

One Neighborhood:
Unity and the Character of God in the Intercultural Churches of Baltimore, Maryland

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Abstract

Baltimore is filled with racial and socioeconomic segregation that goes all the way back to the late 1800s. While the laws that previously allowed segregation have changed, the scars and pain they produce still negatively affect the city to this day. Intercultural churches in Baltimore were created to bring together diverse people groups in a place where unity could prevail.

Through interviews, readings, and visits, I researched intercultural churches in Baltimore to prove that, while sometimes challenging to create and maintain, they ultimately express God's ideal creation and provide unity in a city with powerful division. This research does not argue that every church in Baltimore should become an intercultural church; instead, this research emphasizes that intercultural churches must be more prevalent in the city, so that people can have the opportunity to experience intercultural ministry and the richness that flows from it.

Through establishing a common memory and relationship building, the increased presence of intercultural churches in Baltimore City will uphold biblical expectations to promote personal growth and city-wide impact, and reveal a more complete image of the nature and character of God.

Key Words: "Intercultural Church", "Baltimore", "Diversity"

The diversity in Baltimore is a modern expression of a biblical vision conveyed in Revelation. The vision says there will be “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”¹ Baltimore has a vast representation of all these tribes in its over 200 neighborhoods, “each with a distinct personality and experience.”² While the diversity in Baltimore is indeed indicative of this biblical vision, the likelihood of its reality has been negatively impacted by Baltimore’s racial and socioeconomic segregation that goes all the way back to the late 1800’s. While the laws that previously allowed segregation have changed, the scars and pain they produced are still felt and seen today. Because every neighborhood in Baltimore is weighed down by years of segregation, there must be a means of unification that encourages the great multitude to come together united as one neighborhood at the feet of the Father. From this necessity, intercultural churches were created. There must be a place where a community of people from “different cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds enter a covenant with one another to worship and fellowship together and serve one another... .”³ Through establishing a common memory and relationship building, the increased presence of intercultural churches in Baltimore will uphold biblical expectations to promote personal growth and city-wide impact, and reveal a more complete image of the nature and character of God.

A Note About Language

Various sources in this project argue for an intercultural church but utilize different diction to do so. For the purposes of this paper, any time sources are quoted in this paper and the

¹Revelation 7:9 (NIV).

²“Guide to Neighborhoods in Baltimore,” Visit Baltimore, September 1, 2022.

³Safwat Marzouk, “What Is an Intercultural Church?,” in *Intercultural Church: A Biblical Vision for an Age of Migration*, 15. (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2019).

author chose to use a different phrase to insinuate intercultural church, the phrase will be replaced with ‘intercultural church.’ I do not intend to correct those sources, but rather to create a standard of vocabulary throughout this paper and ensure that all parties agree on the argument and intent of intercultural churches and their impact in the city.

What Intercultural Churches Are Not

While similar, intercultural churches are not the same as multiethnic churches, multicultural churches, interracial churches, or cross-cultural churches. A distinction exists between the roots of each of these words. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, culture is “the customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group.”⁴ Culture encapsulates a large part of one’s identity and motivates a person’s behavior and norms. Conversely, the root words *ethnic* and *racial* are less encompassing than *culture*. Ethnicity refers to a “group identity based on culture, religion, traditions, and customs.”⁵ In this case, ethnicity is largely connected to someone's heritage, where culture is a learned behavior based on one's surroundings. Race, on the other hand, refers to “the major groupings into which humankind is considered to be divided on the basis of physical characteristics or shared ancestry.”⁶ Ethnicity and race are part of one’s culture, but they do not properly encapsulate the socioeconomic characteristics, traditions, and ideologies that the term culture does. For the purposes of this paper, culture is the best option.

Similarly, the prefixes *multi*, *inter*, and *cross* also determine the meaning and implication of each word. *Multi*, according to Oxford English Dictionary, means many or multiple⁷. *Inter*

⁴Oxford Languages, ‘culture’, *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

⁵Oxford Languages, ‘ethnicity’, *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

⁶Oxford Languages, ‘race’, *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

⁷Oxford Languages, ‘multi-’, *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

means being between or among.⁸ The goal of intercultural churches, which will be discussed in greater detail later, is to encourage the communication and appreciation of multiple cultures, not merely to have multiple cultures present. Agnes Brazal and Emmanuel DeGuzman explain it well when they clarify that “multiculturalism refers to the policy of peaceful coexistence” while interculturalism “not only respects differences but creates space for interaction of diverse cultural groups.”⁹ *Inter*, as opposed to *multi*, is the appropriate prefix for the purposes of this paper. Continuing on, there is not a solid distinction between the prefixes *cross* and *inter*. Both cross-cultural and intercultural express a form of communication between two groups of people. The only distinction is that intercultural is a “happening between two cultures”¹⁰ and cross-cultural is “relating between”¹¹ them. In comparison, intercultural meets the standards of the church described in this paper more effectively than cross-cultural. Given the above analysis, ‘intercultural’ is the best option because it encourages communication and learning from a vast majority of people beyond the limits of mere race or ethnicity.

What Intercultural Churches Are

Rev. Dr. Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Rev. Dr. Jann Aldredge-Clanton, editors of *Intercultural Ministry: Hope for a Changing World*, describe intercultural churches as churches that:

bring people of various cultures together, to learn from one another, giving equal value and power to each culture, preserving cultural differences, and celebrating the variety of cultural traditions. Intercultural churches and ministries are defined by justice, mutuality, respect, equality, understanding, acceptance, freedom, peacemaking, and celebration. In

⁸Oxford Languages, ‘inter-’, *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

⁹Agnes M. Brazal and Emmanuel S. DeGuzman, *Intercultural Church: Bridge of Solidarity in the Migrant Context* (n.p.: Borderless, 2015) 47-48.

¹⁰Oxford Languages, ‘Intercultural’, *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

¹¹Oxford Languages, ‘cross-cultural’, *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

intercultural churches people must be willing to leave the comfort zones of their own separate traditions.¹²

Rev. Dr. Ji-Sun and Rev. Dr. Aldredge-Clanton outline the grounds on which intercultural churches stand. Intercultural churches go beyond being near others from a different race or socioeconomic status or ethnicity, but instead encourage a growing and evolving relationship built on mutual trust and respect. These churches cultivate an environment where all are seen and celebrated because of, not despite, their culture. They are a space for everyone, no matter a person's background, to come to know Christ. While celebrating each culture uniquely, intercultural churches build bonds, fight for justice of the oppressed, and resist the amalgamation into one dominant culture by actively learning from each new perspective brought forth by every diverse culture. Intercultural churches require their attenders to abandon prejudice and judgment and instead cultivate a posture of learning and respect. Intercultural churches are churches where "members from different cultures can *interact* with each other and thereby mutually enrich the individual members and the community as a whole."¹³

Historical Review

In the early 19th century, Baltimore was not racially segregated. Divisional strife existed, but there were no governmental regulations in place and generally both groups – white and black Baltimoreans – lived near each other. At the time, black people lived in all of Baltimore's twenty wards.¹⁴ In the city structure, white residents tended to live on main streets and black

¹²Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Jann Aldredge-Clanton, eds., *Introduction to Intercultural Ministry Hope for a Changing World*, ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2017).

¹³VănThanh Nguyễn, "From Multiculturalism to Interculturality: The Aim of Theological Education in Today's Global Context," *CrossCurrents* 69, no. 1 (2019): 24–28. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26756896>.

¹⁴Garrett Power, "Apartheid Baltimore Style: The Residential Segregation Ordinances of 1910-1913," *Maryland Law Review* 42, no. 2 (1983): 289–290.

residents tended to live in alleyways, but still, there were no major laws or regulations segregating white and black people.¹⁵ From 1870-1900 Baltimore grew from a population of 250,000 to 500,000. This population boom was due to industrialization, a common occurrence in most major cities in the early 1900's. While it aided production and advancement in technology, the industrialization was coupled with urbanization and depression which "concentrated in Baltimore a growing population of the poor, sick and ignorant."¹⁶

The effects of the population boom impacted both white people and black people in Baltimore. From 1880-1900 the black population increased by 47% and the white population increased by 54%.¹⁷ Because most people in the city were struggling, a large amount of social reform began happening in Baltimore, but the social reform programs were only accessible to the white residents. Public baths and playgrounds began popping up to increase humanization, but until 1908 those programs were specifically designated for white people. Sickness was also a major problem in the cities that would lead to future discriminatory practices. Due to the lack of social reform available for black people, death rates of tuberculosis and smallpox among black people were twice the averages of white people.¹⁸ Around this time, the separation of black and white Baltimoreans became more prominent. Increased social reform geared toward white Baltimoreans paired with an influx of black and European immigrants, new transportation options, and the Baltimore fire of 1904, led to increased white middle class flight.¹⁹ As they

¹⁵MD Center for History & Culture, "History of Housing Discrimination and Redlining in Baltimore," *Vimeo*, July 1, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/434469938>.

¹⁶Garrett Power, "Apartheid Baltimore Style: The Residential Segregation Ordinances of 1910-1913," *Maryland Law Review* 42, no. 2 (1983): 292.

¹⁷ Power, "Apartheid Baltimore Style," 290.

¹⁸ Power, 293.

¹⁹MD Center for History & Culture, "History of Housing Discrimination and Redlining in Baltimore," *Vimeo*, July 1, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/434469938>.

moved to Baltimore, Jewish, Polish, and Russian immigrants tended to have larger homes in east Baltimore, displacing Black citizens to west Baltimore. Due to little money and limited job opportunities, black people sought the cheapest housing and eventually slums formed. The first slum in Baltimore was called Pigtown. The living conditions in the slums were exceptionally poor, often with little resources and multiple families to one single-family home. Eventually, the black people who could afford to do so left the slums in Pigtown and moved to northwest Baltimore—an area eventually known as the 17th Ward. Eventually, the conditions in the 17th Ward decreased as displaced black families from southern slums moved in.²⁰ By 1903, the 17th Ward replaced Pigtown as the slums. Again, the black people who could afford to leave did, and fled to the 14th, 15th, and 16th Wards in northwest Baltimore. In general, western expansion was a successful endeavor for black families, however the east was significantly harder to penetrate.²¹

In 1910, George W.F. McMechen, a Yale Law graduate and respected black lawyer, purchased a house at 1834 McCulloh Street. This home was 10 blocks away from his previous residence. After moving in, George McMechen and his family were scrutinized and treated terribly by their white neighbors. In response to them moving into an all-white neighborhood, Milton Dishell, one of George's fellow lawyers, drafted the Baltimore Ordinance 610. In response, *The New York Times* wrote about the ordinance as the first zoning law in American history in a piece titled "Baltimore Tries Dramatic Plan of Race Segregation."²² *The Times*

²⁰To expand its yards, the B & O railroad displaced over 100 black families to the 17th ward. (Garrett Power, "Apartheid Baltimore Style: The Residential Segregation Ordinances of 1910-1913," *Maryland Law Review* 42, no. 2 (1983): 291.)

²¹Garrett Power, "Apartheid Baltimore Style: The Residential Segregation Ordinances of 1910-1913," *Maryland Law Review* 42, no. 2 (1983): 297.

²²"BALTIMORE TRIES DRASTIC PLAN OF RACE SEGREGATION; Strange Situation Which Led the Oriole City to Adopt the Most Pronounced 'Jim Crow' Measure on Record. BALTIMORE TRIES DRASTIC PLAN OF RACE SEGREGATION," *The New York Times*, December 25, 1910, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1910/12/25/archives/baltimore-tries-drastric-plan-of-race-segregation-strange-situation.html>.

interjected that the plan was the most pronounced Jim Crow law on record.²³ After various updates of the ordinance, Mayor J. Barry Mahool eventually signed ordinance 692 in 1911. The ordinance stated that it was for

preserving peace, preventing conflict and ill feeling between the white and colored races in Baltimore city, and promoting the general welfare of the city by providing, so far as practicable, for the use of separate blocks by white and colored people for residences, churches, and schools.²⁴

The ordinance did not allow black people and white people to live on the same block, even going as far as stating that there should be no assembly of another race at one's place of residence; if the ordinance was violated, the accused would be subjected to a \$100 fine or at least 30 days and up to a year in prison. The ordinance included a stipulation that no existing conditions should be disturbed, and that no section of the city is exempt.²⁵ The white people claimed that the segregation was necessary to maintain public order and to prevent sickness, as the black population was subject to drastically higher rates of sickness. Similarly, to increase property value, in 1912 the Roland Park Co., a developing community in Baltimore, pioneered community-wide restrictive covenants that limited home sales in the community exclusively to white people. To this day, this exclusivity is hard for people to stomach, as author Lawrence T. Brown shared his disbelief that "somehow the blackness of a person's skin would have a negative effect on property value."²⁶ This unique approach to neighborhood structures allowed

²³"The Black Butterfly: The Harmful Politics of Race and Space in America – W/ Author Lawrence T. Brown," [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhRgUS8hmaU), October 16, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhRgUS8hmaU>.

²⁴Garrett Power, "Apartheid Baltimore Style: The Residential Segregation Ordinances of 1910-1913," *Maryland Law Review* 42, no. 2 (1983): 289.

²⁵Power, "Apartheid Baltimore Style," 299.

²⁶"The Black Butterfly: The Harmful Politics of Race and Space in America – W/ Author Lawrence T. Brown," [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhRgUS8hmaU), October 16, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhRgUS8hmaU>.

Roland Park Co. to raise prices and encouraged Roland Park's competitors to develop similar covenants that would eventually exist around the nation.

By 1937, segregation techniques had perpetuated a system of division in Baltimore. Around that time, the Homeowners Corporation published their residential map of Baltimore to determine desirability for residential areas.²⁷ Initially, the map was a part of the New Deal's Housing Act of 1934, but it eventually turned into a technique for further discrimination of minority groups in Baltimore. The residential zones were scored on a scale of A to D and were represented by the colors green, blue, yellow, and red respectively. Each zone was evaluated on things such as percentage of home ownership, age of homeowner, types of building, economic stability of the area, social status of the population, and transportation. In general, "white neighborhoods tended to fall within green and blue groups, immigrant neighborhoods were blue/yellow, while black neighborhoods tended to be redlined."²⁸ The red neighborhoods experienced high rent, low quality housing, and limited social services, which further led to a grade of D; limited ability to accumulate wealth, limited number of social programs, limited access to public works, and high police presence in the neighborhoods deemed these neighborhoods undesirable. Not only did homes lose value for being in an underprivileged area, but some homes lost value for a black person living there. For example, on June 1, 1937, the federal government gave the security rates of a home in central west Baltimore a D due to "negro concentration," implying that just because a black person lived there, the property lost value.²⁹

²⁷ See Appendix A

²⁸ MD Center for History & Culture, "History of Housing Discrimination and Redlining in Baltimore," *Vimeo*, July 1, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/434469938>.

²⁹ "The Black Butterfly: The Harmful Politics of Race and Space in America – W/ Author Lawrence T. Brown," *www.youtube.com*, October 16, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhRgUS8hmaU>.

Examples such as these prove the harsh conditions in which black Baltimoreans were forced to live.

In 1968, the federal government issued the Fair Housing Act to undo the laws that allowed racial segregation in Baltimore. President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which expanded on previous acts, and, among other things, “prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race.”³⁰ While the Housing Act made racial segregation illegal, still more is required to undo the decades of discrimination and division that plague the city to this very day.

To fight against the years of division and hatred in Baltimore, there must be a place where unity can finally prevail. There must be a place where people from all walks of life feel seen and known. If it desires to flourish in the city, the church must be one that celebrates different cultures and must be willing to mourn with brothers and sisters who are still affected by the divisions of the past. The church in the city must be willing to learn and grow and accept people from all different walks of life. On these grounds, intercultural churches must build.

Theological Review

Repeatedly in the New Testament, God exclaims that unity must prevail. Verses such as 1 Corinthians 1:10, 1 Peter 3:8, and Romans 15:6 each express the ideal outlined by Paul and Peter and practiced in the early church that God desires unity among His people. More than that, God charges His people to unite with diverse people groups. Biblically, intercultural churches are

³⁰U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. “History of Fair Housing - HUD | HUD.gov / U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).” www.hud.gov, n.d. https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/aboutfheo/history#:~:text=The%201968%20Act%20expanded%20on.

“God’s clearly expressed ideal.”³¹ Jesus’ call to go and make disciples of all nations no longer requires the crossing of oceans; today, members of different cultures can be found just across the street.

Mark DeYmaz, author of *Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church* and pastor of Mosaic Church in central Arkansas, uses the church in Antioch as the basis for his intercultural ministry today.³² In Acts 11, the church at Antioch represents a biblical expression of an intercultural church. The gospel's spread was originally limited to Jewish people, but Peter and Paul, two of the New Testament’s most prominent church leaders, believed that the gospel needed to be spread further, so they began preaching to Greeks too. In the backdrop of the story Peter, a Jewish man, went and ate with uncircumcised men. In verses 2-3 of Acts 11, Peter’s fellow Jewish brothers were astounded that he would go and eat with someone who wasn’t like him. Peter, however, knew that God had given the gift of His spirit to all believers, both circumcised and uncircumcised. And if that were true, then it was the job of any believer to share in community with anyone who calls themselves followers of Jesus.³³ Later, in Acts 11:20, Luke, the author of Acts, shares that “men from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks as well, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.”³⁴ The men from Cyprus and Cyrene were from vastly different cultures than the people in Antioch, but, by the grace of God “a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”³⁵ The church at Antioch is an ancient example of an intercultural church that flourished, proving not only that

³¹Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Jann Aldredge-Clanton, *Intercultural Ministry : Hope for a Changing World* (Valley Forge, Pa: Judson Press, 2017),19.

³²Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020), 18-19.

³³DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 19.

³⁴ Acts 11:20 (NIV).

³⁵ Acts 11:21 (NIV).

intercultural churches are possible, but that they are capable of turning a great number of people to the Lord.

God clearly desires unity among His children. Maintaining unity among groups who all think and act the same may be easy to accomplish, but in doing so the group is limiting the potential for growth and knowledge. In 2 Timothy 2:24, Paul tells Timothy that “the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone.” Notice that Paul doesn’t tell Timothy that everyone of the Lord’s servants must agree. Instead he expresses kindness as the chief quality of a servant of the Lord.³⁶ Unity does not require everyone to be in complete agreement. Instead, true biblical unity is being “humble and gentle, bearing with one another in love... through the bond of peace.”³⁷ In the same way, unity does not have to come through the sacrifice of anyone’s cultural norms. God made his creation unique on purpose. In Psalm 139 the Psalmist writes that God “knit [his creation] together in [our] mother’s womb.”³⁸ If God wanted all of His creation to look and act the same, then they would, but such a creation would substantially limit the nature and character of God. As God’s children, humans were created “in His own image.”³⁹ God is expressed in each and every culture on the earth. If only one culture or group of people existed, there is no way it could encompass all of God’s character. Practicing intercultural unity and relationship in the church is God’s expressed desire for His children.

Personal Context

³⁶Isaac Adams, *Talking About Race: Gospel Hope for Hard Conversations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2022), xvii.

³⁷Ephesians 4:2 (NIV).

³⁸Psalm 139:13 (NIV).

³⁹Genesis 1:27 (NIV).

I had two main motivators that pushed me to dive into researching intercultural churches. The first was a conviction that intercultural churches had two practical benefits; first, they clearly exemplify the biblical ideal of the church, and second intercultural churches have larger room for city-wide impact. The second motivator that encouraged me to research intercultural churches was less practical and more personal. This conviction was one that I have always known but did not know how to express until now: intercultural churches increase knowledge and awareness of God. We learn in scripture that while he is praying for his disciples, Jesus prays, “This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”⁴⁰ This prayer means that our main job on this side of heaven is to grow in knowledge and love for the Father. By experiencing different styles of worship, listening to diverse groups of teachers with diverse experiences, and learning more about individuals who grew up in different cultures, humans have a greater opportunity to learn about all of the ways that the Lord is caring for and providing for each and every one of his beloved creatures. Jemar Tisby says it best in his book *How to Fight Racism* when he says, “No single people group can adequately reflect the glory of God. Rather, we need the diversity present in the multiplicity of nations and tribes to paint a more complete portrait of God’s splendor.”⁴¹ Unity among diverse nations and tribes is the best way to exemplify the glory of the Father. One such example of diversity is the style of worship at Bilingual Christian Church.

Bilingual Christian Church is one of the intercultural churches currently serving the city of Baltimore. Bilingual currently serves individuals from 23 nations and has a “multicultural

⁴⁰John 17:3 (NIV).

⁴¹Jemar Tisby, *How to Fight Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 30.

focus.”⁴² Something unique about Bilingual is that they simultaneously use English and Spanish during their entire service. Specifically, Bishop Angel Núñez preaches one sentence in English and then the same sentence in Spanish right after. When asked about why Bilingual did this, Bishop Núñez shared a story. Originally, the church was solely Spanish-speaking. One day, an English-speaking man visited the church. Over a period of weeks, the leaders of Bilingual accommodated the best they could for him, but ultimately it was a huge hassle and eventually Bishop Núñez asked the English-speaking man to leave. However, the man insisted that he found a community there and refused to go. After going to God in prayer and asking what to do, Bishop Núñez heard the Lord say to him, “Did I not die for all people?” It was then that Bilingual Church was born.⁴³ This story is a representation of the revelations that come from intercultural churches. Bishop Núñez learned more about the nature of God because of the intercultural exposure that he experienced. In the same way, “unity of faith and the knowledge of the son of God” is now achieved by anyone who enters Bilingual Christian Church.⁴⁴

Methodology

Before conducting this research, I had a personal conviction that intercultural churches would be beneficial to Baltimore. After collecting personal stories of both hardships and successes, I remain convinced, more so than before, that intercultural churches are both beneficial and ideal for the community of Baltimore. To come to this conclusion, I researched the historical context of the city of Baltimore through the collection of both primary and secondary sources. I also read various books and articles written by pastors who are currently

⁴²“Bilingual Christian Church – ‘No Perfect People Allowed,’” Bilingual Christian Church, accessed December 21, 2022, <https://bilingualchristianchurch.org/>.

⁴³Bishop Angel Núñez, Personal Communication, July 2022.

⁴⁴Ephesians 4:13 (NIV).

servicing in intercultural churches. To place intercultural churches in the context of Baltimore, I interviewed three pastors who are currently serving at intercultural churches in Baltimore.

Beyond this, I returned to the biblical text to corroborate the convictions of each of the sources that expressed biblical conviction as their reason for practicing intercultural ministry.

Findings

Centuries of racial segregation and socioeconomic disparity in Baltimore have led to a division that I once thought was unmendable. How can such pain and separation in Baltimore produce any form of community? Brandon Green, Associate Pastor of River City Community Church in Chicago, Illinois, explains that there is a level of tension and conviction about serving at an intercultural church. He believes that intercultural churches are an opportunity to see the church “as it should be.”⁴⁵ However, Green argues that intercultural churches are often merely a place of superficial diversification rather than a community of believers from different cultural experiences joining in fellowship and community together. The expression of intercultural church that Green is speaking about often presents after a majority white church realizes its lack of diversity, and white people fear judgment or pressure for being a monocultural church. Frequently, intercultural churches are a result of a societal movement or fear of image rather than a genuine expression and desire for the church to look and act like the kingdom of heaven.

Doug Foltz, a project manager at Stadia Church Planting, corroborated the idea of the superficially diversified church through his observation that multiethnic churches are increasing in popularity, but rarely are they truly interrelated in community the ways that intercultural

⁴⁵Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Jann Aldredge-Clanton, *Intercultural Ministry : Hope for a Changing World* (Valley Forge, Pa: Judson Press, 2017), 15.

churches aim to be.⁴⁶ That being said, if intercultural churches are truly biblically rooted, and provide personal growth and city wide impact, how can intercultural churches go beyond mere social image and achieve genuine intercultural connection? To achieve intercultural connection, the following three steps are recommended: individuals in an intercultural church must establish a common memory, ensure diversity is represented in every aspect of the church and its ministry, and strive to build intercultural relationships.

Step One

George Erasmus, an aboriginal leader from Canada, said “Where common memory is lacking, where people do not share in the same past, there can be no real community. Where community is to be formed, a common memory must be created.”⁴⁷ Pastor Brandon Green, associate pastor of River City Community Church, agrees with Erasmus when he explains that reconciliation is only possible when each community member grows together in a shared memory or experience. If intercultural churches truly desire to be one neighborhood of believers where each believer feels celebrated and loved, a common memory must exist among them. This memory, according to Green, is the realization and acknowledgement of white supremacy, both historically and today. The longer communities “deny the reality of a common past” the longer society will go without true community.⁴⁸ Redefining reality is a challenging feat, but luckily it is possible to accomplish such a goal. Step One is speaking candidly with church communities about the common past that we share. Honest communication means frequent conversation about various social justice issues that face minorities in the church. It also means acknowledging how

⁴⁶Doug Foltz, personal communication, September 2022.

⁴⁷Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Jann Aldredge-Clanton, *Intercultural Ministry : Hope for a Changing World* (Valley Forge, Pa: Judson Press, 2017),19.

⁴⁸Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Jann Aldredge-Clanton, *Intercultural Ministry : Hope for a Changing World* (Valley Forge, Pa: Judson Press, 2017),19.

each member of the current culture in Baltimore has been affected by white supremacy and how lives have been changed because of it. Speaking broadly, Brandon Green charges any who partake in an intercultural ministry with the following:

Ours is the call to a common memory that informs our reality and its atmospheric conditions. Ours is a posture of repentance for our complicity and apathy and the shaping of false narratives that have distorted our history. Ours is the remission of the sin of white supremacy- nailing it to the cross. Ours is adherence to the rebuke of Jesus after curing so many; ours is to go and sin no more.⁴⁹

Step Two

Once a shared memory is put into practice, there must be an exploration of the more practical elements that benefit intercultural churches. Joshua Symonette, Lead Pastor of Hope Baltimore, explains that location and representation are exceptionally important aspects of intercultural ministry. Choosing a location that is both accessible to people of multiple cultures and safe for every member to attend increases the likelihood of engagement and attendance. In the same way, Pastor Joshua explains that “what you highlight matters.”⁵⁰ If it is a value, interculturalism should be expressed in the church’s website, on the platform, in worship, and in all other aspects of the ministry. Pastor Joshua and his church make sure to celebrate and talk about various ethnic holidays and use culturally diverse examples in sermons. This inclusivity is not a means of publicity, but rather an expression of the true nature of the diversity of the church.

Front Porch Christian Church, an intercultural church in the York Road corridor of Baltimore, uses a polycentric leadership model to exemplify expression of diversity throughout

⁴⁹Kim, *Intercultural Ministry*, 26.

⁵⁰Pastor Joshua Symonette, Personal Communication, July 2022.

the church.⁵¹ Polycentric leadership is a democratic leadership model whereby all members on the leadership team come from diverse cultural experiences and each offers different strengths to the team. This model sees “all creation as equal, worthy, and able to contribute.”⁵² In scripture, the church in Antioch serves as a model of diverse leadership. The book of Acts explicitly expresses a diversity among local church leadership, such as the diversity found in the teachers from Cyprus and Cyrene. Diverse leadership, while expressed as the biblical ideal, is not a leadership structure that will simply happen by chance, it is one that “must be intentionally sought.”⁵³ This process of diverse staffing should not be done to reach a certain quota of diversity, but rather to adhere to the belief that increased growth and learning comes from a diverse staff of individuals. Pastor Mark DeYmaz explains that when deciding on a new staff member, intentionality is exceptionally important. In *Building a Healthy MultiEthnic Church*, DeYmaz shares that there must be clear adherence to the vision of intercultural ministry so that diversity among staff is not easily shifted.⁵⁴ Regardless of the method, a true intercultural church must have a staff that reflects the cultural representation of its members.

Step Three

After establishing a common memory and ensuring diversity is represented, building intercultural relationships is necessary. The previous steps lay the foundation necessary for community among diverse cultures, but “the development of [intercultural] relationships that

⁵¹The York Road Corridor is a modern example of racial and socioeconomic division in Baltimore. Divided by York road, on the west side of York road the population is largely white and wealthy residents, while on the east side the population is largely Black and poorer residents. (Pastor Andy McNeely, Personal Communication, July 2022.)

⁵²“Cultural Values,” Front Porch Church, accessed December 21, 2022, <https://frontporchbaltimore.org/cultural-values>.

⁵³Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020), 72.

⁵⁴DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 73.

transcend ethnic and economic barriers”⁵⁵ is ultimately the goal. These relationships act as the distinction between multi-cultural churches and intercultural churches. At intercultural churches, relationships are built to grow beyond gatherings of monocultural individuals and into a discussion in which all parties express “authentic love for one another and thus fulfilling the ‘greatest commandment’ as expressed by Christ in Matthew 22:36-40.”⁵⁶ While relationship building is certainly not the last step in achieving intercultural churches, it is the most important.

Relationships take time to build, and the process may not be easy. Having intercultural relationships can sometimes be awkward, and when they get too uncomfortable “some choose to segregate themselves and only spend time with people of a similar background.”⁵⁷ Pastor Isaac Adams agrees that awkwardness can exist, but instead of ignoring the awkwardness, Adams believes that “if we better appreciate the difficulty of conversations about race, we will better appreciate one another.”⁵⁸ Acknowledging the awkwardness and “understanding the communication breakdowns across racial lines...is foundational” to following Jesus and properly loving each other.⁵⁹ Additionally, there is no current evidence to suggest that similar cultural backgrounds are necessary to build strong bonds. According to *The Journal for Intercultural Communication*, “cultural, linguistic and religious similarity was deemed as not important for friendship formation. Instead, similar values, self-disclosure and respectful communication

⁵⁵Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church : Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020), 83.

⁵⁶DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 85.

⁵⁷Mark Hearn, *Technicolor : Inspiring Your Church to Embrace Multicultural Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2017), 45.

⁵⁸Isaac Adams, *Talking About Race: Gospel Hope for Hard Conversations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2022), xiii.

⁵⁹Adams, *Talking About Race*, xvii.

assisted intercultural friendship formation.”⁶⁰ Therefore, if each member of the intercultural relationship is practicing honest and respectful communication, friendships will grow.

Beyond discomfort, prejudice will also impact intercultural churches. When those prejudicial thoughts are realized, the individual must acknowledge his or her prejudices that “all of us have” and have a determination to do something about it.⁶¹ True relationships are formed when one acknowledges a problem and is determined to work through that problem. When situations with prejudice arise, they must be dealt with swiftly and honestly. In intercultural ministry, growth and grace must abound in times of prejudice. Mark Hearn, author of *Technicolor: Inspiring Your Church to Embrace Multicultural Ministry*, agrees and interjects that when prejudice takes hold, above all else, any community of believers is held together by faith, hope, and love for each other and God.⁶² To love one another is to intentionally acknowledge personal prejudicial thoughts and actions, and to dedicate oneself to altering them.

Challenges of Intercultural Ministry

The primary challenge for intercultural churches is the value that minority groups gain from participating in monocultural worship services and communities with members of their same cultural group. Specifically in Baltimore, a city with immense racial and socioeconomic divide, there is a comfort and pride that emerges from being a member of a group with individuals of similar cultures. In the same way, some individuals are accustomed to worshipping in environments that are not conducive to intercultural ministry. For example, some people like

⁶⁰Marlene Kastner, “Formation and Benefits of Intercultural Friendships: The Role of Communication”. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 21 (3):26-40. <https://doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v21i3.19>.

⁶¹Mark Hearn, *Technicolor : Inspiring Your Church to Embrace Multicultural Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2017), 84.

⁶²Hearn, *Technicolor*, 36-42.

to worship standing and dancing, while others like to be seated or even bowing. In intercultural ministry all cultures would be represented, and such representation can be a challenging adjustment for those who are used to a particular way of thinking about and engaging with God.

Pastor Joshua Symonette of Hope Baltimore, a Jesus-centered, justice-seeking, cross-cultural church in Baltimore, explains that there is nothing wrong with individuals engaging with monocultural places of worship. However, he does suggest that monocultural churches are not as ‘rich’ as intercultural ones.⁶³ In intercultural churches, people are stretched and uncomfortable, and people grow and mature to understand experiences outside of themselves. This paper is not arguing that every church in Baltimore should become an intercultural church. Instead, this paper is arguing that intercultural churches must be more prevalent in the city, because more people need to have the opportunity to experience intercultural ministry and the richness that flows from it.

Fruit of Intercultural Ministry

Intercultural ministry leads to an explosion of personal growth. To this day, the distinctions and presuppositions that were perpetuated by historical discrimination create dividing lines in Baltimore that are hard to cross. However, when individuals begin to engage with others who are different from them, they “are forced to step back and rethink the world in which they live.”⁶⁴ *The Journal of Intercultural Communication* asserts that individuals who interact with others from different cultures experience “increased cultural understanding,

⁶³Pastor Joshua Symonette, personal communication, July 2022.

⁶⁴Lara L. Lomicka, “An Intercultural Approach to Teaching and Learning French,” *The French Review* 82, no. 6 (2009): 1228.

acceptance, and self reflection,” all of which accelerate personal growth.⁶⁵ Similarly, researchers who studied intercultural education methods have found that those who engage in intercultural communication “avoid stereotyping which involves perceiving someone through a single identity.”⁶⁶ This awareness and appreciation for diverse cultures not only increases a sense of community but also builds a more well-rounded individual.

In the same way that intercultural churches create a more mature and well-rounded individual, they also create opportunities for greater impact in the city. If a church is designed to receive and pastor a diverse group of people, it will not limit itself to individuals from a specific culture, but instead will have the capacity and knowledge of how to care for every person that lives near that church. Andy McNeely, head pastor of Front Porch Christian Church, an intercultural church in Baltimore, asserts that, while their church is small in attendance, they are able to “have a larger impact beyond the walls of the church” because of their intercultural nature.⁶⁷ Pastor Andy gives the example that his church “of thirty attenders fed thousands of people throughout Baltimore during the pandemic.”⁶⁸ Indeed, while intercultural churches may experience slow growth because they require more communication and dedication, they do encourage greater impact for the city.

Similarly, because of their unique and diverse makeup, intercultural churches have the chance to expand outside of individual neighborhoods to reach everyone in the city. When looking at a modern map of Baltimore, there are over 50 distinguishable community areas.

⁶⁵Marlene Kastner, “Formation and Benefits of Intercultural Friendships: The Role of Communication”. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 21 (3):26-40. <https://doi.org/10.36923/jicc.v21i3.19>.

⁶⁶Lara L. Lomicka, “An Intercultural Approach to Teaching and Learning French,” *The French Review* 82, no. 6 (2009): 1227.

⁶⁷ Pastor Andy McNeely, email communication, February 2023.

⁶⁸ Pastor Andy McNeely, email communication, February 2023.

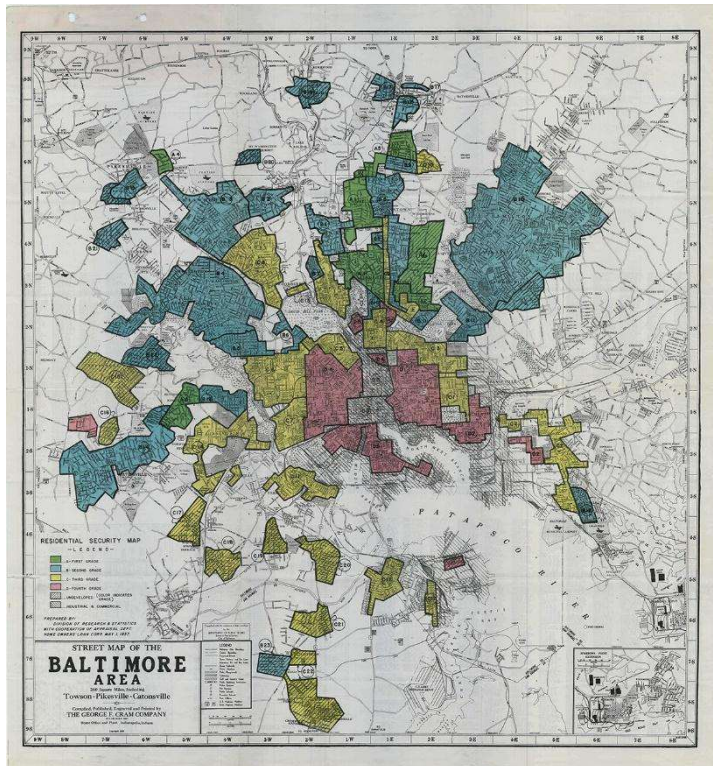
Instead of planting one church in each of those 50 communities, an intercultural church has an opportunity to greet and care for all of the members in and around the church despite the area from which they come.⁶⁹ Because intercultural churches are more open to the diverse people groups in Baltimore, there will be a greater chance of city-wide humanitarian work and intercultural churches have the capacity to care for a larger population of people.

Concluding Thoughts

Intercultural churches are challenging to create and challenging to maintain. True intercultural churches cultivate inclusivity and communication that cross racial, political, and socioeconomic lines. These churches are a space where hard conversations are had, and past oppression is not forgotten. In Baltimore, intercultural churches are a call to movement out of oppression and division and into a space of open community wherein all people feel seen and known and loved. By following the three steps—establishing a common memory, ensuring representation in the church, and building genuine relationships—intercultural churches, while upholding biblical expectations, promote personal growth and greater city impact while revealing a more complete image of the nature and character of God. Intercultural churches provide opportunity for all of Baltimore to come together as one neighborhood to worship God as “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹See Appendix B

⁷⁰Revelation 7:9 (NIV)

Appendix A⁷¹Appendix B⁷²

⁷¹The George F. Cram Company, *Street Map of the Baltimore Area*, May 1, 1937.

⁷²Community Statistical Area Boundaries for the 2017 Neighborhood Health Profiles, “Baltimore City Health Department,” 2017.



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