



PAOC Cultural Language Guiding Group

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The following is a list of key principles to assist churches to move from a monocultural to a multicultural presence in their view, ministry and experience:

- Diversified leadership
- Celebration of cultural diversity
- Passion and awareness for the community

Diversified Leadership

The leadership of the church must be reflective of those it serves. Space must be made for the development and experience that other cultures bring to the vision and ministry of the church. This includes both volunteers and staff. A simple question to ask is “Does the leadership look like the congregation?”

With diversity comes strength and perspective. We are often quick to judge a situation from our lens, but we need to replace judgment with curiosity, asking questions to better understand what others see, think and feel about a given situation. Research shows that diverse teams are

smarter than homogeneous groups and that they make fewer factual errors when discussing available information.

There will be training and cultural barriers that will need to be navigated, but the reality is part of leadership development always has challenges to overcome.

Celebration of Cultural Diversity

What we must first recognize is that the gospel has torn down the barriers that often exist in cultures and communities. Part of presenting the body mature in Christ is helping them to see that in Christ, “there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythians, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col. 3:11). What we are left with is simply “believers.”

The pursuit of diversity is not an easy path; if it were, multicultural churches would be the norm. The process can be at times painful for pastors and congregants alike. Not only does it challenge heart-level issues of prejudice, but it also challenges lifelong preferences regarding music, expressiveness in services, preaching style and more.

There needs to be a commitment to building consensus out of a coalition of different cultural groups so that one cultural group does not dominate or control the ministries of the church. With the arrival of new cultural groups a church eventually realizes that the tensions being felt around the different customs and expectations of each group can be a place for dialogue and not division. This was the experience of the early church as recorded in Acts 6:1-6 and Acts 15, and it is the eventual destination of the entire church in heaven as seen in Rev. 7:9.

Passion and Awareness for the Community

The church is called to be a lighthouse to those around them not just to those like them. Today, our communities are very diverse and multicultural and so should the church be a reflection of those in the community it serves. The healthiest of churches reflect the multicultural diversity of their surrounding community as evidence of being led of the Spirit to engage everyone in their community in the best of ways.

Often, we struggle with finding common ground with those around us. What we need to recognize is that language and ethnic background are not the only foundation to build upon. Many communities are economically and employment/service based. We often have much more in common with those in our immediate communities than we realize. Rather than focusing on our differences, a focus on our common humanity, similarities of human experience and common need before God serves us well in approaching, socializing, sharing, serving and being witnesses among those currently outside the church.

The multicultural church recognizes the need to intentionally reach across every barrier to see those around them and the world come to know Christ as Saviour. A diverse missions program

can also assist in growing a healthy world view both of those around us and those in areas in need of the Gospel, not merely overseas: Our local communities today increasingly require cross-cultural outreach in much the same way as missionaries experience in fields of witness around the world...all because the world now resides in our communities.

This is a new and exciting day for our churches across Canada. Being and moving intentionally toward the multicultural character and complexion of the church in heaven may be stretching and uncomfortable at times, yet is also filled with even greater joy, congregational numeric growth and also personal growth, being shaped increasingly into the image of Jesus himself.

Use the references below, reach out to us for further assistance, share this with your leadership team and prayerfully, joyfully and faith-filled anticipation, chart your steps forward!

References

- Pursuing and Leading a Multicultural Church Team EFCA article
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- Characteristics of Emerging Healthy Multicultural Churches, Paul Pearce, 2000
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