Church Leadership in a Multicultural World

Unity and Diversity in the Church

Two critical questions:

1. What is the basis of our unity?
2. What are the limits of our diversity?

God on many related questions.

What is the basis for unity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Why are we brought together as a people? Why does God call us to be a Christian community of faith? Several answers surface. These answers may not all be of completely equal value, but all are very important.

Faith in God through Christ is at the heart of our fellowship. It is God who calls us together, and it is our individual faith that brings us into His circle. Because we accept the gift of salvation given so freely by Christ on the cross, we are part of Christ’s Body. This makes us a member of the church simply because we believe in Him.

A shared mission—commissioned by Christ at the close of His earthly ministry—calls us into a fellowship that is tasked with work in the secular world, activities beyond worship and study. The missionary enterprise is demanding. Christ needs our capacity to come

What is the basis for unity?

- Faith in God through Christ
- A shared mission
- A shared message: doctrinal agreement
- Fundamental Belief 13
- Counsel from Ellen White’s writings
together in sophisticated structures capable of far-reaching impact. Mission calls for a unity that can utilize high technology and complex strategy, a “togetherness” far beyond the simple gathering of believers who pray, sing and talk.

A shared message is to be conveyed by the missionary enterprise. An important platform of doctrinal agreement is necessary to convey a coherent message to the world. This calls for careful study of Scripture, the gifts of as exercising that gift. The heritage of her writings provides important guidance toward unity and diversity within the Church.

Ellen White was an abolitionist, an active believer in social justice. “It has become fashionable to look down upon the poor, and upon the colored race in particular,” she wrote. “But Jesus the Master, was poor, and he sympathizes with the poor, the discarded, the oppressed, and declares that every insult shown to them is as if shown to himself.” (The Southern Work, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1966; pages 10-11)

Her favorite depiction of God’s special concern for the oppressed blacks in America was her comparison of their plight with that of the Israelite slaves in Egypt. In one such analogy she boldly declared, ”The Lord did not wait until His people went forth and stood in triumph upon the shores of the Red Sea before He called Israel His son, but while they were under oppression, degraded, downtrodden, suffering all that the power and the invention of the Egyptian could impose to make their lives bitter and to destroy them, ... God under-takes their cause and declares to Pharaoh, ‘Israel is my Son, even my first born.’ God cares no less for the souls of the African race ... than he cared for Israel.” (Ibid., page 14)

Ellen White saw the hand of God in the differences among individuals and cultures and taught the value of diversity. “There is no person, no nation, that is perfect in every habit and thought. One must learn of another. Therefore God wants the different nationalities to mingle together, to be one in judgement, one in purpose. Then the union that there is in Christ will be exemplified.” (Historical Sketches, pages 136-137)
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At the same time she worked her whole life to build a strong denomination and often urged unity among the believers. “There are no two leaves of a tree precisely alike,” she observed, “neither do all minds run in the same direction. But while this is so, there may be unity in diversity.”

She continues with an extended metaphor not unlike the rainbow, quilt or mosaic metaphors often used today to describe the ideal of diversity. “Look at the flowers in a carpet, and notice the different colored threads. All are not pink, all are not green, all are not blue. A variety of colors are woven together to perfect the pattern. So it is in the design of God. He has a purpose in placing us where we must learn to live as individuals” in a diverse fellowship. (Review and Herald, July 4, 1899)

The Limits of Diversity

How much diversity can the Church tolerate? At what point do differences become destructive or conflicts unmanageable? Can diversity become a cover for heresy or is culture sometimes simply a way to bring in practices that dishonor God?

The Bible makes it clear that an unwillingness to believe in Jesus or to confess that Jesus is the Christ puts an individual outside the household of faith. (Ephesians 2) Among believers there may be large differences over church polity and practice, even on doctrinal matters, but if they all confess Christ and honestly seek to learn of Him and obey Him, then there is a basis to settle their differences and find the truth. While they are seeking truth, fellow believers should treat one another with respect.

There are times when believers must part company and go in different directions. An example of this is when Paul and Barnabas decided that they could no longer continue their missionary work as brothers. The same may be true for Christian organizations or denominations. In spite of the different directions—for an organization this may include different missions, different visions and even different statements of faith—believers can still treat one another with respect. This is true even when a Christian—or a body of Christians—feels that the other is gravely mistaken about doctrine or practices.

Scripture also teaches that how a faith community behaves is proof of what that community truly believes. In John 17 is recorded Christ’s prayer for the unity and growth of the church. He states that it is the “oneness” or quality of relationships among believers that will testify to the truth of His claims before the on looking world. A body of believers has not only the right, but the duty to set a high standard for those who become part of its fellowship to ensure that the quality of their collective witness is honoring to God and a persuasive witness to nonbelievers.

The Limits of Diversity

- An unwillingness to believe or to confess that Jesus is the Christ.
- How the community behaves is proof of what the community truly believes.
Ministry in a Multicultural World

The challenge which confronts church leaders today is to re-vision Adventism for the 21st century in a multicultural context. Business as usual—which has carried the Church through the 20th century with a structure and program largely unchanged since 1901—simply will not meet the tests of the future and certainly will not take full advantage of the new opportunities available.

The bold steps necessary to engage the multicultural future of the Church require that leaders and believers be clear about “who it is,” with a strong sense of identity rooted in Scripture and Adventist heritage, and what it is called to be and do; a clear vision of the eternal mission of the church, especially in the prophetic context of the Remnant people of God.

Perhaps more important, such bold steps will require of the Church a strong sense of “whose it is.” The issues faced by the Church in this new, multicultural context will require a passionate spirituality on the part of leaders. They must never lose sight of the fact that the Adventist Church is God’s church; that its mission is Christ’s mission. As we are faithful to Him, He will be faithful in opening doors and providing blessings for His people.

A Missionary Challenge

North America needs to be treated as a mission field in the same way that we in the West have approached much of the rest of the world. The U.S. is no longer a nation with a Christian consensus and in Canada the vast majority of the population of long ago severed any relationship with the established churches. Especially for Adventists, North America must be viewed as a largely “unreached” land where most of the people have no real knowledge of the Bible and no basic commitment to faith in Christ. Certainly, very few have any knowledge of or commitment to Christian ethics as a code for their lives.

Critical to making this shift in perspective is the development of the skills and tools necessary to function as missionaries in the North American context. Pastors and congregations must be led to see themselves as a missionary people operating at a “frontier” of mission by learning to understand and diagnose their local communities as “unreached” people groups, to articulate the gospel in a non-Christian context, to meet the needs of nonbelievers and win their friendship, and to
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bare a credible witness in a secular setting. These are skills largely unrelated to the "how-

The Challenge

- North America needs to be treated as a mission field in the same way that we in the West have approached much of the rest of the world.
- Critical to making this shift in perspective is to develop the skills and tools necessary to function as missionaries in this context.

5. What does it mean for congregations and conferences that find themselves increasingly marginalized from society at large?

6. How do we make the eternal gospel clear and the Adventist Church relevant to the changing culture in North America?

At least six major realities are important to the missionary context of the North American Division. Each is directly related to diversity issues and how the church handles its multicultural situation.

1. The NAD is proclaiming the gospel in a secular society. It can no longer be assumed, when people are invited to a Bible study or public meetings, that they own a Bible, know anything about the structure or content of the Bible or ascribe any authority to the Bible. Most Americans, and an even larger number of Canadians, are not active in any church and have little interest in religion. Many have a negative attitude about organized religion of any kind.

2. North America has become an urban civilization. In 1850, when the Adventist movement was just getting started, less than five percent of Americans lived in metropolitan areas. By 1950, fully 80% of Americans were living in urban neighborhoods or the suburbs of large cities. Canada has been somewhat more urbanized than the U.S. along the entire curve. Urbanization has paralleled the Adventist movement in its development, but Adventism has never really come to terms with it. The time has come to reach the large cities.

3. North America is a highly competitive marketplace of ideas and ideologies. The Adventist message cannot ignore, deny or sidestep this competitive environment. Evangelism today requires a thorough knowledge of the
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competition. The consumer is king in the marketplace, and we cannot avoid the use of contemporary art, music and language in presenting our message. We must also recognize the emergence of significant numbers of adherents to major world religions other than Christianity. There are millions in North America who have grown up with or adopted Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism. There is also a renewal of Judaism and renewed resistance to the loss of Jews to Christianity with its long, bloody history of anti-Semitism.

4. The North American environment is characterized by the omnipresent high technology and entertainment of “the information age.” The telephone 800 number, the Fax machine, the Internet as well as television, radio, recordings and cinema, are all tools which must be used if the evangelization of North America is to be seriously addressed. A

The NAD Missionary Context

- A secular society
- An urban civilization
- A marketplace of ideas and ideologies
- The omnipresent high technology and entertainment of “the information age”
- Pervasively individualistic religion in which faith is defined as a private matter
- A marginal Adventist Church

whole generation has come to adulthood which believes that “if you are not on the Web, you don’t exist.” These new media not only convey information, but change the nature of information and the way it is perceived and handled. The logic of “infotainment” is inescapable for

the Adventist message if it is to be proclaimed to new generations in North America.

5. North America has come to a time of pervasively individualistic religion. Faith is defined as a private matter. It is considered bad manners to talk openly about something so intensely personal except among close friends. Outside authority over matters of faith is an anachronism which has been co-opted by the notion that submission is good in and of itself. A self-centered, do-it-yourself approach to spirituality is the result, in which largely untutored, secular people seek to meet their inner yearnings toward God by assembling whatever random set of superstitions and doctrines seems right in their own eyes.

6. The Adventist Church is more marginalized than it has been since the early 20th century. Polls of the general public show that it is largely invisible to the average person, as well as the media and opinion leaders. Too many of our resources are being invested in aging institutions struggling for survival and unable to compete effectively. There are growing sectors in North America in which there is no Adventist presence at all.

In order to respond this situation will require the full mobilization of the entire Adventist community in North America. This cannot be handled by the clergy alone or denominational employees. The skills and insight of professional people among the church members will be needed. An entirely new ecclesiology and vision must be crafted which again makes clear to every Adventist where his or her missionary role is; what God expects and how to do it effectively.
Key Questions for Leaders

There are some searching questions that church leaders must ask themselves. The answers will reveal the extent to which you are prepared to exercise real leadership in the new century and the new, multicultural, postmodern world into which we are thrust, like it or not. (These questions can be used as an effective discussion tool with executive committees, boards, and planning groups.)

1. **Have we fostered an atmosphere in which all members are accepted without regard to their differences?** To what extent is your congregation, institution or ministry one in which people find a nonjudgmental, inclusive and welcoming dynamic? It is the work of the leader to help our people become comfortable in diverse, multicultural settings, working and worshipping with many different kinds of personalities, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic levels.

2. **Does each member feel affirmed for his or her uniqueness?** The leader must go out of his or her way to affirm individuals within the congregation, institution or ministry. Unless you set a personal example, an affirming dynamic will not develop in the organization. This can be seen as an exercise in faith. If we believe that each member is individually gifted by the Holy Spirit, then our affirmation is based in a search for these spiritual gifts. In fact, we look at each person as gift. God gives your organization the gift of each individual, a gift we hold in trust for the Lord.

3. **How can the Church establish equality and justice for specific target groups that are handicapped by system prejudice and unequal treatment?** The Adventist heritage began with pioneers who were not afraid to seek social justice. In today's world—especially because of the secular triumph of extreme individualistic and free-market ideology—it is not easy to find social justice mechanisms for which there is consensus support. Yet, it is still the responsibility of leaders to address the needs of disadvantaged groups no matter how unpopular it may be. This is a test of moral leadership. Creative solutions are needed in a number of difficult situations.

4. **To what extent is the Church committed to providing a strong ministry in major cities?** For decades the non-Hispanic white majority among Adventists in North America has been comfortable to write off the large cities. Because the metropolitan areas are multicultural mosaics, nowhere do these issues become more pertinent. And nowhere is there a greater test of the mission-driven focus of leadership. Almost all of the unreached communities in North America are located in metropolitan areas. Cross-cultural cooperation will be necessary for the Church to seriously address its mission in these large cities. The abilities of every culture must be brought to the...
5. **What needs to happen to deepen its commitment to this unique ministry?** How do we move our members beyond a self-interested focus on their own needs, their own families and their own kind? What must we do to challenge them to this major missional imperative in North America? Somehow in every discussion of the purpose and goals of the Church, in each conference and union conference executive committee, in every mission report and planning session, the mission fields of the large cities must be held up before the people. Some need to be challenged to consider moving into unreached urban neighborhoods and suburban towns. Others already live in unreached areas and need to be asked to open their homes to small group ministries or learn to share Christ where they work. Church members must be encouraged, enabled, equipped and empowered to work together in multicultural teams in the cities. As they serve the poor and community needs, as they share the gospel message with non-believers, they will also learn to appreciate the contributions of other cultures and come to see the differences as assets. No tactic has greater potential for solving the internal, cross-cultural conflicts and prejudices of the Adventist membership than working together across “turf” lines in urban missions.
New Approaches to Cross-cultural Harmony

For a number of reasons the approaches that have been used over the years in the Adventist Church to deal with inter-group or cross-cultural conflict are no longer effective. For many decades we have seen some form of minority group pressure and majority leadership concessions.

Unfortunately, in most cases issues were not addressed until discontent had built up over a period of time. Church communications channels often withheld discussion of the issues, and both sides went away feeling distaste for the settlement. Minority group members often felt that too little was done too late, and majority group members were unprepared for the outcome with questions about the fairness of what they saw as “special treatment” accorded in response to pressure.

All of these incidents have been played out against a backdrop in which the idea of a unitary culture within Adventism has been widely assumed. Only now are more and more members coming to terms with the multicultural diversity of the Church.

Can we find new approaches to cross-cultural harmony within the Adventist family? Can we find approaches based on positive assumptions about diversity as an asset to the mission of the church? Can we find approaches that make it easier to settle specific issues in ways that demonstrate social justice and affirm the essential fellowship of all believers?

I believe there are such approaches. I believe that God has given the Adventist community a unique opportunity to demonstrate the nature of His kingdom to be a “people of hope,” a living sign of His soon-coming Holy City in which there is a gate for every tribe, the precious assets of each group are included in the structure, and He “will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more.” And injustice and poverty will have come to an eternal end. (Revelation 21:3-14)

What is Culture?

If we are to find multicultural harmony within the Church, we must understand culture; a topic not often discussed by Adventist ministers. It is also an illusive subject even among the professionals who focus on its study and understanding.

What is Culture?

- Not innate, but learned
- A process of socialization
- Not biological, genetic or racial
- Socially learned and assimilated
- Dynamic, fluid, open
- The way of life of a people
- Goes beyond language, dialect, and speech.
- Includes everything that is passed on, experienced and practiced.
Culture is not genetic. It is not innate, but learned. A child who carries the genetic code of Vietnam, brought to California as a baby and growing up in a white, Anglo family comes to adulthood with the culture of sub-urban southern California Anglos, not the culture of rural Vietnam. She will not even know the language of her Vietnamese origins, nor have much interest in where she came from until well into adulthood. She will always be an outsider to the culture of a rural, Vietnamese village, even if she learns the language and travels back to find her roots.

Culture is the product of a process of socialization. It is not biological or racial. It is socially learned and assimilated.

It is difficult to describe or pin down with precision the nature of a particular culture. Culture is dynamic, fluid and open-ended. It changes with new generations even as language adopts new words and concepts.

Culture is the way of life of a people group. It goes beyond language, dialect or habits of speech, although those are powerful elements in the construction of culture. It includes everything that is passed on from generation to generation, everything experienced or practiced by a people group.

A culture can be quite primitive or highly sophisticated and technological. Culture involves information, education, technique and invention. Participants innovate and change the culture, often without intending to do so.

Culture includes customs, habits, aesthetic choices, beliefs, rites, traditions, myths, legends, superstitions, stories, songs, dance, jokes, tastes, inherited artifacts, prejudices, attitudes and values. It is sometimes called “psychographics” in distinction to demographics, which involves only “counting heads.”

Culture is what people are. “Culture is, in short, everything that is part of one’s social heritage and environment,” writes Pedrito Maynard-Reid. “It is the sum total of all those ways of doing things, of thinking about things, of feeling about things, of believing, that make up the life of a group of people.” (Diverse Worship: African-American, Caribbean and Hispanic Perspectives, pages 17-18)

Multiculturalism
This can be a controversial topic. Multiculturalism is a word used today in many political and even theological debates. I can appreciate the concerns of political analysts who focus on the changing nature of the American or Canadian democracies. The Adventist Church is far ahead of national demographic change and must deal with these issues sooner than does either nation.

I am not using “multiculturalism” as a code word for letting down the standards or the entry of a relativist approach to truth into the Adventist Church. Some writers have labeled “multiculturalism” with this baggage. It is a valid concern, although some of those who have raised the concern are, in fact, tainted with
rallama. Although I have defined culture broadly, I want to be clear about the fact that I strongly believe there are eternal truths and divine laws that are "above" culture. God stands outside all cultures, although He reveals Himself in each particular culture and calls believers from all cultures.

Multiculturalism recognizes that every individual has a primary culture. This is usually the culture in which they were born and raised.

**Multiculturalism**

- Everyone has a primary culture.
- Each is part of many secondary cultures.
- Each person is multicultural insofar as they participate in many cultures or subcultures, such as those shaped by ethnic background, places of birth and residence, generation, gender, marital status, education, occupation, and socioeconomic status.

It leaves its indelible mark throughout each person's lifetime. It cannot be eradicated and it is not healthy to be internally at war with one's primary culture.

It is also true that each individual is part of many secondary cultures. Each person is multicultural insofar as they participate in many cultures or "subcultures," such as those shaped by ethnic background, places of birth and residence, generation, gender, marital status, education, occupation, and socioeconomic status.

For example, a woman may live in a suburban community where she is part of an up-scale, "assimilated" Hispanic culture. She may drop off her children at a church school where she is part of a conservative, Catholic religious culture. She may drive on to the railroad station where she gets on a train and joins a commuter culture. When she arrives at the inner-city hospital, where she practices medicine, she becomes part of a scientific, professional healthcare culture. When she takes a lunch break to join a neighborhood women's group, she becomes part of a barrio Latino culture. On the weekend, when she goes with her husband to a Marriage Encounter, she enters a culture focused on spirituality and the marital relationship. Each of these cultures has its own history, community and values, and there are times when this woman feels caught in conflicts between the various subcultures of which she is a part. If she were to become a Seventh-day Adventist who simply add another complication to her life, or will Adventism give her new tools with which to deal with her multicultural reality? Of course a traditional view would suggest that she simply leave all of the other cultures and live entirely within an Adventist subculture. In today's world that is an unrealistic expectation and may even be counterproductive for the mission of the Church.

**Multiculturalism in the Church**

When a person becomes a part of the Church community, that person brings a variety of cultural "eyes" with which to view the gospel message. In fact, "the message" is heard through the cultural filters of each person and accepted on the terms of their own understanding. No person is capable of anything else. We each come to adulthood with certain "software" installed in our brains and that is the
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Multiculturalism in the Church

- When a person becomes a part of the Church community, that person brings a variety of cultural “eyes” by which to view the gospel.
- Because the gospel takes on material form, the question then becomes which forms from which cultures will be selected to mediate the gospel.

The choice of cultural forms with which to convey the gospel is often a decision made without awareness, based on prejudice and myth. This can result in the glorification of traditional forms and the too-easy adoption of popular culture. A multicultural church must educate its pastors and lay leaders to make these decisions with a full understanding of both the cultural and theological issues. Every church board must understand some fundamental missiological concepts that were once taught only to overseas missionaries.

Can the Church be Transcultural?

Some would argue that the church, because it represents God—who stands outside human cultures—must operate beyond any particular culture. The “transcultural” approach begins not with human culture but with the church and its worship of God. It asserts that the church’s worship of God, by its very divine focus, transcends all cultural boundaries. The transcultural character of the church reflects the transcultural nature of God, who knows no bounds.

This is an idealistic approach that ignores the fact that all believers perceive God and His worship through the lens of their culture. As human beings they can do no other.

Can the Church be Transcultural?

- Transcultural begins not with human culture but with the church and its worship.
- The church’s worship of God transcends all cultural boundaries.
- The transcultural character of the church reflects the transcultural nature of God, who knows no bounds.
- Yet all believers perceive God and His worship through the lens of their culture.
They are like the camera that cannot capture a picture seen by the human eye because it is beyond the limits of the film. We can only perceive what our “film” allows us to perceive—except for those mystical moments that are, by definition, beyond description—and our “film” is what is called “culture.”

In fact, the “transcultural” ideal for the church devolves, in practice, into the old concept of the church as “melting pot.” The “melting pot” has often been the ideal in the church, despite its secular origins. In this concept, each culture is slowly melted into a larger culture. At any given moment, some segments are less “melted” than other segments, but the ultimate goal is to “melt” all cultures into a single culture.

Of course, in the church context the “melted culture” is defined as elevated above any of the cultures melted into it. It is seen as a more Godly or holy culture than the worldly ingredients. Often the “heat” necessary to melt the cultures into a new culture is ascribed to God as a means of purifying the new, churchly culture.

In spite of these espoused ideals, what is almost always true in practice is that one worldly culture is dominant. It becomes the primary source for the definitions of “elevated” culture. Purity is “white,” while evil is “black.” Angels are blond and the devil is swarthy. Or, the definitions are reversed. In fact, we cannot escape human culture. God does not intend for us to do so, at least while we remain in this world. His intention is for us to use our human cultures to accomplish His mission in this world for which He gave His life on the cross.

Approaches that seek to set aside the difficulties involved in translating the gospel into human culture ultimately deny the will of God. These approaches lead eventually to unfaithfulness in the very mission that is at the heart of God’s will for the church.

**The Church as Polyculture**

Let me suggest another approach which may be more fruitful and more faithful to the mission of the church. In this model the Church provides a shared culture which is superimposed upon all of the cultures which become part of the community of faith. This overarching, shared culture is centered around divine will, Godly values and missional purpose. The technical term for this is a “polyculture.”

This shared culture partakes of the various cultures but has a common center. It is called a “polyculture” because it intentionally taps into all of the cultures that it touches and selects useful elements to weave into its overarching framework. Yet, it is a culture separate from the various cultures it touches because it
The Church as Polyculture

- The Church provides a shared culture which is superimposed upon all of the cultures within the community of faith
- This shared culture partakes of the various cultures but has a common center

is centered in God’s will, the mission of the church.

In a polycultural church each group can maintain its identity but still be part of a shared mission and a common faith. Differences are celebrated because each participating culture represents a “gate” in the “New Jerusalem,” an avenue through which the gospel travels out into the world and through which new believers return into the Kingdom of Christ. All cultures become instruments in God’s plan to save the world!

A polycultural church is mission-driven and grace-oriented instead of focused on internal strife over culture issues and inter-cultural conflicts. The differences between cultures are positioned as tools for “finishing the work” instead of causes of action against one another.

A polycultural church is in a better position to take the message to “every nation, kindred, tongue and people” than is a mono-cultural church, a “melted” church or even the transcultural ideal. It is “in the world” of each culture, but not “of the world” of each culture because its origin and purpose is in God’s will for His people.

In the polycultural church, each congregation is supported and affirmed in understanding the culture of its local community and learning to minister to that community in culturally-appropriate ways. There is no “one, right way” to do ministry, but many ways to minister, each calculated to best achieve God’s purposes in its particular context. But, all congregations and leaders are held accountable to God’s central purpose and will. Each is evaluated on the basis of their contribution to the mission of Christ.

In a polycultural church each ethnic and cultural segment would have a recognized structure for mission to its culture in the outside world. The structures and ministries of

A Polycultural Church

- Each group can maintain its identity but still be part of a shared mission, common faith
- The church is mission-driven instead of focused on internal strife over culture issues and inter-cultural conflicts
- The church is best positioned to take the message to “every nation, kindred, tongue and people”

the church would be structured around the multicultural realities of its mission in the world rather than internal traditions and politics. A “mission” structure of some kind
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would be created each time the church connects with a new culture or significant subculture. It would be organized as a “missionary” church rather than a structure designed for governance and nurture in this world.

The central purpose of a polycultural church unit—at the world, division, union or conference level—would be to identify unreach people groups and plant new ministries in each group. “Higher” levels of the church would feel a higher level of mission-driven purpose and reach beyond the vision of “lower” levels which may be tied more closely to a narrower vision based in the self-interest of believers.

What are the requirements for the success of the polycultural church approach at any level? What elements are absolutely essential to make this approach effective?

1. Transformational leaders—Leadership that is centered in God’s mission is absolutely fundamental to the polycultural approach. Church leaders must be able to “see” with mission-driven “eyes.” They must have the strength necessary to convince others to turn away from self-interest and work for God’s purposes. They must be effective change agents both within the church and in the world.

2. Leaders with great cross-cultural skills—The leaders of a polycultural church must have well-developed skills and rich education in the understanding of cultures and how culture relates to the mission of the church. Theology, mission studies, missiology, anthropology, sociology and culture studies become more important than management, administrative skills and leadership theory.

3. Leaders with a vision for shared mission—Leadership in a polycultural approach must believe in the importance of including all of God’s people in the missionary activity of the Church. They must be untiring in seeking the buy-in of each culture, each congregation and each individual. Of course, this involves a process of negotiation. Each buy-in includes a small modification of the over-all structure of the shared understanding of mission. Each culture has its own, local goals alongside the larger goals. Each culture makes a contribution to the larger goals.

The skills necessary to come to a truly shared mission are the skills that mobilize the whole people of God. Leaders in a polycultural approach see the exercise of these skills as the core of their role.

4. Leaders with passion for a polycultural Church—In order for this approach to provide a solution to the issues raised in our multicultural world, there must be a cadre of leaders who believe in the concept. They must have a passionate vision for a polycultural Adventist Church which is faithful to God’s mission and message in all cultures.

5. Three layers of leaders—The polycultural model calls for at least three essential
layers of leaders, and the leadership function is different at each level. Without this “wiring harness” the polycultural approach will not work for the Adventist Church.

Local leaders direct the Church in its presence and ministry in a particular, local community. They cannot simply be “franchise” operators, using blueprints and manuals sent from corporate headquarters. They must come to understand and diagnose their local community and structure a ministry that best represents God’s eternal purpose in that context.

Cultural leaders coordinate the congregations that exist within a specific culture across a reasonable span of local communities. This may not always involve the organization of a “sisterhood of churches” within that culture. It may on occasion be leadership mediated through a loose fellowship of congregations who are also part of different, multicultural “sisterhoods,” or even through a resource center of some kind. This kind of leadership can be provided—and is essential in a polycultural approach—even if, for historic and administrative reasons, the denominational structure does not follow the contours of cultures.

Transcultural leaders function outside the various cultures and focus on the mission of the Church, its divine message and the development of a multi-cultural strategy. They serve the cultural leaders and local leaders by encouraging faithfulness to Christ’s mission, by holding them accountable to the principles of multi-cultural mission, and by sharing learnings among the various cultures. When one group learns to effectively translate the everlasting gospel into the context of one culture, those learnings often provide suggestions that will be helpful for evangelistic breakthroughs in other cultures.

6. Teamwork among the layers of leaders—This approach cannot work unless the leaders in the various layers or overlays work closely with all of the other leaders in the total system. A multicultural team with shared standards for cross-cultural skills is the core administrative requirement for this approach. It is also the primary asset for a Church which believes that it has a multicultural mission and a sense of urgency at this time in history. These leaders and their cross-cultural skills are gifts from God intended for His purposes.

7. Highly developed communication among leaders—The leaders of a polycultural approach must constantly communicate about multi-cultural and cross-cultural issues, as well as issues particular to each culture. They must communicate about culture. They must have the language skills, the professional terms and education, necessary to such communication. All of this requires high-tech communication and information management systems.

### Requirements for Success as a Polycultural Church

- Strong leaders
- Leaders with great cross-cultural skills
- Leaders with a vision for shared mission
- Leaders with passion for a polycultural Church
- Three layers of leaders
  - Local leaders
  - Cultural leaders
  - Transcultural leaders
- Teamwork among the layers of leaders
- Highly developed communication among leaders
Readings and Resource Materials

1. Is There a Price Tag on Diversity?
   Research on the impact of diversity on churches by Lyle Schaller

2. Case Study: A Multicultural Congregation in a Multicultural Community
   A history of turn-around and church growth

3. Resolving Conflict in a Multicultural Environment
   Conflict management skills for leaders operating in a multicultural context

4. Effects of Personal Contact and Cultural Exchange: "Summer in the City"
   Report on a successful program that creates cross-cultural dialog among church members

5. Guidelines for Successful Diversity Training
   What works and what does not work

7. Leadership Training as a Tool for Confronting Racial and Ethnic Conflicts
   A proven strategy for equipping local leaders to deal with cross-cultural issues and conflicts

8. Diversity: The Turbulent Evolution of a Sensitive Issue
   Some history on the development of contemporary approaches to diversity

9. Up Against the Limits
   Practical approaches for specific problems in cross-cultural relations

10. A Workshop Design to Learn about Cross-cultural Communication
    A tool you can use with your office staff, in congregations and ministries
A copy of the full 100-page version of this booklet can be obtained from the source noted below for $25. It includes all of the additional readings and helps.

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