the Church universal and local.

Challies underscores this point.

> "The Bible makes it clear that God is building a diverse church. It is God's plan that a church begun in one place with one people would soon spread across the earth to become a church in every place and of every people. We see the ultimate result beautifully and vividly described in passages like Revelation 5 and 7. God is drawing to himself representatives of all tribes, languages, peoples, and nations, (and, of course, all classes and castes and ages and demographics and …). There will certainly be an ultimate and heavenly fulfillment of this vision when Christ returns, but we naturally long to see a temporal and earthly fulfillment. And we do, through the local church. The local church is the place we are meant to see unity in diversity."

So the present day experience of the Church holding together unity and diversity is a foretelling of the glorified Church which the book of Revelation particularly points us towards.

This diversity is increasingly seen in the worldwide Church of today. Tim Tennent writes:

> "More people from more diverse people groups with more languages worship Jesus Christ today than at any time in human history. Whether you are looking at linguistics, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or geography – by every measuring rod, Christianity is the most diverse movement in the world today. The words of Matthew 24:14 are being fulfilled before our very eyes: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (18-19)

Anna Anderson in her dissertation pulls several of these theological threads together with an emphasis on the eschatological.

> "Diversity must be explored in light of our overarching identity as God's people, united covenantally to Christ, brought into His eternal kingdom to the end of His praise. With sights set on the new heavens and new earth, God's eternal habitation with the people He has possessed from all nations, we rejoice in the diversity that God has ordained for His everlasting glory. Ethnic and cultural diversity in our world today points to a future consummation of His plans. The nations, as well as unique gifts from God that find their origins and development in those nations, have real value today as seed of a fulfilment yet to come. At that time His elect will bring the glory and honour of their nations before Him in never-ending procession." (65)

According to Fleming, the process of contextualisation in a culturally diverse context not only allows the Gospel to be received among hitherto unreached peoples, but also teaches existing Christians new things about their own faith. He turns to the story of the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10-11 and argues that what we see here are two conversions not one. Peter as well as Cornelius is converted. Peter's is "not a conversion to faith in Jesus Christ as it is for the Cornelius group, but rather a theological and cultural transformation. Peter must be converted to a new vision of what constitutes the people of God." (37) For Fleming the story of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 "describes the Church on a journey to a deeper understanding of their identity as one people of God comprised of two distinct groups who believe in Jesus…. Unity does not mean uniformity." (52) Fleming applies this to our present context, arguing that Christians in the Global South may live a cultural experience which is closer to that of the New Testament than those of us in the prosperous West, and can challenge some of our assumed practices and habits as a result. "For example, Christians from Africa might be able to correct North American interpretations of Scripture that reflect an unbiblical individualism." (313)

So as we have seen there are many strands of Christian theology which underpin a commitment to cultural diversity in the local church and especially in church leadership. One branch of theology which merits a section of its own here is missiology – the impact of cultural diversity on the mission and evangelistic ministry of the Church.

3. <u>Missiologically: culturally-diverse leadership teams enable growth across diverse people groups</u>

Christianity is a missionary religion. For those of us who have grown up in it, it can be easy to forget that this is not true of all religions. But Christianity says, in effect, "Whoever you are, and wherever you come from, this is for you." So when the Christian church seeks to grow, to reach new people, this is not for its own sake, to ensure its future, but because of this longing that the Gospel should be shared and more and more people come to know the love of God for themselves. Many Christians go back to Jesus' final words according to Matthew's Gospel. "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations," calling it 'the Great Commission'.

So Christians will be particularly concerned to live and organise in such a way that people from 'all nations' are able to hear and respond to the Christian message. As such the issue of culturally diverse leadership is intrinsically linked to the growth of the Church in a globalised world.

In a blog posted entitled *Freeing the Gospel and Church from Western Cultural Captivity* Graham Joseph Hill writes:

> "The church is a new humanity comprising every tribe, language, people, and nation. The church must cultivate a distinct social existence that witnesses this new humanity. The

> church shapes its community and mission around its commitment to plurality, diversity, unity, and multi-ethnicity."

This picture of a culturally diverse church can now be seen in many of the major cities of the world.

Hiebert argues that we now find ourselves in the global era in which mission requires of us a "double translation" (64) and "incarnational witness." (65) He states, "The translator seeks to preserve the connection between meanings, forms, and realities in the translation" (65) ensuring that the message lands in new cultures in ways which are both comprehensible and congruent with the tradition.

Fleming points out that this is not a new experience for the Church.

> "Contextualising the Gospel is inherent to the mission of the Church. The book of Acts tells the story of a Church whose very identity involved expressing the good news about Jesus in multiple settings and among new groups of people." (25)

Rather beautifully he argues that "Luke's narrative [in Acts]… is an unfinished story", now being lived out in "London, Lagos and Lima". (55) The Church around the world lives out this multi-cultural paradigm and in doing so not only points to the nature of God's Kingdom and the eschatological destiny of the Church, but also makes it more and more possible for people from every culture – "all nations" – to find their place in the community of faith.

In his important work *Multicultural Kingdom* Harvey Kwiyani applies this specifically to a UK context.

> "The cultural diversity we see in British Christianity is a gift from God. We can meet Christans from all over the world in our cities. They come bearing gifts that could invigorate British Christianity and help re-evangelise the nation." (77)

Kwiyani reminds us that the enrichment and renewal which are intrinsic in a multi-cultural church are not just for the good of those yet to be reached, but also for those who are already part of the Church. A church which has become stuck or stale can come into a new season of life through receiving its members from other cultural backgrounds as a gift.

4. <u>Anthropologically: culturally-diverse leadership teams contribute to our understanding of what it means to be human</u>

At the most fundamental level, religions address questions about what it means to be human. Migration and globalisation have changed the experience of being human for many people, and must reshape the ways in which the Church speaks into these most basic of human questions and longings.

Lewellen points out that migration is an ancient phenomenon, but that contemporary migration has some new aspects to it. International migration and the cultural relativism to which it gives rise are now accepted as subjects for anthropology (131) Likewise, Hill states, "In anthropology, scholars like Clifford Geertz and Franz Boas have emphasized cultural relativism, asserting that cultures can only be understood on their terms. This perspective has revolutionized how we approach other cultures, moving from a judgment posture to understanding and respect." (Unity) Lewellen points out that with the rise of fast and cheap international travel has come also the rise of transnationalism in which people live across borders as an alternative to older patterns of assimilation. Whereas earlier generations of migrants might have felt they had no alternative to assimilate with the culture of their new home country, given that they might only return to their land of origin once or twice in a lifetime if that, now wealthier migrants might return several times a year, reinforcing the

relationships and norms of their original home country. “Indeed, immigrants may retain the term ‘home’ for the country of origin even into a second or third generation of legal citizenship into the new country.” (151) This new phenomenon of transnationalism means that some migrants may continue to live in two cultures for the rest of their lives, creating new ways of being in both. On the other hand, and particularly for children of immigrants, there may be a sense of not quite belonging anywhere. Kim, in his study of Koreans in New Zealand churches, quotes one as saying, “I straddled two cultures and didn’t fit in either of them.”

We live in a globalised world and a globalised church in which, as Hill argues, “Cultures are no longer isolated entities; they interact, influence, and coexist within shared physical and digital spaces.” (Unity)

Before going further, it is worth noting that the concepts we are utilising here are contested. Sinclair and Evans, for example, critique the concepts of both diversity and leadership. On diversity, they write “It is inappropriate to create a category that corrals together experiences of, for example, race and gender, treating them as in some way equivalent, all just ‘difference’ or ‘diversity’.” (162) We need instead to recognise “the diversity in difference” (167). On leadership, they remind us that it is important to note that our conception of leadership is itself a cultural construction in which some voices have bene privileged over others. (167) “Because leadership has historically been a white male idea, leaders who are not white males encounter challenge.” (168) Even processes of leading which explicitly seek to empower diverse teams can end up excluding some. (178) Much of this is undoubtedly true, and in this dissertation while I have used the term ‘diversity’ as a broad heading, for the most part my attention has been on linguistic or ethnic diversity. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to address the important question as to whether the implicit model of leadership which is inherent in my case is itself the product of white Western male ways of doing things, and therefore incapable of being fully and equally inclusive of everyone.

Kraft notes six key questions which cultures address. These are:

1. Definition of life;
2. Approach to age and leadership;
3. Transitions between stages;
4. Continuity or discontinuity between stages;
5. Ancestors;
6. And when things go wrong. (228-234, my paraphrase)

These are, of course, some of the topics which are addressed by religious traditions. Kraft argues that culturally diverse leadership teams will need to recognise these differences and to see them, not as problems to be solved, but as invitations to exploration and learning.

To summarise the reasons why this topic will matter to Christians, we quote Hill again:

> “The intercultural endeavour is, therefore, 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 deepens our understanding of God, broadens our love for our neighbours, and enriches our shared spiritual wisdom. Intercultural theology, missiology, missions, and ministry are thus not just significant – they’re essential for fulfilling our divine calling in an increasingly interconnected world.” (Unity)

In concluding the literature review, we note the work of John Kotter on why transformation efforts – of any kind – fail. Kotter says that any process of transformation requires considerable time and passes through a whole series of phases. Skipping any of these steps sabotages the whole effort. According to Kotter, every transformation process requires the following:

- A sense of urgency and importance;
- A strong guiding coalition;
- A clear and compelling vision;
- Repeated ongoing communication;
- The removal of obstacles;
- The creation of short term wins;
- Refusal to declare victory too soon;
- The anchoring of the change in the culture. (paraphrase mine).

In reviewing Kotter's list of pitfalls and obstacles, it is easy to see without looking too far why so many transformation efforts falter, and why many leaders decline to embark on them at all. These are to some extent the opposites of the factors we are already seeing coming into view as essential for the transformation effort of building a culturally diverse leadership team, and an important reminder that without those factors then this effort is likely to fail. And yet from our review of the literature it should be clear that the case for embarking on a transformation effort to secure a culturally diverse church leadership team when in a context where this is possible is almost impossible to negate.

Context: the problem to be addressed

Many long-established congregations in England (and elsewhere in Europe and North America) have lay leadership which is mono-cultural, usually white and tending to be older. Yet many of these congregations are in town and cities which have become highly culturally diverse. Sometimes the congregation may not look at all like the wider community, with for example long-established members who have moved out of the area as diversity has moved in continuing to travel to church. Sometimes the congregation may have changed so that cultural diversity is reflected in the congregation as a whole but not in its lay leadership. This may act as a barrier to effective mission among groups who are not represented in the leadership, and a style of leadership which is disempowering and exclusive, not being reflective of the cultural backgrounds of congregants. With patterns of migration and urbanisation this is likely to be a greater challenge in the future.

The Church of England, for whom I was working as I wrote this dissertation, has recognised this disconnect in its Vision and Strategy for the 2020s which talks about the challenge to become "younger and more diverse" and in one of its strategic planks aims to become "representative of the communities we serve." The congregations of the CofE are generally older, whiter, and more highly educated than the population as a whole. St. James' Cathedral Toronto, where I will serve as Dean from January 2024, has some culturally diversity in its congregation and indeed its leadership, but arguably not enough for the cathedral of the most culturally-diverse city in the world (according to the U.N.) A phrase that has resonated with me as I have prepared to take on this role has been "a cathedral fit for the city of Toronto." Such a cathedral will need to be more genuinely reflective of the people and the cultures of the city at every level, which is the impetus for this dissertation.

Research Question

The RQ which this thesis sought to address was:

> How have leaders who have successfully led a transition from a culturally homogenous to a culturally diverse lay leadership done so?

Methodology

My methodology was as follows:

- In depth interviews with 2 church leaders who had successfully led such a transition or some aspect of it. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and analysed for patterns and themes.
- These were complemented with a focus group interview with a small group of people who are part of one of these churches to test findings and applicability.
- Ethics approval was sought and given and consent forms administered.
- Actual first names are used throughout, although other identifying factors and the names of the churches concerned are not given.

Report on church leader conversations

In a chapter entitled 'Models of Change Management', Edgar Schein argues that a dissatisfaction with the status quo is always at the root of any kind of change process.

> "A desire for change, for doing something differently, for learning something new, always begins with some kind of pain or dissatisfaction. This can take many forms—an unexpected negative result of some program, a drop in sales, people leaving unexpectedly, a loss of morale. Failure to achieve something that was wanted or expected could be equally painful, especially if it created disappointment or disillusionment. The desire to change something can even result from a reminder that something intended had not yet been done. In all cases the common factor is some kind of pain." (322)

This seemed to be the case for both the church leaders I interviewed, who both felt a level of frustration with the context in which they found themselves when taking on their parishes.

My first church leader conversation was with Stu. Stu now works as a consultant on leadership in the church and business worlds, but formerly he was the vicar of a Church of England parish in a very multi-cultural part of west London. I already knew Stu a little from other connections, but I knew I needed to meet him in connection with this research project after I posted something about my dissertation on Facebook and two of my Facebook friends independently told me that I needed to speak with him. My conversation with Stu and subsequently a couple of people from his church made up the core of my work on this project.

When Stu became vicar of his church it had been in decline for some years. In the fairly recent past this had been a church of some 350 people with a reputation that meant that people travelled in for worship services and events from miles away. These 350 people had been largely white and living within an easy journey to the church. However the area had been changing. The immediate location was now only 15% white and surrounding districts had also been subject to 'white flight' as other ethnic groups moved in. The commuter congregation were no longer within easy reach of the church and had started going elsewhere. At the time of the appointment of Stu as vicar the congregation was down to about 50 in a building which could seat 450 people. This contributed to a sense of desperation among the congregation who realised that things needed to be different. Stu understood that if things were not able to turn around under his leadership then he would be the last vicar of this parish.

However, although the congregation was now small it had also become more ethnically and culturally diverse, reflecting the population of the immediate area much more accurately than the previous larger congregation had done. Stu had a vision to grow the church again but this time to build a congregation which reflected the diversity of the area rather than drawing a culturally-homogenous commuter congregation. Although Stu's background was in a network of churches known for their well-resourced church planting programme, his church never became one of their projects and so he moved to his new parish with no resources or people other than his immediate family. He knew he was going to have to rely on the people he found locally, or as he put it, those God sent.

To fulfil his vision of building a culturally-diverse church, Stu told me, there were four main strands or emphases.

First, there needed to be a culturally-diverse leadership and staff team. Stu says, "Unless the team reflects the multiculturalism of the area, you won't find it in the church." For Stu this needed to be seen in both the volunteer leadership of the church and the staff team that he planned to build as resources allowed. The first staff appointment was of a Black community pastor who Stu had worked with in a previous role. By the end of Stu's time in post his staff team of eighteen (mainly part-time) represented almost every continent and spoke six different first languages.

Second, as Stu puts it, it was important to look for the Holy Spirit to bring those whom He chose into the congregation. Stu comes from the wing of the Church that puts a lot of emphasis on the role and leadership of the Holy Spirit. As he tells his story it is striking how often he talks about the Holy Spirit bring a certain person or a particular cultural group. After all, as John (my other church leader interviewee) said in a later conversation, "You can't stand outside the church with a sign saying 'Black people wanted'!" This was almost certainly made easier by the fact that at the time of Stu's appointment as vicar the congregation were already culturally diverse. As Stu tells the story, the Holy Spirit brought people from different language and cultural groups into the congregation who might then ask for help to create specific groups or even congregations (distinct worshipping communities) to enable them to reach others from the same linguistic or cultural background. Key to this seems to have been quite an entrepreneurial and permission-giving approach to ministry from Stu himself. While other clergy might have said no to untested or risky ideas, he appears to have said "Let's try it." He talks a lot about the importance of the church building, which is large and has a high street location, as providing space and visibility for new initiatives. Stu's vision seems to have been to move from a building which was underutilised and closed most of the week other than Sundays to one which was open and vibrant all week round.

Thirdly, being intentional about being a culturally diverse staff and leadership team meant also being very focused on training and leadership development. Stu recognised that there might not always be Global Majority Heritage (GMH) candidates for leadership roles with sufficient training or experience and so without an intentional leadership development programme focused on GMH people white leaders and staff team members might end up being appointed by default. Some of this leadership development was informal and locally focused, training a culturally-diverse cohort of people to take on visible lay ministry roles within the church. Some of it was more closely integrated with the institution of the Church of England, identifying and training people who had the potential to exercise future ministry as priests or licensed lay ministers within the Church. Some of these ordinands (priests in training) would return to the church after training to begin new congregations or programmes focused on the cultural groups from which they themselves came.

This leads naturally to the fourth factor Stu mentions in the development of a culturally-diverse church, and that is planting new congregations. Initially, all the new congregations were within the building of the parish church and seen very much as part of the life of the parish. Over time some congregations were planted further afield. Again, Stu sees himself as having been responsive to the work of the Holy Spirit, rather than taking a strategic lead himself. As he tells the story, a group of people from a particular cultural background might approach him and express a desire to start something to reach their friends and families. His role would be to support them in making this happen. Leaders would be appointed from within that cultural group, and these new congregations would often then grow very quickly. On other occasions he might find a leader from an under-represented group and ask them to begin something, so taking more of an initiative. These leaders could be clergy or lay. Generally these new congregations would worship in a language other than English, although some congregants might come to the English language Sunday service as well (although even that service would have elements in different languages, about which more later). As a result, Stu says, people from GMH backgrounds would say to him, "We feel celebrated, not just tolerated."

I asked Stu about the obstacles he had experienced on the journey to develop a truly multi-cultural leadership team, expecting that he might speak about resistance to change from the existing congregation. This was not the case. Initially the only real obstacle to change was capacity. The strategy outlined previously was demanding and labour intensive, and the staff and leadership team took time to grow. Over time a bigger obstacle, sadly, came from the diocesan authorities who seemed to struggle to affirm and encourage the experimental nature of the work, being more worried about policies and protocols being followed. As the church grew, demands from the diocese for significant increases in the church's financial contributions to central funds became an existential threat. Although numbers of congregants were up, per capita wealth was down due to the socioeconomic status of those who were joining. (This aligns with the intersectionality issue raised earlier. In reaching people from different *ethnic* backgrounds the church also reached people with different *socio-economic* backgrounds.) Yet the diocese assessed the church's contribution, according to Stu, at a level which would have closed things down. Sleight of hand was needed to use a separate trust fund where money could be stored to support the ministry.

Another key component of the work was intentionally intercultural worship. Although there were congregations worshipping in various different languages e.g. from the Indian subcontinent, the largest congregation on a Sunday morning continued to be largely English in its worship and liturgy, and as previously stated some who attended worship in another language would also attend this. The leadership team felt it was important to reflect their cultural diversity even in this service, and so there would always be at least one song in a language other than English and an intention to ensure that different ethnicities were reflected on the platform. The watchword was "All the nations represented every Sunday." Food provided after services would be brought by different members of the congregation who were encouraged to bring food from their own tradition for everyone to share.

By the end of Stu's time as vicar his congregation were roughly 1/3 Black, 1/3 Asian, and 1/3 white. His advice to people undertaking a similar journey? Don't rush or fret. Spend time in prayer and listening. Get friends around you. And enjoy the journey – it's a lot of fun.

I wanted to get another point of view on my subject and so I met with church leader John. John was at the time we spoke vicar of a fairly large parish church in a prosperous part of south east London, an area where the congregation was largely white as was the wider population. John has lived in a number of different countries and considers himself to have a love for the experience of cultural

diversity, and a passion to see the Church embody an intercultural approach. Clearly this was going to be a limited factor, at least as far as ethnicity and language were concerned, in an area such as the one in which John was ministering. But John also worked with a pastor named Hugo of Hispanic heritage who had been a Roman Catholic priest and had converted to Anglicanism. As a student of the cultural mix of London, John was aware that there was an area not so far from his parish but in an inner urban context where one of the highest concentrations of Spanish speakers in London lived. He also knew that one of the Church of England churches in the middle of that area was without a vicar, and that it had been through a lengthy period of numerical decline and was now quite small. He wondered if something might be done and began to talk to some of the local leaders in the church hierarchy about possibilities.

Over time a plan emerged. Hugo had not yet completed his period of training and was not therefore qualified to become the priest in charge of the parish in the Hispanic area. So a recently retired priest with significant international experience was recruited to work with Hugo. He would be officially the leader of the parish for a set period of time. Meanwhile Hugo would complete his training and work in the parish simultaneously, taking on more of the responsibility until the day came for the older minister to hand over completely.

At the heart of this plan was the planting of a new Spanish-speaking congregation, sharing the church building with the existing English language one. Both congregations together would make up the worshipping community with neither designated the 'main' one.

In some other parts of the world this strategy would not be a cause for comment. For example, in areas of the USA with significant Hispanic populations Spanish-speaking congregations are common, usually sharing a church building with an English-speaking one. Indeed, shortly after our interview John left the UK to work with a diocese in the USA to develop exactly this model. But in the Church of England, with its emphasis on uniformity, very little of this had been attempted.

So the planting of a language-specific congregation in a London parish was regarded as very much a pioneering project, an experiment. One of the reasons for this may be that in the Church of England congregations tend to be local, living within walking distance of the church they attend (notwithstanding the story of Stu's church above, which had been a commuter church before his time). In the USA many people drive to church and think nothing of spending thirty minutes behind the wheel to get there. This matters for two reasons. First, concentrations of particular cultural or language groups may not be sufficiently intense to support a local language-specific congregation, even in London. To gain a critical mass, some people may have to come by car or public transport. And secondly, because populations move. An area which is known for its large West African population in one generation may find that these have been replaced by people from Poland or Romania a few years later.

John is very clear that a language- or culture-specific plant does not have to begin with a service. There may be other kinds of gathering which precede it. Nevertheless, a Spanish-language service was how this church plant began, and once it started it grew massively from the very beginning. As well as Spanish speakers from the local community, others came from further afield, making the best of London's public transport, as they heard about this from friends and family. This was of course gratifying for Hugo and his colleagues, but also caused tensions. The idea that there were two linguistically-distinct congregations with neither designated the main one was clearly a fiction almost immediately. Quite quickly it became clear that the Spanish-speaking congregation was where the energy and growth was and the other congregation felt overshadowed and marginal. The challenges also emerged that accompany any period of rapid church growth, such as training and deploying

sufficient high-calibre leaders, and developing structures and processes flexible enough to cope with the influx. In such circumstances the balance of power shifts quite rapidly.

One response to the growth has been to plant other congregations, although unlike in Stu's church these plants have all been Spanish-speaking. The aim is not to create a range of culturally-diverse expressions of church but rather to expand the Church of England's offer to the Hispanic population of London. As well as congregations which have been planted from the original church, others have been inspired by this example.

One question of which the leaders are aware is the potential life cycle of a linguistically-distinct congregation. This is the challenge of the second generation. The first generation of immigrants who have been raised in another part of the world and have English as their second language are delighted to have the opportunity to worship in their mother tongue and to meet with others who come from a similar cultural background. This applies even if they have excellent English and attend English language services as well. But the second generation have probably been to English-speaking schools, and have friends from a variety of cultural backgrounds who all speak English as their first language. To them, the Spanish service (or equivalent) may seem backwards-looking and unappealingly homogenous, even if they appreciate the welcome which it expresses. It may be that churches which are planted with a single language focus transition to a different model over time, or are replaced by those who have done so. John says that in the diocese of San Diego the largest Hispanic church worships exclusively in English!

Although John had said that his own parish was largely white, I asked him what he had done to try to develop a more culturally diverse approach locally. Part of his response to inheriting an all-white leadership team was to build a friendship with a Black priest who was serving in a nearby parish, inviting them to participate in key events and services, thus enabling the small number of Black people in the congregation to see someone like them in a leadership role liturgically. He was also intentional about making people of other ethnicities visible wherever possible, for example in leading intercessions or reading the Bible in church. He stresses the importance of being pro-active about recruiting non-white volunteers, noting that those who do not presently see themselves represented on the platform are the least likely to volunteer, so they must be approached and asked. For John an important point is that people need to feel seen and when they are approached and asked they know they have been.

John's enthusiasm for cultural diversity comes over clearly when he speaks about it, as does Stu's. "I love cultures!" he says, and you sense he means it. Although neither made this point to me specifically, I felt that for both the push for cultural diversity was not primarily strategic but came from the heart. Of course strategy then needs to be developed that can help deliver the goal. But for both church leaders it was a matter of passion that their churches should reflect the beautiful mess of multiculturalism from top to bottom. That passion is rooted in both their own experiences of living in different cultures and their theological understanding of the nature of the Kingdom of God.

John stressed the importance of the connection with the church leader for people from GMH backgrounds. While British culture has become more relaxed and less hierarchical over time, this is not the case everywhere. In many parts of Africa and Asia hierarchy remains very important and therefore to have a relationship with the priest – to feel seen by him or her – is very much valued.

Finally John, like Stu, stressed the importance of sharing food as a place of relationship and hospitality, but also as a place where different cultures can be celebrated and enjoyed by everyone.

Focus group

I wanted to test out what I thought I was hearing from Stu and John so I attempted to set up one or two focus groups. It proved harder to do this than anticipated so I ended up with one focus group with just two members, both from Stu's former parish. One was Sally, Stu's successor, and the other Emmanuel, a priest from India who had been there throughout Stu's time and beyond. I asked them two questions.

1. What have been your experiences of seeing a change to a multicultural leadership team in a church?
2. What factors do you think were important in enabling that change?

From my earlier work I had identified five factors which seemed to me to have been important in the stories I had heard and from the literature review and I wanted to see if these were the factors which others recognised. The five were:

1. Visibility of people from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds;
2. The intentional leadership of the senior leader towards a multicultural approach;
3. The use and celebration of cultural signifiers such as food;
4. An intent towards use of language including some services and events offered in languages other than English;
5. Congregation or church planting, creating spaces for people from other parts of the world while working to keep the unity of the church as a whole.

The focus group confirmed the importance of all of these themes with some important additions and nuances.

For example, there was an emphasis in our discussion on the importance of listening and learning, which relates to the issue of intentional leadership. Leaders who have the intent to lead into a culturally diverse model of church must exhibit curiosity and humility. There is an important recognition of what remains to be learned and understood, and a desire to understand it. This relates to John's point about the importance of people feeling seen, and also to his point about relationship with the priest or senior leader. When the vicar asks open questions about the culture of an individual or group, and pays attention to the response, then this communicates that the person or group are valued by him or her.

An argument was made that it helps if the senior church leader has some personal experience of living as a foreigner in a culture other than their own. This may well contribute to a personal cultural dexterity, an ability to learn from and celebrate cultural diversity, as well as a deeper understanding of what it is like to try to make one's home in a context where one might feel like – or be treated like – an outsider. The empathy on the part of the senior leader which this may inculcate was seen a being important in the forming of significant relationships with those who are experiencing this dislocation in the present time and context. I was encouraged by this as an Englishman born in Kenya on my way to lead a culturally diverse community in Toronto!

In terms of cultural signifiers, the importance of food was emphasised, and this was linked to the value attached to hospitality and eating together. This is something that Christians should be able to understand at a deep level. After all, the central Christian liturgy is a reenactment of a meal, and the first century church of Acts met in one another's homes, breaking bread together. Yet in many churches a cup of unpleasant coffee and a cheap biscuit after the service is all the hospitality which is ever offered. Many cultures in the Global South set a high premium on hospitality and eating

together, and the focus group affirmed the importance that had been attached to this in their own experience. At the same time, other cultural signifiers were highlighted as being significant too. For example, music and dance from different cultures were seen as important, whether in worship or other social gatherings, together with flags of different countries prominently displayed and other visual clues that this community is proud of its cultural diversity. It was seen as important that the church has one highly multicultural carol service, with songs and readings reflective of the cultures that are represented in the congregation.

On that word, 'multiculturalism', Sally felt that this was an unhelpful word, in her mind suggesting different cultures which sit together in the same space without ever changing or affecting one another. She preferred the term 'intercultural' as suggesting a dialogue or conversation, in which each culture engages with the others, remaining true to itself while also being shaped to some degree by that intercultural engagement. This concept reminds us that cultures are not static, things to be handled delicately and preserved in aspic, but rather living and dynamic, always changing and being changed as part of the cultural flow of the world.

The vision of this church is to be 'a home for all nations where God's love changes everything.' Sally and Immanuel stress that building a church that reflects this vision is hard work and comes with many challenges. They have appointed a 'cultural advocate' within the church leadership team whose task it is to engage when there are areas of tension or crossed wires, or when someone has been offended by someone else. There is a realism about the fact that cultures are far from perfect, and that people can cause offence sometimes without meaning to. I warm to this idea of selecting someone whose cultural intelligence is high who can move towards areas of difficulty rather than ignoring them.

Finally, Sally stresses that this all takes time. There are no quick fixes, even while there may be some moments when things move quite rapidly. And even when people from diverse cultural backgrounds step up into leadership roles, that doesn't necessarily mean they will immediately feel confident to contribute or to speak up. Overall the journey of building a genuinely intercultural leadership team is a slow one.

Discussion

Hill (Unity) offers a summary of the practice of intercultural Christian leadership and ministry, as follows:

- Intercultural leadership guides and influences Christian communities amidst diverse cultural contexts, nurturing unity amid diversity.
- It embraces cultural diversity as an enriching element rather than a divisive one, recognizing that diversity mirrors the manifold creativity of God.
- Active listening and open-mindedness are crucial, encouraging dialogue between different cultural perspectives, which results in mutual understanding and enrichment.
- Respecting cultural differences is paramount, fostering a community where each individual feels valued and understood.
- It champions inclusivity, inviting every voice to the table, especially those historically marginalized or silenced.
- Intercultural ministry fosters collaboration, promoting collective decision-making and problem-solving that draw on diverse perspectives.
- It challenges ethnocentrism, breaking down cultural barriers and prejudice and fostering understanding and acceptance.

- Cultural humility is critical. Leaders continually learn and unlearn, open to being transformed by their encounters with others.
- Intercultural ministry is dynamic, adapting to changing cultural contexts and needs while remaining rooted in the gospel.
- Leaders need intercultural competence, the ability to effectively interact, communicate, and build relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds.
- It requires biblical interpretation sensitive to cultural differences, avoiding the imposition of one's cultural understanding on others.
- Reconciliation and justice are core values. Leaders work to heal divisions, build bridges, and foster a culture of fairness.
- It invites a polycentric vision of the church, recognizing multiple centres of leadership and influence rather than a single, dominant centre.
- It celebrates a polyvocal Church, welcoming a chorus of diverse voices that enrich our understanding of God and our shared mission.
- Intercultural ministry reflects the Missio Dei, God's mission, which invites all cultures and people into a loving community, embodying the Kingdom of God on earth.

It will be seen that the elements which Hill identifies map closely with the elements which come out of the discussions summarised above. For example, our churches see cultural diversity as a strength and source of celebration, not a problem to be managed. They recognise the need for cultural competence and humility, intentionally learning and developing the skills needed to lead an intercultural community well. In for example their models of congregation planting they build a polycentric vision of the church and welcome a polyvocal community of faith. They cultivate respectful listening, recognising the value of different perspectives and seeking them out where they may be absent.

Four things particularly strike me from all I have heard and read.

The first is the leadership challenge involved in building a culturally diverse congregation and in particular a culturally diverse leadership team. Stu, John, Sally, Immanuel, and Hugo all appear to be exceptional leaders. All have experiences that are unusual among clergy, for example of living in other cultural contexts. All seem to have gifts which would have made them outstanding leaders in any field that they had worked in. But by definition not every church leader is exceptional. Can the Christian Church raise the quality of leaders, by better processes of selection and training, or my thinking more broadly about who those future leaders might be? Can the Church ensure that only exceptional leaders are appointed to posts in churches such as these?

The second is that this journey often leads to exponential growth. In a context such as the Church of England's today growth of 1 or 2% per year is seen as a significant achievement, and 5% would be seen as remarkable. Yet Stu's church and Hugo's church plant experienced far more growth than that, sometimes overwhelming the structures and patterns of church life as well as the existing congregation. This happened as a result of a focus on unreached groups and allowing those who were culturally closest to those groups to lead outreach to them. The CofE could move out of a mindset and experience of precipitate decline to one of substantial growth by intentional engagement with cultural diversity.

The third is that this process is a dynamic and constantly moving one. Cultures evolve, first generations die out, cities shape-shift and morph. This isn't a journey with a final destination but a mindset and approach, more like surfing than building.

The fourth is that all this is hard work, complicated and bruising at times. There is a danger of a kind of liberal romanticisation of cultural diversity. But if it was easy to draw diverse cultures into one happy community then it would happen more often than it does. I was struck by the church who had appointed cultural advocates to work for reconciliation where relationships had broken down. This is resource intensive, and given that GMH-background groups are likely to be poorer than the white indigenous population, the resource challenge can get worse rather than better as growth occurs. More problems to solve, with fewer resources to solve them.

Conclusions

Brian Leander in an article for the Lewis Centre of Church Leadership talks about the seven characteristics of diversity-orientated churches. Although he is writing for a US context our research would suggest these could apply to other places in the world as well. The seven are:

- Leadership that strategically recreates vision and value-congruence;
- Top management that reflects the demographics of the church membership and wider community;
- Organisational strategy and action to address inequalities and conflicts;
- A leadership development plan;
- A diversity plan for leadership;
- Policies for reconciliation at all levels;
- A leader who defines, legitimates, and reproduces the organisation's vision and values across the generation.

It is notable how these seven characteristics align closely with the two churches studied in this thesis, in part at least. We have seen how important leadership is, both in intent and capability. We have noted the importance of organisational strategy and tackling conflicts. We have identified the significance of developing a diverse leadership cohort. And so on.

We began with Schein and we will end with Schein, who reminds us of the challenge inherent in building culturally diverse leadership teams, as well as the future context in which the need for organisations to engage well with this topic will be increasingly important.

> "As organizations and working groups become more multicultural, new ways of building workable relationships will have to be invented, because just training everyone to be more culturally intelligent and composing groups with the most intelligent will not be practical. Existing groups will have to find experiential ways of learning through creating cultural islands and learning new forms of conversation such as dialogue. The most essential characteristic of these new conversational forms is that they be personal stories, because only through such stories can people from different cultures identify with each other." (Schein, 121)

Stories are one of the things the Christian church should be good at. We have our own stories of life and faith. In becoming Christian we step into a meta-narrative – a story – of God's engagement with the world. In our mission and evangelism we share these stories, listen to others, and seek connection and alignment.

Every cultural group has a story too. A story of what shaped them, of how they got here, of their dreams and anxieties. As we pursue this vision of a Church which reflects the glorious diversity of the Kingdom of God, we could do worse than beginning with sharing stories – ours, God's, and one another's.

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