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Winston Wright

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Music Moves Us To An Intercultural Church For a Changing World

By

The Rev. Canon Winston Wright

Doctor of Ministry

Candler School of Theology

Dr. Joanne Solis-Walker

Project Consultant

Dr. Roger Nam

Director of DMin Program

Abstract

Music Moves Us To An Intercultural Church For a Changing World

By The Rev. Canon Winston Wright

The thesis, *Music Moves Us To An Intercultural Church For a Changing World* outlines a strategic initiative aimed at enhancing the church's adaptability to innovation. The innovation is designed in a targeted way to address church member engagement among racial groups and allowing for potential growth. The methodologies used will enable integration based on a data-driven process in making timely decisions.

The main objectives of the thesis include organizing an operational working environment, encouraging engagement across all races to achieve membership retention and promoting sustainable growth. For the church to be viable, human capital must be a priority to achieve measurable results. This will require innovative skill improvement programs; continuous leadership training and an adaptive learning environment will be necessary.

One of the essential parts of this initiative is to use the data to promote a well-informed decision-making process. This will enable the church to put in place performance monitoring tools to achieve maximum output from the available resources. The data ensures a safe, productive and far-reaching impact in the practice of the church.

The primary focus of the thesis calls for sustainability for the future success of the church. The practices of the church should be equally available, utilizing the use of all available members' skills and creating an environment which maximizes the best use of its time and resources. To achieve this, a sustainable model for member engagement should include elements that allow for resilience and long-term viability.

The goal is to ensure a successful implantation. This must follow a sequential format that includes engagement of members of all races in the process, frequent testing for effectiveness, and allowance for regular check-ins. To maintain proper execution, it will be necessary for members to learn quickly to adapt when changes occur rapidly.

This thesis serves the church as another way for innovation, efficiency and long-term viability. Through this approach the church can engage technology, people and processes in its quest to stay relevant. This will make a dramatic change in how the church operates, how members engage each other and how lasting value is cultivated for them.

Music Moves Us To An Intercultural Church For a Changing World

By

The Rev. Canon Winston Wright

United Theological College of the West Indies, Diploma in Ministry, 1991

University of the West Indies, B.A., 1991

Graduate Theological Foundation, M.B.A., 2006

Candler School of Theology, DMin., 2025

Project Consultant: Dr. Joanne Solis-Walker, PhD.

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Introduction

The Christian church in the modern era, and especially since Covid, has undergone some challenges. The Episcopal Church specifically has witnessed a decrease in membership causing many church communities to link themselves to other congregations to survive. This also causes many to disband completely due to lack of sufficient membership and income to support the ministry and maintain property. The population is aging as the church draws fewer and fewer families, especially those with young children. One of the possible reasons is obviously that the church does not feel sufficiently relevant to a large enough population.

At the same time, there is more global strife than perhaps in any other era, and most of it can be traced to exclusionism, a tribal mentality that says that my community is better or more important than your community, and we do not try to invite you to join us. This can be seen in so many modes: sexism, racism, agism, gender prejudice, ableism; and the list goes on. Of particular concern at this moment is the movement toward cultural supremacy. The Ukraine war, the strife between Israel and Gaza, the attitude toward immigrants on a global scale. All can be seen as some form of isolation of one group from another and an attempt to promote one group over another.

It is impingement upon the church to address both issues. First, it must become relevant across every spectrum if it is to survive. Second, if it is to respond to the great commission, it should be a participant in helping to solve global issues. What if a single focus could address both issues? What if the church could become a Petri dish for showing the world how true interculturalism could solve global dilemmas? What if it can also solve the church's own problem of diminishing membership?

Note that I use the word interculturalism rather than multiculturalism. The two are not the same. Many Episcopal churches are already multicultural which is clearly defined in the *Webster's New World College Dictionary* as ¹“having to do with many cultures.” Being multicultural does not mean that each culture will cross over and share ideas from their respective traditions. Intercultural, in contrast is described by the *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, as ²“Between or among people of different cultures.” All churches stand to benefit from a cross pollination of cultures blending in the various worshipping experiences. Martyn Snow argues that ³“Interculturalism then, is the process of reflection on the interaction of cultures with the intention of ensuring that all people are equally valued, all are able to contribute their unique gifts, and receive the gifts of others.” This also makes for a stronger church as it engages the present and future generations of worshippers.

This need for an intercultural model has been intensified by the vastly increased tendency of the population to migrate. In some instances, this migration has caused a backlash from isolationists, but in others, it has contributed greatly to a global sense of community. The implication for the church seems overwhelming.

This research is focusing on the question, can music be used as a tool to move a congregation from being multicultural to being intercultural? Music is a gift from God, as reflected in Exodus 15:1, “Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord.” (New Revised Standard Version) it can also be seen with Jesus and his disciples in Matthew 26:30,

¹ Agnes, Michael. Etal. *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, IDG Books Worldwide Inc. Foster City, CA. 2000. Page 946.

² Ibid, Page 744.

³ Snow, Martyn. Etal. *An Intercultural Church for a Multicultural World: Reflections on gift exchange*, Church House Publishing, 27 Great Smith Street, London SW1P3AZ, 2024, page 39.

“When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the mount of Olives.” (New Revised Standard Version). The church continues this tradition of using music to integrate many races into one worship. This and the social setting are critical, but how is it to be accomplished? It seems that it would require sharing something new. David Williams argues that ⁴“Based on differences in societal standing and human need, these ethnicities have cultivated different spiritual identities as well.” This would require reorientation of how we do church, taking into consideration established customs and practices. We must also bear in mind that there are sub-cultures that each culture brings to a new global community setting, so that task is, perhaps, more intricate than it appears at first glance, but in its simplest terms, the church must encourage cultures to unite rather than divide.

Diverse Music

The Episcopal Church has attempted over the past few decades to eliminate tribalism or supremacist culturalism as a dividing force. The *Lift Every Voice and Sing* hymnal is an example of the effort to include African American culture, for instance, into the mainstream of the church. There have been efforts to include various forms of Hispanic culture, including the presence of Spanish lyrics in the *Wonder Love and Praise* extension of the 1982 hymnal. This was a good beginning. The problem is that these efforts are not enough. They honor various cultures, but they do not ensure that members of each culture interact intimately with members of other cultures.

The practice of intercultural relationships will be necessary for the survival of the community. For acceptance to take place and vibrance to emerge, there must be a sustained

⁴ Williams, David A. (2020), *Unity in Diversity: How Music Helped Shape Spiritual Identities of Black and White Seventh -Day Adventists, 1840-1944*, Liturgy, 35:2, 33-41.

cross-cultural working relationship allowing each group to feel a part of the church's ministry. This kind of working relationship will allow a great deal of influence distributed equally among the three primary racial groups and the cultural subdivisions within races.

Furthermore, the message of the gospel takes on a new perspective when the understanding of each cultural group can be inter-blended with those of each other group. As people come together, they can develop deep and lasting relationships which help to make the discourse more fulfilling. New friendships can be born where the discussion not only focuses on the gospel but on an understanding of each cultural practice. This certainly would help to eliminate fear of the unknown and at the same time would encourage engagement at a deeper level. Michael Emerson argues that ⁵“A person can be in a congregation that is defined as racially homogenous from the organizational viewpoint, but not from the individual viewpoint.” One must be allowed to claim one's own heritage and be able to celebrate it in a community.

Diversity in Scripture

The idea of the importance of intercultural blending is firmly rooted in scripture. The true test of Christ's message is evidenced in the experience on the Day of Pentecost. God in the Spirit can truly work within different groups gathered in the same room. In the Acts of the Apostles 2:4 it is written that, “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” (New Revised Standard Version). Here we have people of different cultures responding to the same gospel message aided by the Holy Spirit. It therefore places a demand on our present churches to engage the Holy Spirit if we are to truly experience God's intention for all people.

⁵ Emerson, Michael O. *People of the dream: Multicultural Congregations in the United State*, Princeton University Press, 41 William, Princeton, NJ. 2006. Page 85.

The greatest impact of the sharing of cultural differences and commonalities would be achieved through the building of relationships among members of different cultural groups. The result would be evident in the willingness of the parishioners to learn, listen, have quality conversations, and develop sustainable relationships within a trusting environment. These would hopefully lead us eventually to a deep longing for relationship building with one another and sensitivity to the needs of those who differ from us.

The ability to learn from each other, working across cultural differences and commonalities would challenge the assumptions we often make. The greatest intercultural learning experience comes from sharing our personal life experiences to help develop common understanding. In her book, *Building Lasting Bridges*, Kathryn Choy-Wong asks the question,⁶ “Why did God make our world so diverse?” She makes the point that a cultural worldview should be the starting point for building bridges among cultures. This worldview should begin with God as creator of a diverse world full of beings who have been given the ability to make free choices.

Diversity invites people to interconnect with interdependence and to consider the impact their choices will make on others. For the church it is crucial that intercultural relations include all of God’s creation. This creates opportunities for growth notwithstanding the challenges from those without sufficient information. One may assume, for instance, that a person belongs to a particular cultural group or country, when it would be easier to inquire, and would result not only in more accurate information but also in the possibility of relationship. Therefore, if God created

⁶ Choy-Wong, Kathryn. Etal. *Building lasting Bridges: An Updated Handbook for Intercultural Ministries*, Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA. 2022 Page 2.

a diverse world, we should see the practice of diversity as important. This drives the interest we show in the wellbeing of each other.

We can learn a great deal about diversity from the creation story and the story of redemption through Christ. In the Genesis story God blesses the offspring of Abraham and they spread to all nations. In Genesis 22:17 it is written, “I will bless you, and I will make your offspring numerous as the stars of heaven, and as the sand that is on the seashore.” (New Revised Standard Version). Baptism makes us one with God through Christ and the Holy Spirit and enters us into one community. Choy-Wong argues that ⁷“God’s plan of redemption has included people from diverse nations” and these are folks who comprise the church.

This interculturalism, though, must refer not only to a blend of races and ethnicities, but it must also refer to an active blend of age groups. It is important that the church meets the needs of the young people. In fact, it lacks vision for the future when the ideas and the needs of the young are not taken into consideration. The challenges come when the church can identify the needs, maintain them and still function as one church. This will take practice and commitment over a long and sustained period. However, if creativity is diminished, it can cause numerous barriers to the growth of the church. Edward Hammett describes in his book, *Reaching People under 30 while Keeping People Over 60*, a practical solution to find creative ways. He argues to ⁸“look for creative ways to meet the needs of those over sixty so that they don’t require all the staff time and budget.”

⁷ Choy-Wong, Kathryn. *Building Lasting Bridges: An Updated Handbook for Intercultural Ministries*, Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA. 2022, Page 8.

⁸ Hammett, Edward H. Etal. *Reaching People Under 30 While Keeping People over 60*, TCP Books, 2222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA. 01923, 2015, Page 164.

In many churches younger people take some time to engage in the ministries as they are mostly geared towards older folks. Young people love it when others listen to their cares and concerns as important members of the community. Hammett argues that ⁹“they are much happier giving time and energy to an actual need than simply donating money, walking away and not knowing how a donation was really used.”

As a missional church the great commission points us toward reaching all people for the kingdom of God. In Matthew 28:19, it is written “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (New Revised Standard Version). With the intercultural church comes challenges and competencies which either impede or advance ministry.

Relationship Building

While the value of this orientation seems apparent, implementing a structure within which it is appreciated and asserted has its challenges. In many cases perception and assumptions have caused us to learn critical distinctions between groups, especially in dealing with multicultural communities. The first task will be for us to develop the capacity to listen to each other. This will certainly help in forming a consensus for growth. Esther Waal reminds us that listening involves every part that makes up the human body. She argues that listening ¹⁰“involves mindfulness, an awareness which turns listening from cerebral activity into a living response.”

The church will be better served if we treat listening as a skill which must be developed. If we each share our stories, we will learn intercultural practices from each relating to our

⁹ Hammett, Edward H. Etal. Reaching People Under 30 While Keeping people Over 60, TCP Books, 2222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA. 01923, 2015, Page 174.

¹⁰ Waal, Esther de. Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict, The liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. 2001, Page 43.

cultural contexts. Active listening eliminates assumptions and creates a better environment for good relationships. In each of our cultures, we listen, learn and practice certain behaviors. If we insist that our intercultural practices build good relationships, people will experience true freedom. Choy-Wong argues that ¹¹“In order to develop a more accurate and sensitive interpretation of another person’s behavior across cultural and racial identities, one needs to develop relations build upon trust and openness.”

In some cases, special skills can be learned for this trust and openness to grow. Learning other languages, for instance, will show the depth of the interest one shows in accommodating another. The ability to adapt to cultural practices will create a space where one feels welcome and included.

I believe that quality conversations focused on building good relationships will inevitably lead to trust. The foundation of diversity began as part of God’s creation. If the church uses that concept as its basis, then intercultural sharing will flourish. The telling and re-telling of stories reinforces the blending of cultural norms. It will certainly be a new learning experience as the community changes; implicit and explicit biases will be exposed, and the church will become a more welcoming community.

Observing Cultural Interactions

As I have contemplated these needs in the greater church, I have looked at my present ministry site which serves as a good case in point. The state of our parish in its current form can be clearly defined as multicultural. The different racial and cultural groups all exist under the same roof, but we need to become integrated in cross-cultural sharing in the mission and ministry

¹¹ Choy-Wong, Kathryn. Etal. Building Lasting Bridges: An Updated Handbook for Intercultural Ministries, Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA. 2022, Page 76.

of the church. The congregation consists of twenty-six different nationalities, with three distinct racial groups. These include Black, White and Hispanic people. Although they exist in the same congregation, they revert naturally in worship and in social gathering to their racial group. My task must be to move the congregation from being just a group of multicultural folks existing under the same roof, to an intercultural working community.

Among the people, groups range from toddlers to nonagenarians. Of the total congregation women make up about eighty percent and men twenty percent. The twenty-six different nationalities originate from North, South and Central America, Caribbean/ West Indies, England, and other parts of Europe. The majority are couples who would have been married for many years. There are also a few single men and women and a few young families with children. The largest percentage of parishioners belong to the upper middle class, while a small group belong to the upper class and about ten percent belong to the working class.

The interaction takes place in the pews for worship and at tables for the social hour. In both places families tend to sit together in racial groups or single folks sit with people they are more familiar with. Upon entering the buildings, an observer can notice that the diversity is quite apparent because the parishioners sit in distinct groups.

Contribution of the Young

Young children make up a good percentage of the congregation. They would attend Sunday school while the parents attend worship separately. At the social hour young children run around under the watchful and protective eyes of adults. Every adult treats the children as if they are their very own, creating a community of trust and a safe space.

Highly valued by the community are the special events during which a given culture is celebrated. These special occasions occur during the celebration of birthdays, anniversaries, baptisms, Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving and Pentecost. In each of these activities' music is included to reflect a cultural tradition. Folks dress in the attire of their country of origin. While their cultural differences may be present, parishioners are not impeded in their ability to gather for worship or the social hour.

A Safe Space

The environment in which worship and social- hour take place consists of buildings constructed from concrete blocks. For worship people sit in pews while at the social hour they sit at tables with chairs. The pews are twelve feet long and the tables are white and round collapsible with both seating eight to ten people. Each Sunday parishioners and visitors alike gather in no special order or form and people engage in their differences and similarities.

For both the worship service and the social hour, the message and meaning conveyed is an invitation to engage people of all different races and cultural backgrounds. The display of personal artifacts explains their meaning, message and purpose in their civic and religious lives. A significant part of both occasions has to do with the welcoming of their guests in unique and noticeable practice. It certainly gives the impression that the ease with which they share in their differences helps to alleviate fear of the unknown.

The church has no official dress code. Members of every cultural group dress according to the tradition with which they are familiar. For specific celebrations folks normally wear clothes befitting those of their country of origin. Observing the sanctuary, one could see the various colors, styles and the confidence they display in wearing them. The colors remind me of

the multiple fall colors during the changing of the leaves. Interestingly the majority speak English when gathered in a common space. The differences can be seen when they separate themselves into their own cultural groups and speak in their own languages.

In this kind of community, it can be a problem getting the racial groups working together. It can also be an opportunity to achieve an intercultural working- congregation. I seek to establish an intercultural blending to serve a wider cross-section of the people in a meaningful way. To keep a multicultural community going, one must maintain a working combination of racial groups. I realized that this would require a very focused study and a search for purposeful solutions.

I began recognizing that it would be important that each subgroup find in our community a place in which they could engage and celebrate something befitting their identity, but it would also be important that they connect intimately with those of other identities. In my conversations and observations, the common denominator for that possibility is music. Most members primarily come to engage in a worship experience, to learn, and to be inspired, and it is music that supports that inspiration. On the one hand, it is music that is always at the center of what energizes members to express their unique cultures. On the other hand, it is music that most intrigues them about other cultures. In our church, as in most churches, music is a religious practice which is defined by Mary Moschella as ¹²“something people do over and again, with some regularity.” In a church that shares so many differences, music can allow us to engage each other in differences and celebrate the similarities. This can allow for new relationships to develop. This will take time, especially in a multicultural setting, but music can be the device

¹² Moschella, Mary Clark. *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, The Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, OH. 2008, Page 47.

that will allow the blend to begin. I chose to conduct an experiment. Could I use music to foster the intercultural relationships that my parish needed.

Role of Music

Music forms a central part of the worship experience. It informs the scripture readings, the prayers and enriches the spiritual connection among the people. Gerardo Marti defines the role of music in this way, ¹³“music is not part of the culture of the church or embedded within the culture of the church but is a practice that constitutes a congregational community.” Different kinds of music make for a fuller and richer worship experience.

In every worship service participation should be inclusive of all cultures, from choosing the music to sharing in the liturgy to leadership of the worship. Everyone who shares in our worship should take great pride in seeing someone from their cultural tradition in a leadership role. We want to welcome the differences in beliefs, in views of God and in how members choose to express them. Marti argues that ¹⁴“The question of worship experience is difficult to grasp, and the difficulty is complicated by the inherent contradiction of beliefs held by people regarding the power of music in the face of race.” A monocultural church can be difficult on its own. When you add multiple cultures to a congregation it becomes increasingly challenging.

Music, however, works just the same way in a multicultural church as in a monocultural church. The difference comes when the music is introduced purely based on a particular culture. While the choices may satisfy individuals within a culture, it takes some time for the different

¹³ Marti, Gerardo. *Worship Across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multicultural Congregation*, Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Ave, New York, NY. 100016, 2012, Page 80.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, Page 78.

cultures to embrace unfamiliar modes. Don Saliers argues that ¹⁵“music is deeply connected within human emotional life.” Traditionally, the music presented in church consists of well accepted songs familiar to most people.

I began by looking at how music is traditionally used in the Episcopal Church. There is a culture that exists within the Episcopal/ Anglican Denomination that has become a cultural and religious practice for centuries. Whenever the clergy prepares his/her sermon, the hymns for that worship service are selected to correspond to the scripture readings and the prayers of intercession for the day. With that kind of global understanding of the church, integration has a starting point. Each culture can begin to integrate their own identities as they define themselves, using the music, scripture readings and the prayers of the people to give the church a new identity.

The standard message of the gospel will always be the same, but how it is received and practiced may vary from one church to the next. The difference will come in the measure of the faithfulness demonstrated by the congregation, this will determine their level of commitment. Douglas Powe argues that ¹⁶“The ultimate test is not how well you perform but whether the people of God has given you- as a people- are more faithful in their pilgrimage as a congregation.” An intercultural church would really test the limits of faith in how members reflect and perceive the gospel. Music could be the energizer to push these limits.

¹⁵ Saliers, Don E. *Music and Theology*, Abingdon Press, Nashville TN. 2007, Page 14.

¹⁶ Powe, F. Douglas. Etal. *Sustaining While Disrupting: The Challenge of Congregational Innovation*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN. 2022, page 111.

Many people around the world identify with music that speaks of what they value and who they value. David Williams states that ¹⁷“Music forms a community, expressing a culture’s aesthetics and values.” For example, Jamaicans identify with reggae music, which captivates the mind and soul of the people both in civic and religious settings. Music goes to the heart of what the church does. It transports people in general to celebrate a deep appreciation of what they have developed within each cultural practice over time. This can clearly be seen on special occasions, during the celebration of birthdays, anniversaries, baptisms, Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving and Pentecost. I envisioned that each of the cultures in my parish could use music specific to the celebration and customs with which they were familiar, and members of each culture could participate in one another’s celebrations.

Music would form part of the expression of who communities are, and what they bring to the weekly Sunday worship to express their diversity. During their time together, each racial group would have to share in every aspect of worship. They would share in the readings, especially on Pentecost Sunday and Hispanic month when the readings are done in different languages. Some would be ushers, chalice bearers during the administration of Holy Communion, singing in the choir, serving on the church’s board, outreach, public relations among other areas of service depending on their gifts. In this kind of setting, the pastoral leadership would constantly navigate the complex demands of a tri-factor model to integrate each segment into one community. Every moment, every event would become a matter of urgency simply to keep the community together.

¹⁷ Williams, David A. (2020), *Unity in Diversity: How Music Helped Shape the Spiritual Identities of Black and White Seventh-Day Adventists, 1840-1944*, *Liturgy*, 35:2, 33-41.

Music becomes the key to worship the God who embraces all of us equally. Kortright Davis argues that ¹⁸“To worship that God is to be filled with the vision of the world which belongs only to God.” Within each culture and every worship experience God becomes the central figure of all our practices.

For a pastor, leading a multicultural church is like balancing on a tight rope. This takes courage, constant engagement and an opportunity to learn something new. I have not yet honed all the skills necessary to lead an intercultural congregation, but I continually seek to do so. It is certainly an asset to be able to sing, as it helps to reach where words cannot go. I am clear that every aspect of the pastor’s leadership role must be a shared one. This gives a variety of leadership styles to the congregation and can prove beneficial across cultures for parish growth.

In any kind of study or observation of the worshipping community, the purpose and intent of gathering the information should be made clear. These congregations are fiercely protective of their traditions and practices. Every culture that exists within the congregation would have to give permission for this process in order to create a common understanding among the parties. This would allow for an openness among communities to share their similarities and engage more meaningfully in their differences.

Over a four-week period, I conducted an ethnographic participant/ observation of the member engagement in worship and the social hour afterwards. In the Episcopal tradition the social hour following the worship would break the fast of many members. In both the actual worship and the social hour, music plays a vital role.

¹⁸ Davis, Kortright. Can God save the Church? Living Faith...While keeping Doubt, WIPF & Stock Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 2021, Page 146.

Using Rachelle Green's Participant/Observation Worksheet, I attempted to capture the intercultural interaction in four categories: the people, objects, environment/events and message. This process impacted on my personal and pastoral involvement with the community.

Literature Review

Grace Episcopal Church faces a stark reality, if the community does not come together to amalgamate the different races in intercultural sharing diminishment will begin to take place. Conversations with research authors show that the use of music, cross-cultural sharing help the different cultures intersect. In her book, *Building Lasting Bridges: An Updated Handbook for Intercultural Ministries*, Kathryn Choy-Wong offers a theology supporting diversity where individual experiences embrace a multi-racial community. She argues that ¹⁹“Our physical makeup, our personalities, our natural talents, our limitations and weaknesses, our family upbringing, our social relationships, our opportunities and experiences, our geographies, and even our place in history make us all different.” These by themselves will not solve the problem of racial integration. The fact that they are in the room lends itself to the possibility of more interaction and the creation of a more lasting and sustaining intercultural community. For too long we have been worshipping in the same space but not working together.

Martyn Snow in his book, *An Intercultural Church for a Multicultural World* offers two unique perspectives to respond to intercultural work. One perspective addresses diversity as originated in creation. Choy-Wong in her book *Building Lasting bridges: An Updated Handbook for Intercultural Ministries* agrees with Snow that creation came into being with diverse people.

¹⁹ Choy-Wong, Kathryn. Etal. *Building Lasting Bridges: An Updated Handbook for Intercultural Ministries*, Judson Press, Valley Forge, PA. 2022, Page 3.

Snow argues that ²⁰“Genesis 1 tells us that God saw creation in all its diversity and declared it good.” The church seeking to become intercultural represents all that God intended it to be.

Snow’s second perspective speaks about how the church uses the exchange of gifts to explore all that intercultural practice has to offer. It creates a more meaningful cultural sensitivity as the races engage with each other. Snow asks the question, ²¹“Can I see myself as a gift?”

Other authors agree with Choy-Wong on the transition from multicultural to intercultural. Douglas Powe in his book, *Sustaining While Disrupting: The challenge of Congregation Innovation* introduces a way of preserving traditions while adapting to new ways of serving God. In my present congregation the tension of intercultural change exists as we grapple with sustaining old practices and engaging in new ones. Powe reminds us that ²²“we do not want to address something before people are ready, and we do not want to do it after the opportunity has passed.” This will mean adapting to new tools, skills and practical experiences at key moments in order to take the church into the future.

Building intercultural relationships also takes place while parishioners are gathered for worship. In a real sense the Church community gets life and energy from the interactions in worship. Kortright Davis in his book, *Can God Save the Church? Living faith... While Keeping Doubt*, and Gerardo Marti in his book, *Worship Across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multicultural Congregation* address the complexities of worship. Davis seeks to shed light on maintaining the original intent of what it means to be a witness of Christ’s message to the world.

²⁰ Snow, Martyn. Etal. *An Intercultural Church for a Multicultural World: Reflections on Gift Exchange*, Church Houe Publishing, 27 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P3AZ, 2024, Page 26.

²¹ Ibid, Page 56.

²² Powe, F. Douglas. Etal. *Sustaining While Disrupting: The challenge of Congregational Innovation*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN. 2022, Page102.

He argues that ²³“Radical change is painful, costly and disruptive; but no new life really emerges without it.” Marti on the other hand talks broadly about how the element of worship answers the question about diversity. He also suggests that church leaders need to be courageous to achieve diversity in the interaction of the people. Marti argues that ²⁴“By suggesting that worship music is the means by which the intentional involvement of visible diversity through the conspicuous color is accomplished, I am also suggesting a substantive, qualitative definition of multicultural congregations.”

Many authors see music as the glue that brings the community together in worship and cultural practices. Don E. Saliers in his book, *Music and Theology*, traces the history of music in the church and the deep cultural practices. His research reveals a theology of music in previous and present practices, while opening new ways to that practice. Saliers states that ²⁵“From the beginning of the Christian movement and the earlier communities the faith was learned and expressed, in part, through song.”

David A Williams in his article, *Unity in Diversity: How Music Helped Shape Spiritual Identities of Black and White Seventh -Day Adventists, 1840-1944* suggests that a plurality of identities exists in each culture. He argues that within that culture music helps the diverse community to express their spirituality in worship. He further argues that ²⁶“Music helped foster a shared identity, linking diverse people around the globe.”

²³ Davis, Kortright. *Can God Save the Church? Living Faith... While Keeping Doubt*, WIPF & Stock Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 2021, Page 31

²⁴ Marti, Garado. *Worship Across the racial divide: Religious Music and the Multicultural Congregation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, Page 213.

²⁵ Saliers, Don E. *Music and Theology*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 2007, Page 34.

²⁶ Williams, David A. (2020), *Unity in Diversity: How Music Helped Shape Spiritual Identities of Black and White Seventh -Dan Adventists, 1840-1944*, *Liturgy*, 35:2,33:41.

The third author Gerardo Marti in his book, *Worship Across the racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multicultural Congregation* also talks about the importance of music specifically in a multicultural community. His research connects diversity and the challenge of choosing music in a multi-racial worship. Marti argues that ²⁷“The question of worship experience is difficult to grasp, and the difficulty is complicated by the inherent contradiction of beliefs held by people regarding the power of music in the face of race.”

Integration is a theme that is relevant for the making and sustaining of a multicultural community. Michael O. Emerson in his book, *People of Dreams: Multicultural Congregation in the United States* examines why secular institutions seem more racially integrated, while the church remains mostly monocultural. He suggests that one reason may be that some churches, because of their history, strongly resist being multicultural. Emerson sighted part of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.s. dream, which referred to ²⁸ “People whose lives are significantly intertwined with each other across racial lines and who serve as bridges between groups.” From his research he concluded that multiracial congregations become the avenue by which racial integration happens.

Both Mark DeYmaz in *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church* and Ryan Roach in his book *Preaching Without Borders* illustrate how to integrate, transform, and build lasting and sustaining approaches to church viability. At my parish we are directly involved in transforming our church from just existing as different cultures to cultivating a working intercultural

DOI: 10:1080/0458063X.2020.1739480.

²⁷ Marti, Gerardo. *Worship Across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012, Page 78.

²⁸ Emerson, Michael O. *People of Dreams: Multicultural Congregation in the United States*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2006, Page 105.

community. DeYmaz and Roach address directly that although the divisions will no doubt continue, they will do so with avenues for growth and lasting relationships.

DeYmaz argues that²⁹ “After some research, we recognized that the only way to fully integrate Latinos in the worship service was to provide for simultaneous translation.” He warns that sometimes the assimilation process only benefits the majority in the congregation. On the other hand, Roach argues that ³⁰“A preacher needs to have multiple tools in his toolbox if he is to successfully communicate the unchanging gospel to a rapidly changing world.” Similarly to what I see in my parish, both DeYmaz and Roach see the process as most effective when the barriers that prevent a diverse community are broken down to achieve vibrant relationships.

Part of the challenge in the parish is carrying out activities that create the teamwork needed to advance diversity. Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, in her book *Teamwork Cross-culturally* suggests that the best response is to create teams from a multinational background. Diversity is a global trend, and as such, the church should reflect global diversity. Lingenfelter argues that ³¹“We must understand from the outset that the cross overturns all our cultural patterns of identity, authority, and values for personal, family, and public life.”

The diversity in the parish stems largely from migration. With that comes a melting pot of cultures with knowledge, skills, traditions and practices to amalgamate into one church. Shaping the future of the church will take careful realignment of the human capital. Thomas Sowell in his book, *Migration and Cultures: A World View* addresses the delicate balancing to keep the

²⁹ DeYmaz, Mark. *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church*, Josey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint, San Francisco, CA, 2007, Page 55.

³⁰ Roach, Ryan. *Preaching Without Borders*, WIDF & Stock Publication, Eugene, Or, 2022, Page 25.

³¹ Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. Etal. *Team Cross-Culturally*. Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI> 2022, Page25.

cultures working together. Sowell argues that ³²“Whether it is the internal cultural patterns of a group or the surrounding social and natural environment which predominates at a given time and place can only be determined by an examination of those times and places.”

Innovation

Over the years we have been working with the people in the parish to cultivate a working intercultural community. To this end, a survey was conducted on April 27, 2024, with ninety-eight out of one hundred and fifty-four people participating. These numbers came from the parish weekly attendance register. This was done with the intention to derive data from the thinking of the parishioners on being intercultural.

Grace Episcopal Church was an all-white congregation until it started integrating with diverse people moving into the community. This created a new problem of integration among more than two racial groups. The survey was conducted to capture the actual hard numbers on the make-up of the parish. The results presented some opportunities and challenges to create a workable intercultural parish for the future.

The following data represents the very satisfied people within the congregation: 48.6% (Appendix A) find worship to be meaningful, 57.3% (Appendix B) see communion as vital to the faith, 63% (Appendix D) would recommend the parish to others, 51.9% (Appendix F) believes that the church cares about its members, 59.3% (Appendix G) values diversity, 60.4% (Appendix H) appreciate diversity, 65.1% (Appendix I) appreciate the pastoral leadership, 62% (Appendix K) consider Grace Church to be a welcoming parish, and 70.6% (Appendix E) are generally

³² Sowell, Thomas. *Migrations and Cultures: A World View*, Basic Books, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, Ny. 10022-5299, 1996, Page 47.

satisfied with the parish. These numbers create a great foundation on which to build a viable intercultural church.

The challenge comes with those areas scoring in a lower percentile: only 46.3% (Appendix M) consider Communication to be good, 38.9% (Appendix L) find worship services to be engaging, 28.8% (Appendix R) consider the quality of choir and music to be good, and only 16.5 % (Appendix AB) of youth (Acolytes) and young adults (St. Stephen's) combined seem to be committed to the parish. These areas will require immediate attention if we are to build the diverse community that we seek. This will involve recruitment, training, projected growth and the ability to retain each group.

My starting point for diversity must begin with the story of creation in Genesis chapter one where God saw it as good. Therefore, to move the church forward I will begin with five action plans adapted from the survey results crucial to the process of intercultural building. I decided that the action plans should focus on each of the following areas: children and youth, young adults, member engagement, music/choir and communication.

To engage the children and youth across the racial divide, all programs should include every youth from each cultural group. The customary programs would be Black and Hispanic month presentations, Palm Sunday and Good Friday Dramas of the passion of Christ, Teen dinner dance, vacation bible school, international Sunday presentation, steel pan playing, and the Christmas program. Working together on these activities will begin to teach the children the value of being one family in our differences.

Children live what they learn, and if cultural diversity is taught in church and society, we will not only unite the races but cultivate strong communities. In St. Mark 10:14, Jesus

responded to the refusal by the disciples to allow the children near him with. “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs.” (New Revised Standard Version). It is important that the nucleus of what will integrate into the church should begin with the children.

Young adults are necessary in the church to be the bridge between the children and youth and the adults. Building that bridge will require intentional evangelism and cross-cultural sharing in leadership and community activities. The strengthening of the group should not be limited just to group meetings but should include social community involvement as well. This will pique the interest of others to become part of a movement that includes all people.

Intercultural building in the young adult group will take many forms, because they are independent thinkers with different orientation and deep cultural practices. This will require a new way of thinking as they come together to integrate into one community. This does not mean they lose their cultural identity but that they merge identities with others to form a cohesive group. From this they will derive the strength to work together across any cultural or racial divide.

To be guaranteed any future for such a group consistent conversion, planning and meetings must be ongoing. For example, they must conduct focus groups to determine any barriers that are preventing them from participating in worship and other outreach activities. This will give them increased visibility, sharpen their focus on community outreach, and encourage greater participation, while maintaining their unique identity cross-culturally.

For the general congregation, parishioners should be encouraged to get involved in a member engagement process. This requires asking the right questions, listening to concerns, and

ascertaining their values for inclusion. This will make a good start toward building and sustaining intercultural leadership. Douglas F. Powe argues that ³³“Sustaining leadership is about building upon the history and strengths of the congregation to an even more faithful and fruitful place in its journey to know and do God’s will.” The end game in this engagement is to increase the number of parishioners willing to be trained and participate in greater numbers. The goal here is to increase the member engagement from 20% to 40% over a one-year period.

Further, we will establish and conduct Ministry Sundays quarterly to introduce parishioners to the purpose and intention of each ministry. With this kind of involvement all cultural groups will get an opportunity to showcase their ministry and invite others to participate. This will not only foster greater fellowship among the parishioners but will bring all the races working together.

With the music component of the church one needs to carefully address the concerns related to the choir. The data shows only 34.8% of members to be very satisfied with the choir and the music of the church. This will need some intentional cross-cultural work, to generate greater interest in the music presented for worship. We also need to make sure that we have the resources and music leadership to sustain the quality of the music long term. To that end a working process must be put in place to maintain order to allow members to be well informed.

This will include a recruitment drive to increase the diverse membership of the choir, representing every cultural group in the congregation. An increase in the membership will give the church leadership a greater pool of talents from which to engage. Having diversity in the choir will signal to the wider congregation that the pastoral leadership values the gifts and talents

³³ Powe, Douglas F. Etal. *Sustaining While Disrupting: The Challenge of Congregational Innovation*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, Mn, 2022, page 89.

of all groups. This will help to address questions in any racial group that may arise from time to time.

In the process a diverse music team must be put in place to engage members in their choice of music and their satisfaction. Marti reminds us that ³⁴“Music is not ‘part of’ the culture of a church or ‘embedded within’ the culture of the church but it is a practice that constitutes any congregational community.” A music team will ensure broad selection, quality, engagement of talents, and regular meetings for consistency.

Training is crucial in any church setting; much more essential in transitioning from a multicultural church to an intercultural one. This is where everyone gets to blend their knowledge, voices, gifts and talents as one church. As they learn music from each other they will also create a blending of the cultures. This creates a global impact due to the various cultural identities which enhance the viability of the church in the community.

In any institution communication is required but remains a challenge as the landscape shifts overtime. Communication in the church can be very complex, especially in one with a diversity of cultures. One runs the risk of miscommunication and there is always the challenge of informing those who may be absent on a particular Sunday. The information given one Sunday must be repeated for several weeks for those who will be hearing it for the first time.

Communication in a church is complex and must take many forms to capture those who depend on visual aid, and to enhance the community’s physical interaction with each other. The delivery of the communication can take an oral, electronic, or written form but must be delivered in a manner that is sensitive to each culture. The community also has the option to engage

³⁴ Marti, Gerardo. *Worship Across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multicultural Congregation*, Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016, 2012, Page 80.

internally and externally with present and future parishioners. Further, in moments of crisis, communication takes on a different sense of urgency. In these moments compromise becomes necessary, where compassionate understanding softens individual cultural practices.

For the church to communicate and engage well for a better future, it must have a formal system of delivery for its sacred and social ministries. Working with a diverse group of children, young adults, men and women, we can make sure that updated information is always made available. These can include the live streaming of the weekly worship service, to reach absent parishioners and the public. This will allow the church to connect and engage those outside of the church to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Crucial to cultivating an intercultural church is the inclusive use of language; if the church is to reach all members, it must do so in their language of origin. The worship music and participants from each group will address inclusiveness. This will communicate that the church values the gift of every individual worshipper. When they can see people from their culture in leadership roles, especially when it involves the use of different languages, people are likely to value the experience.

Integration of any church requires the establishment of a hospitality awareness group to welcome new parishioners. People who feel that the church cares about their wellbeing will be inclined to stay. As part of that welcome, parishioners will sit beside the visitor and assist them with the worship. They would introduce them to the fellowship hour following the worship and do follow-up if they miss a week or two. Cultural sensitivity will be critical here as well.

Evaluation

The question about music in the integration of people of different cultures is deeply rooted in the cultural practices of each. An intercultural church will need to blend the different types of music which will create a church that meets the demands of the future. Martyn Snow describes this as ³⁵“a way of drawing on the gift of diversity while also paying attention to the complex dynamics involved when cultures meet one another.” The strength of the church comes from people working together, sharing their gifts and interacting in a new practice. This would need a consistent engagement of all parishioners to maintain a church for all people.

In a successful intercultural church, a multiplicity of strengths is necessary to meet the new way of doing church. The church will employ the best cultural practices, using both new and old ways to produce a contrast in which each cultural group can find acceptance. Thomas Sowell argues that ³⁶“Being faithful is best understood as action: concrete acts of hard work living in surrender and obedience to Christ.” This will make the church not only stronger but culturally sensitive, appealing to an avenue for seekers who are looking for a church that is all embracing.

Many people will search long and hard to find a church where their gifts will be valued. In such a place the exchange of gifts among the cultures can take place, to reflect the very community in which they live. As a matter of survival for the church and a way of expanding its reach into the community this blending of cultures seems appropriate. In the survey of the church 59.3% (Appendix G) of the congregation values the diversity of its members. This will require more work on the part of each cultural group to realize the true potential of pulling together.

³⁵ Snow, Martyn. Etal. *An Intercultural Church for a Multicultural World: Reflections on gift exchange*, Church House Publishing, 27 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P3AZ, 2024, Page41.

³⁶ Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. Etal. *Teamwork Cross-culturally: Christ-Centered Solutions for Leading Multinational Teams*. Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, 2022, Page 96.

A church of this nature helps to eliminate the fears and anxieties that stem from what one may perceive about the other. Working together will significantly increase the level of acceptance which will cultivate a more missional and productive church. Furthermore, because of its inclusive nature the church will tend to have a more global reach. This is largely due to the patterns of migration where an amalgamation of practices, thinking and behaviors becomes the new community. Sowell argues that ³⁷“The story of migration is not only about the people who migrate but also about the lands to which they go and their impacts on those lands.”

The emergence of interculturalism also comes with some challenges that both adversely and practically impact the church. To keep diverse groups of people together certain adjustments must be made to avoid misunderstandings. One of the most delicate and contentious areas has to do with addressing the injustices of the past. These are closely associated with unconscious biases and stereotypes. Joseph Shaules argues that ³⁸“Stereotypes exist in every society because categorization comes so naturally to us. They also exist because we often lack a detailed understanding of foreign people and places and thus can only call to mind simple images to refer to or make sense of them.”

Assimilation is not intercultural living, but a denial of one’s own culture. In most cases the dominant group tends to see its culture as superior. Instead, we seek a place where those who come should simply join all others and enrich their way of life and their way of worship. Snow argues that ³⁹“the vision of intercultural church is one of a multicentered church without

³⁷ Sowell, Thomas. *Migration and Cultures: A World View*,

Basic Books, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY, 10022-5299, 1996, Page 2.

³⁸ Shaules, Joseph. *The Intercultural Mind: Connecting Culture, Cognition and Global living*, Intercultural Press, 53 State Street, 9th floor, Boston, 02116, MA, 2015, Page 123.

³⁹ Snow, Martyn. Etal. *An Intercultural Church for a Multicultural World: Reflections on Gift Exchange*, Church Houe Publishing, 27 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P3AZ, 2024, Page 48.

dominant or marginal groups.” Wherever dominance exists, resistance becomes the prevailing practice of that church. With the challenge of globalization, resistance will occur, until acceptance takes place.

The value system in our church is deeply embedded in the worship practice which challenges the transition to an intercultural setting. Members look at these values, such as a wide array of music that enriches their lives, and this becomes the source of being community. We can only avoid sporadic reluctance to embrace interculturalism, if members see their cultural norms included.

This approach will lead to members feeling greater fulfillment in worship. Every cultural group takes with them their history and cultural practices and blends them in an intercultural way. This challenges the church to cultivate an environment where people can experience others outside of their own culture. Gerardo Marti argues that ⁴⁰“Most congregants do not have extensive exposure to different styles of music in worship.” To this end, the church must seek to connect the needs of every person to an intercultural experience. This will create a community where all races can worship together and find spiritual growth by engaging in an exchange of cultural practices.

The experience of being engaged in worship with a rich diversity represents what the world looks like today. Our life in church constitutes a human experience in which our faith, culture and deeply held family norms are practiced. Margaret Wheatley argues that ⁴¹“All human

⁴⁰ Marti, Gerardo. *Worship Across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multicultural Congregation*, Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY, 10016, 2012, Page 81.

⁴¹ Wheatley, Margaret J. *Restoring Sanity: Practices to awaken Generosity, Creativity & Kindness in Ourselves and our Organizations*, Barrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc, 1333 Broadway, Suite 1000, Oakland, CA, 94612, 2024, Page 37.

cultures except the current Western scientific materialistic one understand that life works in many more dimensions than the physical.” Diversity seeks to capture the whole of humanity- heart, soul and mind- and makes the church one.

Members of a church that engages in intercultural practices share their cultural traditions, respect individual practices, and value each other. This will build strong blended communities which signal a church of the future. Sharing one’s gifts can only make us learn more about each other’s cultural norms and practices. This ultimately eliminates assumptions, doubts, and fears about them. Eventually these practices will be brought into the mainstream of everyone’s worship in an intercultural way.

Conclusion

In our current social, political and economic climate the church seeks ways to integrate different cultures as one working group. With these societal practices the church finds itself not only having to respond but to explore new ways of doing ministry. To compound the matter further, within most of our churches exists a multicentered culture longing for community. My main goal is to get members of the church engaging with each other, to meet the present demand of being church.

For the church to be truly intercultural, it must see its diversity as a part of creation in which all of God’s children must participate equally. One of the major contributors to this diversity stems from migration, which forces the church to adapt to a blending of cultural practices. Deeply embedded in each culture is the music of that culture. This forms part of what moves the various cultures to embrace an intercultural practice in a diverse church.

In a church where multiple cultures meet, the exchange of gifts helps with the cross-pollination of each group. Everyone should see these gifts as being provided by members who have equal opportunity in building the community. For interaction among cultures to be successful, each culture must be seen as equally valued, and the giving and receiving of each other's gifts must be seen as critical to the life of the church.

In the end God is central in all cultures as evidenced in creation. This forms a melting pot of the cultures, and forces the church to adjust to a changing, complex and exciting world. Amid these changes, music bridges the gap between a traditional and a contemporary church. If the church fails to embrace diversity, it will also fail at engaging the new community.

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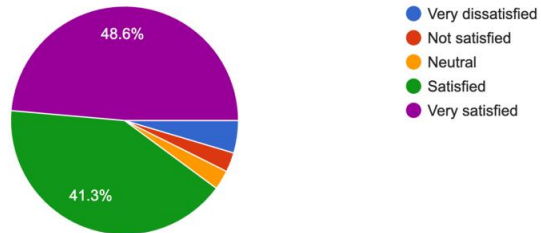
Grace Episcopal Church

Survey Results

Appendix A

Ability to find meaningful fellowship

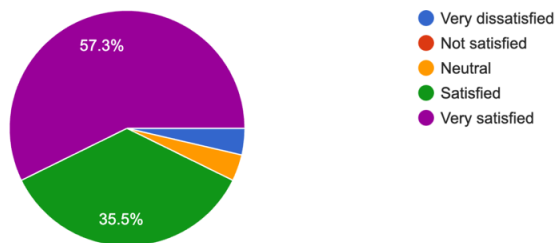
109 responses



Appendix B

Communion

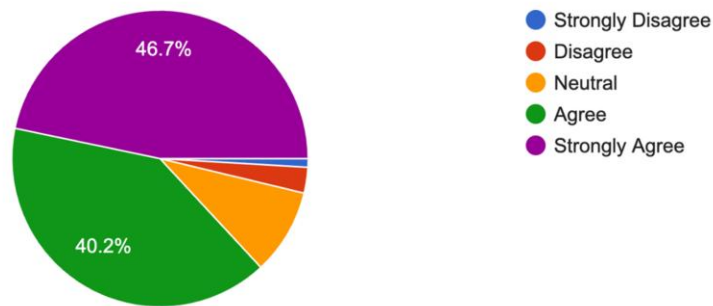
110 responses



Appendix C

I feel supported by the church community.

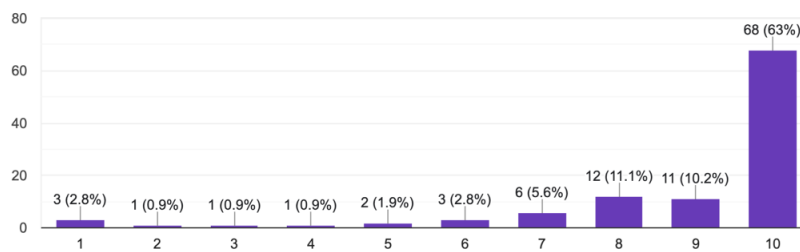
107 responses



Appendix D

Considering your complete experience with this church, how likely would you be to recommend us to a friend or colleague?

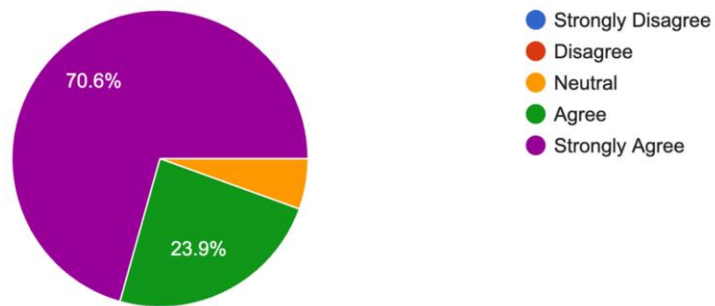
108 responses



Appendix E

Overall, I am satisfied in being a member of this church.

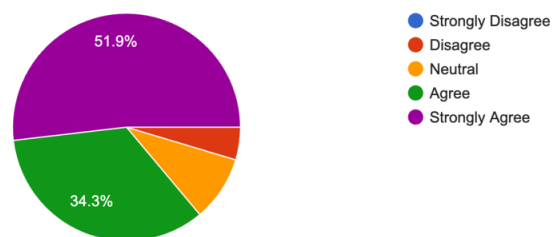
109 responses



Appendix F

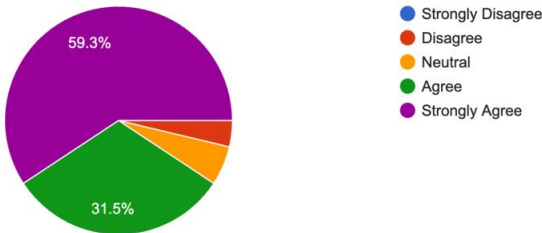
The church cares about its members.

108 responses



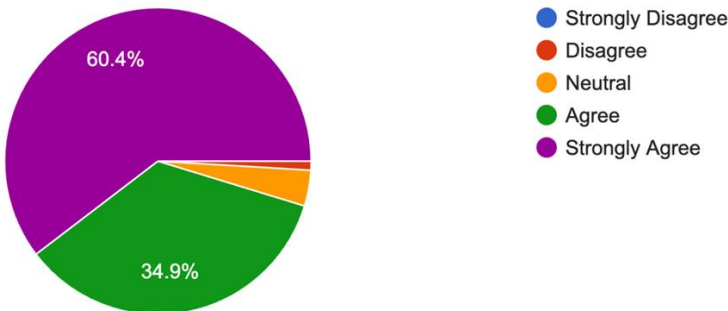
Appendix G

The church values the diversity of its members.
108 responses



Appendix H

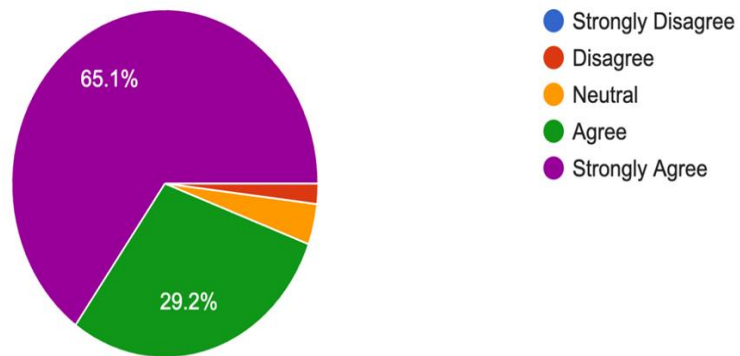
I appreciate the diversity of the members of the church.
106 responses



Appendix I

The priest is concerned about the well-being of the parishioners.

106 responses

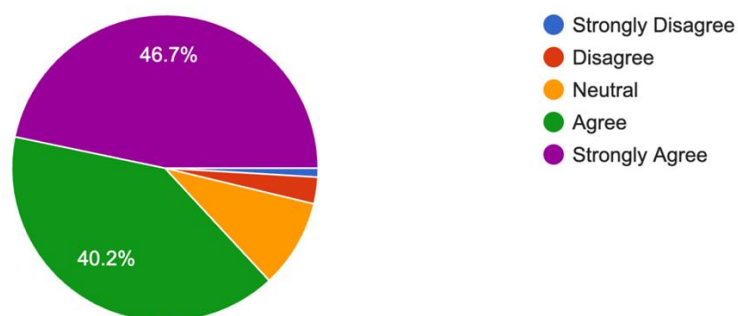


Grace Episcopal Church

Appendix J

I feel supported by the church community.

107 responses

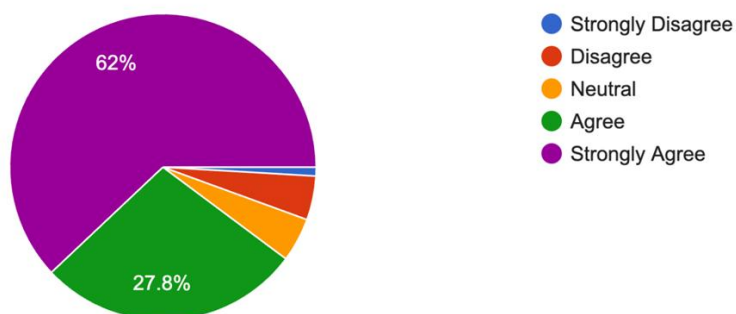


Grace Episcopal Church

Appendix K

The church is welcoming to new members.

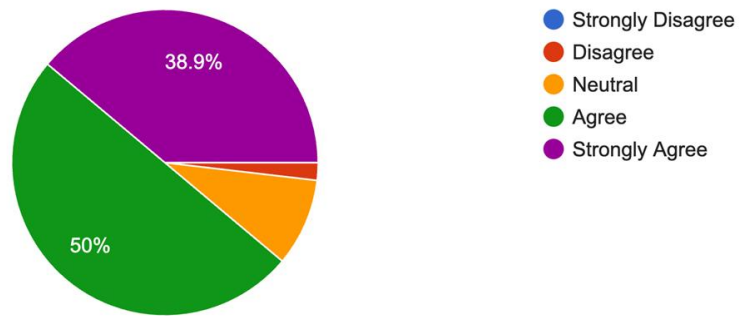
108 responses



Appendix L

The church takes special interest in making the services engaging.

108 responses

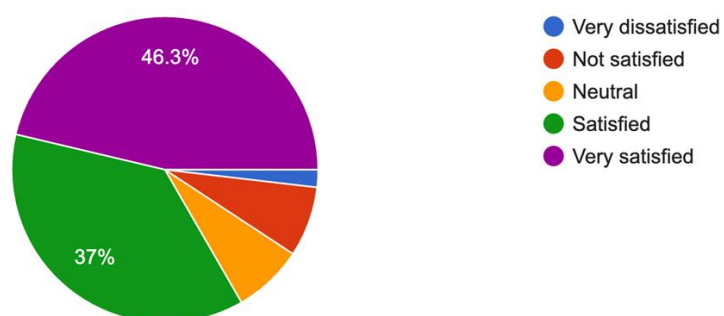


Grace Episcopal Church

Appendix M

Communication about church events

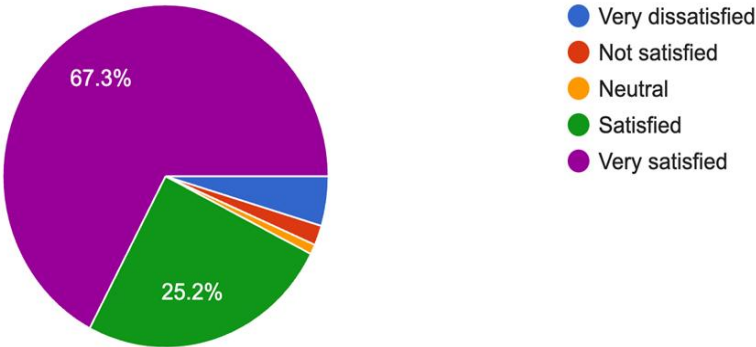
108 responses



Appendix N

Quality of sermons

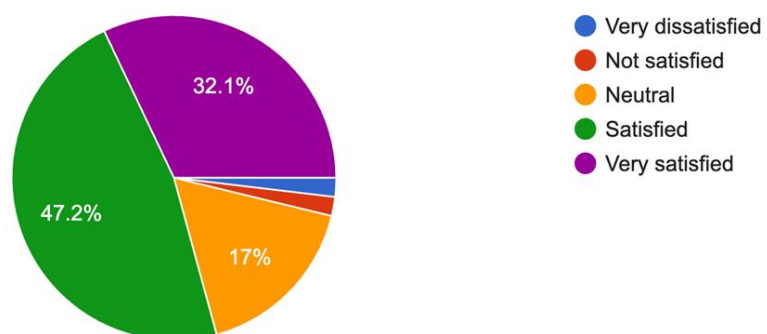
107 responses



Appendix O

Special events

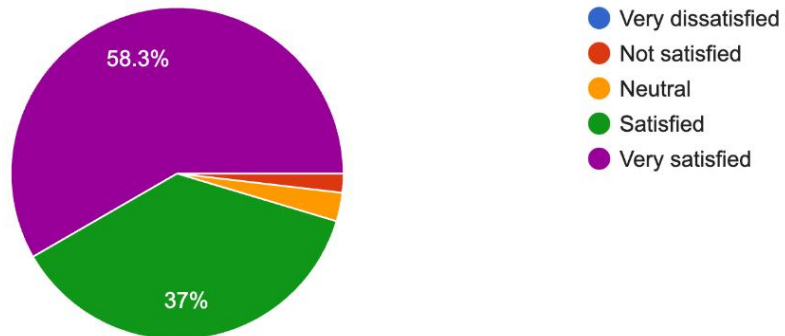
106 responses



Appendix P

Cleanliness at the sanctuary

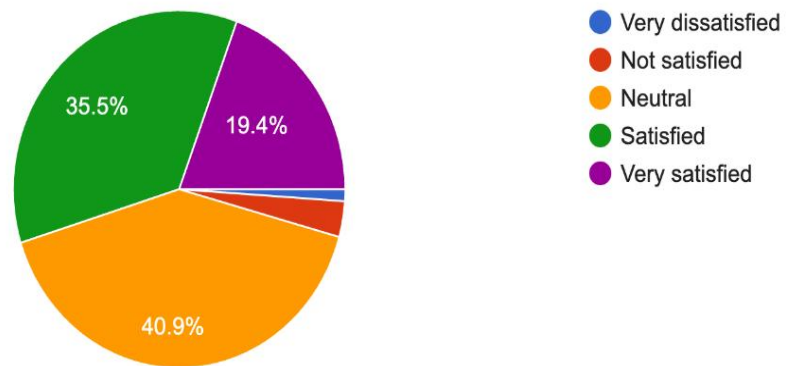
108 responses



Appendix Q

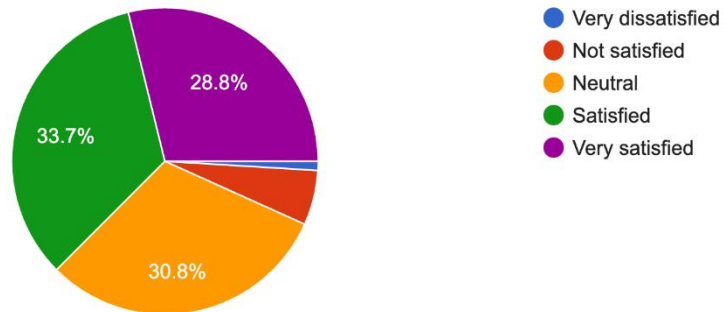
Bible studies

93 responses



Appendix R

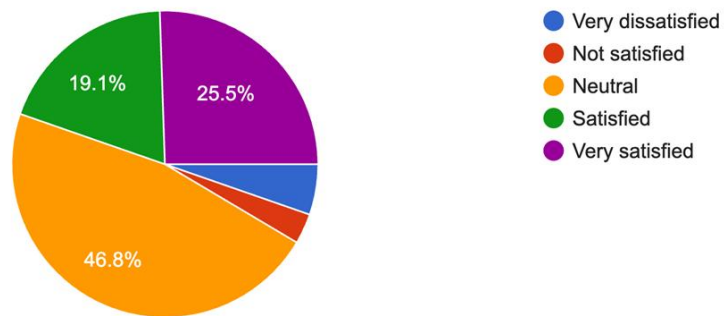
Quality of choir
104 responses



Appendix S

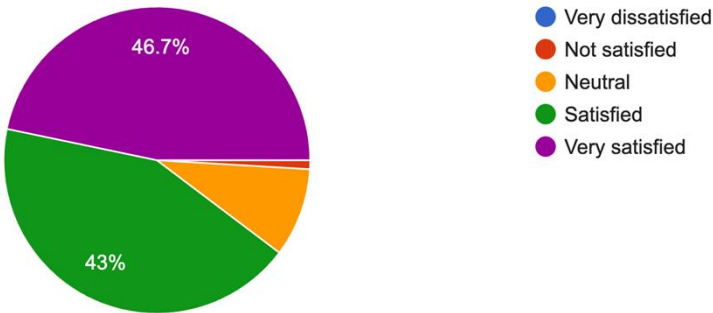
Sunday school classes

94 responses



Appendix T

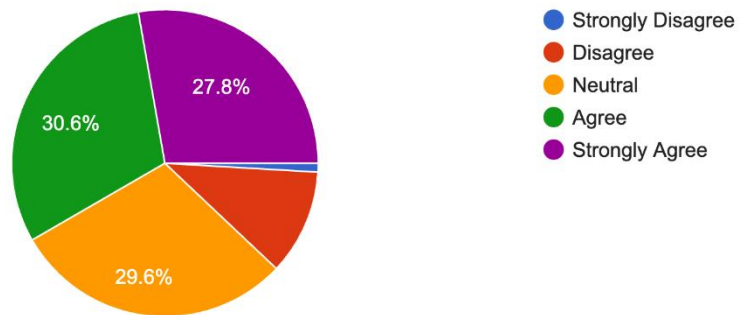
Washroom cleanliness
107 responses



Appendix U

The church's outreach programs are effective in reaching the local community.

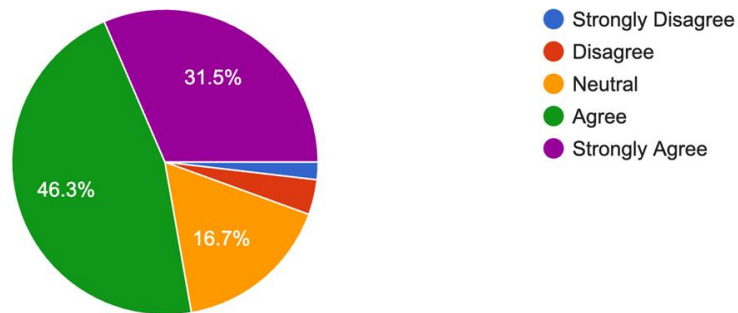
108 responses



Appendix V

The church has a clear strategy to help members grow in their faith.

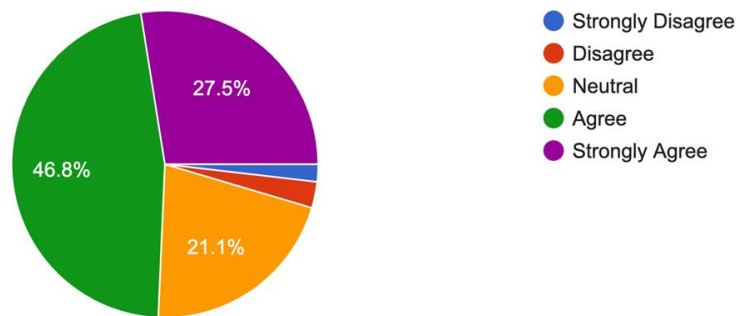
108 responses



Appendix W

I understand the process of becoming a volunteer.

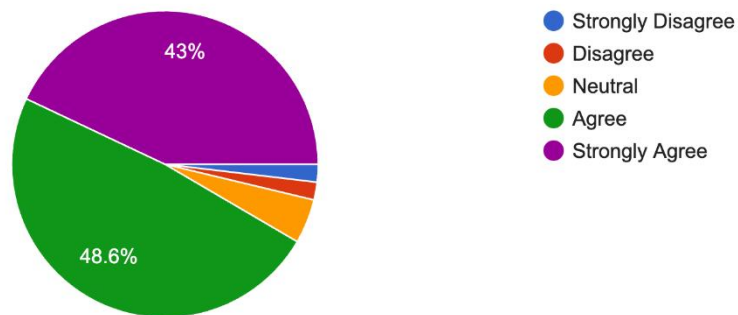
109 responses



Appendix X

I receive timely updates about events in the church.

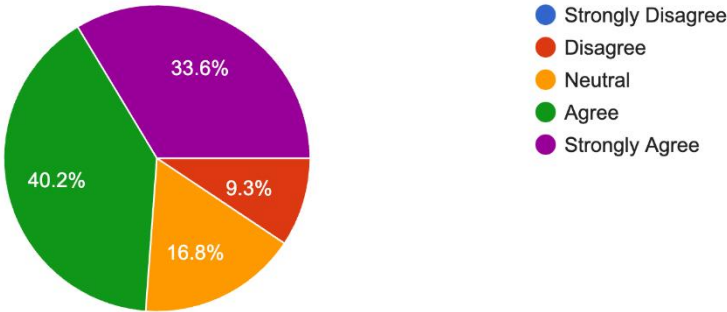
107 responses



Appendix Y

I receive timely updates about the financial health of the church.

107 responses

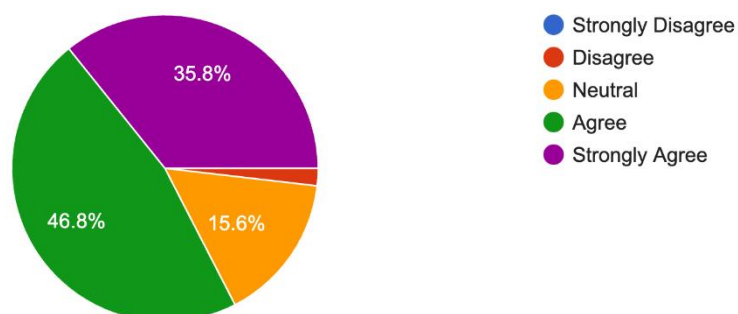


Grace Episcopal Church

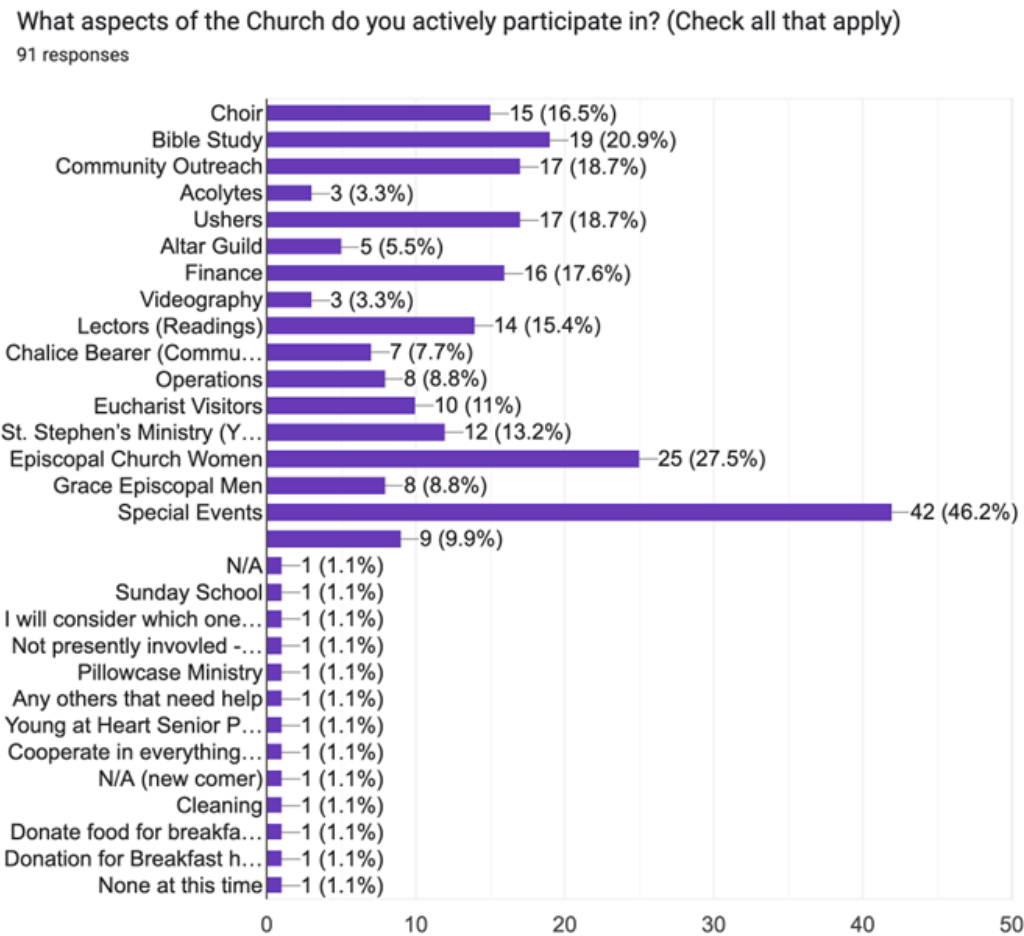
Appendix Z

The church's mission is effectively communicated to the congregation.

109 responses



Appendix AB



Appendix BC

What aspects of the Church do you want to participate in? (Check all that apply)

75 responses

