

## **Multi-cultural Church (Celebrating diversity)**

Multi - cultural Praise can elicit many responses. Establishing a multi-cultural congregation of praise can cause a “culture shock” and many objections. Having had the privilege directing praise through in an ever increasingly diverse church, here are some observations and helpful hints I have encountered on the journey.

### **Vision is vital**

Diversity must be part of the core vision of the church. It can never be the responsibility of the worship leader to create a diverse church. The elders must be convinced of it theologically and be intentional about it. It will never just happen.

Praise is a key part of becoming and developing a diverse church. Because ...

Diverse songs communicate a message of acceptance and openness. We have had many join us, some becoming significant leaders, who are now vital in transforming us to become the church we want to be. It allows the nations to be glad! When people sing in their own language, it is like “coming home” for them. Put yourself in their shoes.

Diverse musicians on the platform expresses the vision. When people see a multi-cultural praise team , there is an immediate level of acceptance regardless of their particular culture. Some may call this window dressing, I call it painting a picture !

At Jubilee, many people could not understand why we were singing Xhosa songs when there were hardly any Xhosa speaking people in our congregation. At first it felt false but it was necessary. Simon Pettit went as far as having a quota of two non-English songs per meeting . What seemed so false then has become natural now. We were seeking to be prophetic in our segregated society.

### **It is God’s intention and purpose**

Revelation 5 and 7 sets the prophetic picture. God’s intention for the Church is to display His manifold (many coloured/diverse) wisdom (Ephesians 3 v10). We are to be the Praise of His glorious grace (Eph. 1). The mystery of the gospel is that only His grace can join people together (Eph 2:14 Gal. 3 v 26-28). How can we demonstrate it if we can’t express it together? Homogenous communities and expressions don’t reflect this. Although we are one new tribe in Christ, Revelation 5 and 7 shows us that culture is not over-looked in heaven. Jesus prays, “ Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” God’s desire is for every tribe, tongue and nation to be gathered together in praise.

### **It makes His praise more glorious**

Again, Piper says: “God is more glorified by diversity than by uniformity. The fame and greatness and worth of an object of beauty increases in proportion to the diversity of those who recognise its beauty”. A church full of different people groups magnifies the manifold mercy of God.

### **It is a catalyst for sanctification**

“By focusing on multi-culturalness, God undercuts ethno-centric pride.” – Piper.

We are faced with issues of the heart when living amongst those unlike us. “ Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” (Romans 15:7) Worship is about sacrifice, not singing. It confronts the “I do it my way” syndrome. God gives us the fruits of the Holy Spirit for this purpose !

Wasn’t much of Paul’s instruction to a diverse church? This is why they are told

Prefer one another and look to the interests of others.(Philippians 2v 3)

Bare with one another (Colossians 3 v 13)

### **Common objections**

The songs are short, repetitive and simple.

- Yes they are ! So that you can learn them and sing them easily, particularly while dancing with your brothers and sisters.

Consider the cultural background. Some cultures may have developed without hymnals/overheads hence the shortness and repetition.

- “The scriptures include or allude to just about every approach to worship there is; organized,

spontaneous, public, private, simple, complex, ornate or plain. Yet there is no comment anywhere about any one way being preferred over another.” - Bob Kauflin.

### **There's not much content to the songs.**

- Debatable. Two words can paint a theological picture, but a balanced diet of songs is important. We choose the simpler more accessible songs but do include more content filled ones now.
  - The truth is still more important than the tune, so we choose our songs carefully.
3. I can't pronounce the words and don't understand them
- That's why we repeat the song and keep them short and simple. By regularly playing the songs, they become second nature.

Help your congregation by taking time to teach the pronunciation.

- Worship is for God's glory not our good feelings. Sacrifice of Praise?

### **I can't engage with God.**

Communion with the Lord is not a once a week occurrence.

Church is communion with Him and God's "Community". True worship is expressed

here. Cultures that are unhindered in physical expression, ie. dance, are being biblical,

We must avoid a western approach and embrace various cultural expression

of praise. In

Jeremiah 31v 13, "mecholah", means communal or round dance.

individualism must be

avoided. When God's people gather to praise, He is there

regardless of our feelings.

### **Variety is the spice of life.**

We all have our personal preferences but diverse praise keeps church interesting. God is a God of variety and many flavours. Our praise should express it. Church is a celebration of God and His people(s). Different cultures bring something different to the party. Allow diversity to enrich you. It may be easier to remain mono-cultural, but the rewards of being part of a multi-cultural church far outweigh the difficulties, Hamba kakuhle (go well) it's worth the journey.

Here are some helpful hints for music directors

- Make an effort to discover and learn songs from other cultures. Obviously your demographics determine the languages, however even in a more mono-cultural environment I encourage you to sing cross-culturally. It testifies to God's glory and can prepare you for and make your people nations conscious. Translating songs from English is a step in the right direction but rather find songs from the communities.
- Love it or loose it. Praise must always be authentic. Congregations sense our hearts. Learn to enjoy it otherwise don't do it! It will take an effort to learn musical styles and pronunciation. Your prep time will be longer and harder, but remember why and who it's for! Don't attempt it unless you're comfortable with it.
- Determine to be diverse. Make every meeting an opportunity for diversity. I'm generally disappointed if I haven't sung in at least 2 languages a meeting. Evaluate it over a month.
- Develop teams that are diverse. Build relationships with musicians from other cultures. Pray for authentic representative musicians to play and lead us. I aim to have various cultures represented on our music platform, particularly leaders. Musicians will express their culture the best.
- Keep it authentic and natural. The cultural songs should not be seen as novel but a genuine expression of Praise. Develop a flow between the "normal" and the cultural. by intersperse cultural songs throughout the praise time.

If there is resistance particularly to movement, rather encourage than belittle or enforce dancing. Exhort don't whip. If the leader is enjoying it, the people join in.

Theologian K Snodgrass writes:

"Christians of other races are part of us, and divisions cannot be allowed to continue. The racial barrier is like a festering wound in the body of Christ....Sunday is often the most segregated day of the week, for Christians worship along racial lines....the perversion of both active and passive racism must be challenged and stopped ... racism will have to be treated on two levels, both as a general societal problem and specifically within the body of Christ. Racism in any form is prohibited by the equality of all people before God and by his unrestricted love. But the theology of the body of Christ deals with the issue at

another level. The point is not merely that all Christians are equal; rather, the point is that all Christians have been joined, which has far more significance and impact."

John Stott writes:

"It is simply impossible, with any shred of Christian integrity, to go on proclaiming that Jesus by his cross had abolished the old divisions and created a single new humanity of love, while at the same time we are contradicting our message by tolerating racial or social or other barriers within our church fellowship .... We need to get the failures of the church on our conscience, to feel the offence to Christ... to weep over the credibility gap between the church's talk and the church's walk, to repent of our readiness to excuse and even condone our failures, and to determine to do something about it. I wonder if anything is more urgent today, for the honour of Christ and for the spread of the gospel, than that the church should be, and should be seen to be, what by God's purpose and Christ's achievement it already is – a single new humanity, a model of human community, a family of reconciled brothers and sisters who love their Father and love each other, the evident dwelling place of God by his Spirit. Only then will the world believe in Christ as a peacemaker. Only then will God receive the glory due to his name."

## You have broken (simunye-we are one)

Capo3 -F

**G(D) C(G) G/D(D/A) D(A)**  
 You have broken all the barriers and brought down dividing walls  
**G(D) C(G) Em(Bm) D(A)**  
 That have kept us separated You gave Your life once and for all  
**G/B(D/F#) C(G) G/D(D/A) D(A)**  
 The sacred veil has been severed, that was keeping us apart  
**G(D) C(G) G/D(D/A) D(A)**  
 You have built the bridge between us by the power of the cross

**C(G) D(A) C(G) D(A) G(D)**  
 We are one \_ by the blood of the Lamb

You destroyed discrimination,  
 Your precious blood has bought us peace  
 We are members of Your body the cross has crushed hostility  
 Now we are living in the promise of your glorious mystery  
 As the gospel of your love joins our hearts in unity  
 We are one \_ by the blood of the Lamb

**D C G**

*Simunye (we are one), simunye we are one new man in Christ  
 Simunye, simunye we're bought from every tongue and tribe  
 Simunye, simunye by your blood we're reconciled  
 We are one 'cause Jesus paid the price*

2<sup>nd</sup> ch

*Hum ek hain , yesu mein (we are one -hindi)...*

We are one new holy nation, a multi-coloured tapestry  
 We are chosen not by merit but because of Your mercy  
 Jesus you show no preferring, in You we share equality  
 We are a race of grace a royal priesthood, a people now redeemed  
 We are one \_ by the blood of the Lamb

**Em(Bm) D/F#(A/C#) G(D) Em(Bm) D/F#(A/C#) G(D)**  
 We see Your holy temple rising built together by Your hand  
**Em(Bm) D/F#(A/C#) G(D)**  
 You've sealed us with Your Holy Spirit  
**F(C) C/E(G/B) D(A)**  
 To be the praise of Your glorious grace

Evan Rogers

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