

Church Planting Manual

Culture and Church Planting

KAIROS 2019-2020



Culture, Diversity and Inclusion in Church Planting

During the 2019 Church Planting Conference, Pastor Norton Lages described diversity in Canada in this way: *“Canadian culture treats other cultures like an abusive husband who sends his*

wife to counselling expecting her to change”.¹ Although we claim to be an inclusive and egalitarian society, Canada, Lages contends, is abusive at worst and patronizing at best.

Like a domestic violence situation, it is a messy and at times hopeless situation which requires a brutal change. Lages uses the word ‘brutal’ intentionally. Such change is hard and painful. It requires great self-awareness and humility on the part of the abuser (majority cultures) and great self-awareness and courage on the part of the abused (minority cultures). He goes on to outline what is needed for true gospel inclusion:

1. **Brutal Simplicity**

Inclusion requires sharing the simple things of life with one another: meals, coffee, the precious commodity of time. All the things you do with those “like’ you seek to do with those unlike yourself.

2. **Brutal Transparency**

Inclusion requires real conversation. We must be honest with one another. It requires an unveiling of the deceitful things in your heart and a constant challenging your own conceptions in order to reveal the real reasons for discomfort when it comes to engaging other cultures.

3. **Brutal Humility**

Lages is a multi-ethnic man living in Quebec. After recognizing the touchy subject of Quebec nationalism, Lages argues that humility is needed in inclusion. Our way of doing things is merely one way amidst a garden of God-given cultural narratives. In particular, our way of doing missions, usually imbued with imported western concepts, is not necessarily the best way.

4. **Brutal Gospel**

All in all what is needed is the gospel of Jesus Christ, in whom there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free. For all are one in Christ Jesus.

Such begins our discussion on culture, diversity and inclusion in church planting. This section of the church planting manual will explore socioeconomic diversity. Though distinct from other forms of diversity, we hope this section will also be beneficial when considering other forms of diversity such as ethnicity, gender, age, ability, etc.

¹ Norton Lages “CPC Congress 2019 Audio Files,” n.p. Cited 5 Nov 2019. Online:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Sm2YCF4RwwwAs14rvvaTzLVdxxNqUB_w.

For some articles exploring this metaphor further see [The Network](#), [Do Justice](#) and [The Christian Courier](#)


May the Spirit of God be your strength on the brutal journey ahead.

Socioeconomic Diversity

Greg Paul once said something to this effect: “If you plant a church for the middle class, the poor will not come. However, if you plant a church for the poor, everyone will come”. Planting a church which celebrates socioeconomic diversity is a picture of God’s kingdom to come and a means by which we can participate in the Kingdom of Jesus now. At the same time, socioeconomic diversity in churches is brutally hard. Most churches in North America grow through affinity groups. Like attracts like. Someone I know tried to attend a church in which the majority of people were quite wealthy. Everyone was friendly enough. The Word of God was preached. And then one of the congregants invited her to a tropical vacation next weekend. She respectfully declined and never went back again to the church again. Based on her economic status, it would be unwise to pay for a trip to Mexico and heaven-forbid the thought of someone paying for her.

This dynamic amplifies the further down the hierarchy of class one goes. A man who was homeless came during a Baptism service one Sunday. He was actually baptized that same day. We celebrated and ate together with him. Well-meaning people from church bought him some clothes and later dropped him off at one of the shelters. He never returned. Another time, I invited one of my friends who was experiencing homelessness to my church. He came and the people were friendly enough. He enjoyed the preaching. One of the church members welcomed him but then asked, “You must know Jeremiah”. When my friend responded in the affirmative, the church person said, “I thought so”. My friend was confused by this and took it to mean that since he looked a certain way (ie. “very Native” and “maybe homeless”) that I should be associated with Jeremiah – the guy who works with homeless destitute people, like himself. He was not sure about it – it just made him feel uncomfortable.

When I invited my friend a second time, I unfortunately gave him the wrong address and he went to another church to ask for help. The church told my friend that he had no idea where my church was and immediately closed the door on him. As one can see, socioeconomic diversity is brutally hard.



This section will draw upon my research and experience in Edmonton working in the inner-city, as well as visits to churches which seek to include those of different economic backgrounds. In addition, it will reflect upon my time at the Church Planting Conference which took me to Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. Here is a brief description of the churches which will be referenced in this section.

1. **Sanctuary Church**, *Toronto, ON. No affiliation.* "All are welcome here. However, guided by the Gospel, we consider people who are poor and excluded elsewhere to be the heart and center of our community. Together, we strive to offer the stability, dignity, resources, and love that all of us need to flourish. To this end, we undertake many life-giving initiatives, including running a healthcare clinic, an arts program, Sunday services, street outreach, and community meals."²
2. **The Community of Immanuel**, *Edmonton, AB. Anglican, United, Roman Catholic and Lutheran.* Run by Inner-city Pastoral Ministry, this church meets at the Bissell Centre where they worship and serve a meal.³
3. **The Father's House**, *Edmonton, AB. Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.* "We are a church that provides for the needs of the community around us in downtown Edmonton."⁴
4. **The Altar**, *Edmonton, AB. Charismatic.* They are part of the Mission Hall on 96st. Many volunteers of the church serve during the week and then host worship on Sundays.

In this section, we will explore three main areas:

1. **The Challenges of Socioeconomic Diversity**
2. **The Joys of Socioeconomic Diversity**
3. **Practical Considerations**

The Challenges of Socioeconomic Diversity

As already mentioned the challenges are vast. We will focus on two: culture and power.

² "Sanctuary Church Toronto," n.p. Cited 18 August 2020. Online: <https://www.sanctuarytoronto.org/about>

³ "Inner City Pastoral Ministry," n.p. Cited 18 August 2020. Online: <http://www.icpmedmonton.ca/wp/>

⁴ "Edmonton Father's House" n.p. Cited 18 August 2020. Online: <http://www.edmontonfathershouse.org/index.html>

Culture

In their book, *A Church For the Poor*, Charlesworth and Williams argue that the vast majority of churches have become “firmly middle class in its internal culture”.⁵ The main culture of the church which informs a worldview, practises, values is dominated by the middle class. Through their study of British Revival Movements, Charlesworth and Williams argue that the church has undergone its own form of gentrification. Many movements such as the Methodists and Quakers were started by those considered “poor in the eyes of the world”. Just like the allure of power and wealth transforms a marginalized space of the city, similar forces invaded the church and conformed it into its own image. Susan Durber, who is also located in the UK, argues that this shift happened during the Industrial Revolution. The church became “captured by a complex class culture” in which the church was on the side of progress and improvement touted by the growing middle class.⁶ She writes, “In a church of ‘Sunday Best’, of voluntary financial giving, of pew rents, of Sunday ‘school’ and improvement, even if no one meant to, the poor was excluded”.⁷

Today, most churches are located far from those living in poverty and guided by middle class leaders. Those living in poverty are generally seen as people to serve, not members who contribute. Charlesworth and Williams argue, “When the middle class culture is unchallenged the most likely outworking of the church’s approach to poverty is to confine its activity to social action projects alone”.⁸ Consideration of culture is a very important factor in our ability to embrace the other, the stranger, the newcomer who comes to our church. Churches which celebrate those living in economic poverty are typically very different from middle class churches. At the Father’s House in the inner-city of Edmonton, prim and proper is not the norm as many who are homeless line the doorway, present yet also hesitant to enter fully into the sanctuary. At The Sanctuary Church in Toronto, effective leadership is in question when there is no one person guiding the service. All the *priests* talk at once or in whispers others cannot quite hear. At the Community of Immanuel in Edmonton, improvement is a nicety of a different scale. For some not drinking alcohol for one day ranks great on the measure of progress. At the Altar,

⁵ Martin Charlesworth and Natalie Williams. *A Church for the Poor* (David C Cook, 2017), 137.

⁶ Susan Durber. *Poverty: The Inclusive Church Resource* (Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2014), 62.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸ Charlesworth and Williams. *A Church for the Poor*, 137.

growth in numbers matters less than growth of spirit and truth. So how do we bring these two worlds together? Charlesworth and Williams argue that since the middle class is in the majority the “onus is on us”.⁹ To return to Lages’ image, we are the husband who needs to confess our sins and humble ourselves before God and our neighbour.

Unfortunately, like the husband, it is difficult to accept other cultures without allowing our own to swallow the others up. Miroslav Volf argues that we need both proper *belonging* and *distance* to our culture. To make this point he takes the work of Ralph Premdas who studies church adherence to culture. Premdas argues that despite great effort most churches merely reflect and perpetuate cultural norms especially in times of conflict.¹⁰ In response Volf argues that we need to depart our culture without leaving it.¹¹ We should have a sense of belonging to our culture and celebrate the good gift it is; culture itself has been caught up in the redemption of Jesus’ body on the cross and in the resurrection. At the same time we should also possess an “internal distance” to it.¹² We separate ourselves enough from our culture in order to make space for the other and to critically judge that which has become corrupted and evil within it.¹³ This also requires accountability from those outside our culture. We must “listen to the voices of Christians from other cultures so as to make sure the voice of our culture has not drowned out the voice of Jesus Christ”.¹⁴ This, I believe, can apply to both ethnic and class cultures.

Listening requires a certain humility and the release of power to give a privileged space for the other to speak. This brings us to the second point.

Power

Another aspect to consider is power. As we have already mentioned, most middle class churches regard themselves as people who serve (powerful) and those in poverty as ones to be served (powerless). Such, argues Corbett and Fickett in their book *When Helping Hurts*, leads to more harm than good for both groups. The writers argue this central point: “One of the biggest

⁹ Charlesworth and Williams. *A Church for the Poor*, 125.

¹⁰ Miroslav Volf. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Abingdon Press, 1996), 37.

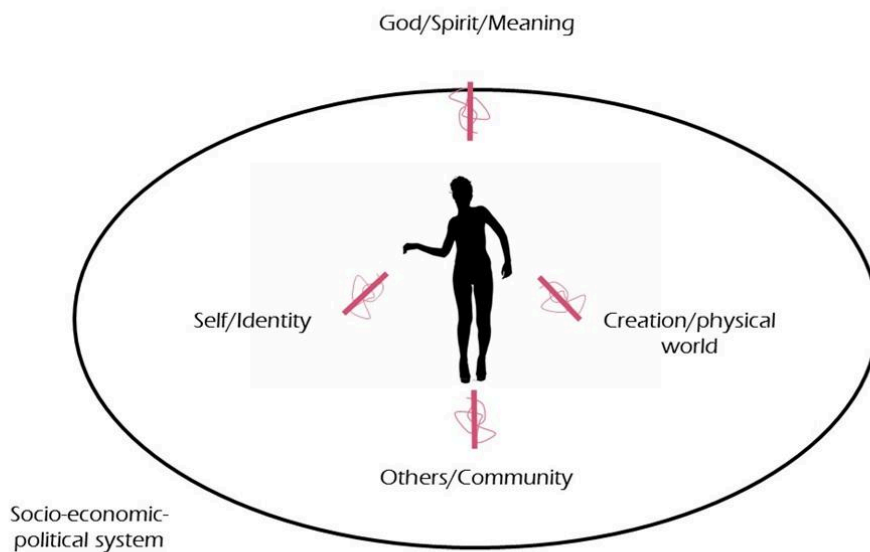
¹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹² *Ibid.*, 51.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

problems in many poverty-alleviation efforts is that their design and implementation exacerbates the poverty of being of the economically rich - their god-complexes - and the poverty of being of the economically poor - their feelings of inferiority and shame".¹⁵ In order to come to this main point, Corbett and Fickett first argue that a necessary shift must occur in Western thinking: the realization of poverty as more than simply a lack of material means.¹⁶ Proper response to poverty first requires an accurate diagnosis. To do this, they turn to Byrant Myers, Jayakumar Christian and others to explore poverty as a complex web of broken relationships. This diagram is one interpretation of poverty.



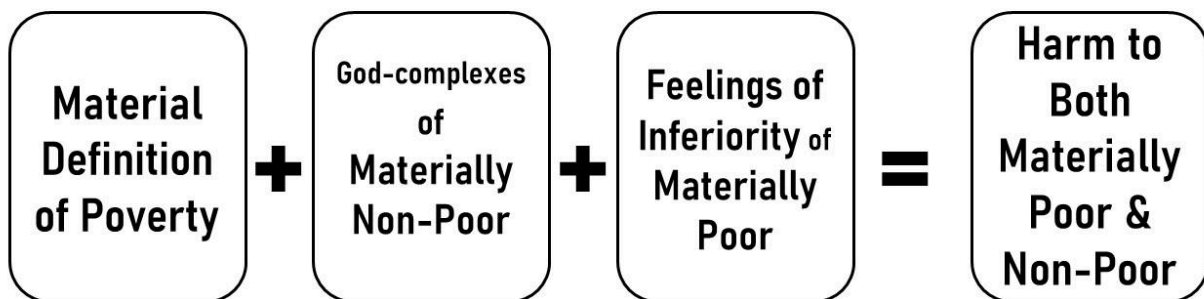
Poverty fills in the void left by the absence of God's shalom. When sin entered the world, the relationship between God and humanity was severed. What resulted was *Poverty of Spiritual Intimacy*, an intimacy we tried to fill through empty idolatry and, currently, materialism. Going clockwise through this diagram, humans also experienced thorns and thistles in creation. This curse caused *Poverty of Stewardship*. Our connection to the land was severed and with it our sense of purpose which we tried to remedy through workaholism or laziness. Also our relationship to others was broken: *Poverty of Community*. Abuse, exploitation, ethnic conflicts,

¹⁵ Steve Corbett and Brian Fillert. *When Helping Hurts* (Moody Publishers, 2012), 61.

¹⁶ For a short video exploring poverty [click here](#).

and exclusion became the norm of our existence. There is also *Poverty of Being*. Our view of ourselves has been broken leading to either a high exaltation (as in god-complexes) or a low battering of who we are. Finally all these relationships are embedded within systems (social, political, economic, and religious) which either encourage humans to flourish or stunt healing of brokenness.¹⁷

When this dynamic is misunderstood the power of the servers (even in the church and despite the best of intentions) is wielded like a sword piercing both the poverty of being in both the server and those being served. The servers seem to believe that they have the capacity to save those in poverty, and in the end, force the materially poor to worship the salvation they claim to bring. In the end, the servers fail as gods and the served fail as worshippers, which sends further ripples through the complex web of brokenness. Corbett and Fickett summarize their work through this helpful equation.¹⁸



I cannot help but wonder that this may be one of the reasons the man who came to receive baptism never returned. Those in poverty come to church only to further exacerbate feelings, to use the words of Mother Teresa, of being “unwanted, unloved, uncared for”. In addition, the people in the church who served the man may have simply reinforced their own sense of superiority over people living in poverty. Their sincere intention was to serve the man yet it was void of space in which the man could contribute and be human in a dignified way.

¹⁷ For sermons exploring poverty defined in this way see [mosaicHouse](#) and [Central Baptist](#)

¹⁸ Corbett and Fillert, *When Helping Hurts*, 64.

Another book, *Toxic Charity* by Robert Lupton, focuses on North American poverty alleviation efforts.¹⁹ He adds to the argument of Corbett and Fickett saying, “Mercy without justice degenerates into dependency and entitlement, preserving the power of the giver over the recipient. Justice without mercy is cold and impersonal, more concerned about rights than relationships.”²⁰ While we must make sure we have a comprehensive understanding of poverty and the power dynamics at play, we cannot merely replace mercy with justice. We cannot easily change a Food Bank Depot into a discount grocery store without mercy. One of my mentors articulates this with the image of two feet. Mercy and justice are like the two feet of a person which must be kept in unison. If either foot goes ahead of the other than the result is discoordination and instability. What is needed is careful stepping together while constantly keeping in mind where we may be inflicting more harm than healing in our service.

Lupton gives a helpful Oath for Compassionate Service which seeks to reduce the harm inflicted by sincere acts of charity by churches. Here is the oath:

- Never do for the poor what they have (or could have) the capacity to do for themselves.
- Limit one-way giving to emergency situations.
- Strive to empower the poor through employment, lending and investing, using grants sparingly to reinforce achievements
- Subordinate self-interests to the needs of those being served.
- Listen closely to those you seek to help, especially to what is not being said—unspoken feelings may contain essential clues to effective service.
- **Above all, do no harm.**²¹

While at a church planting conference in Montreal, I was able to explore the city for the day. I visited some drop-ins for those experiencing homelessness and met a man named Dave there. He was a true Montrealer whose family was from Ecuador. He wanted to give me a tour of the city while on his bottle-picking route. I decided to take him up on his offer and to allow him to lead. I tried to *listen closely* to what he wanted. Thankfully he was very clear and articulate: he wanted company. He adamantly told me to not help him picking up bottles: “don’t help. Just watch”. He was more than *capable of doing it himself*. I was to be his pupil (and occasional coat hanger) and he was to be the teacher. I tried to offer him money for his time, but he refused. He

¹⁹ For a *Toxic Charity* book study guide for churches [click here](#).

²⁰ Robert Lupton. *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)* (HaperCollins Publishers, 2011), 41.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

didn't want any money or anything I had for he earned his own way through life. Since this was what he wanted, I gave up as much time as I could to him, *subordinating my own self-interests*. He even bought me a coffee. We talked about Montreal, his life and God. He told me a story of when he was camping at a church. The Pastor came out and Dave said, "good evening". The Pastor closed the door without a word. After this story Dave said to me, "there are many homeless people more generous than 'Christians'".

Greg Paul tries to break down the dividing wall of power at Sanctuary Church. In this church, chairs are set up in a circle with an opening where the cross is. The communion table is in the middle of the circle and at the back of the room, out of focus, is the worship band. When the music plays, congregates shout out what song should come next. There is order to seemingly chaotic worship; an order grounded in Christ. Paul says, "I always encourage our group to pray aloud, read a Scripture, call out another song, or share whatever thoughts they may have that would contribute to our worship - but first, to be silent for a minute or so, so that we can listen for God's voice".²² There is a Pastor but there is no pupil. His leadership style is unique in this context. His role is to become lesser so that everyone else could become greater. One visitor to Sanctuary commented on this: "Do you see how all the power in this ceremony is coming from the people and not the preacher?' It was beautiful".²³ This story begins our conversation on the joys that socioeconomic diversity brings.

The Joys of Socioeconomic Diversity

Greg Paul summarizes the challenges of socioeconomic diversity in this: "The challenge of the first world church in the twenty first century is to radically reform itself, such that people who are poor are not merely the subject of outreach efforts, but are found right at the heart of our worshipping communities".²⁴ When the marginalized become the heart of a community of faith there is great joy. The core of this joy is the unveiling aspects of the gospel and the Kingdom of God previously obscured. Durber argues that a church without those in poverty in their midst will

²² Greg Paul. *The Twenty Piece Shuffle: Why the Poor and Rich Need Each Other* (David C Cook, 2008). 77.

²³ *Ibid.*, 231.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 218.

have “deeply distorted values”; they will be blind to certain aspects of the gospel and, ultimately, cease to be the church.²⁵ The void left by the church’s real presence would be replaced by a caricature modeled after the superficial *inclusive* narrative of a nation whose real history is founded on *exclusion*. Tentatively drawing from Nietzsche and Foucault, Volf agrees with the notion that the current narrative of Western ‘inclusion’ - the progressive rise of liberal, egalitarian democracies - is haunted by a shadow narrative of ‘exclusion’ inflicted on minorities such as Indigenous peoples and African slaves which persists to today.²⁶ The lack of voices from the margins represents the lack of distance to the narrative of inclusion and lack of imagination for the exclusion narrative. This is why Sandra Maria Van Opstal warns us to be aware of the authors which line our bookshelves and our digital readers.²⁷ Are they from diverse backgrounds and locations or do many of them share a similar perspective? Christ followers in poverty assist the church in returning to its humble beginnings - as victims of exclusion rather than proponents of it - and they help us see God and the gospel anew. Through their perspective, they will help the church confess and “recognize the ways of life that make many ‘rich’ are also those that leave others ‘poor’”.²⁸

I have explored similar themes through Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles.²⁹ In Jeremiah 29 there is a delicate tension. The prophet Jeremiah wants God’s people in exile to simultaneously embrace two realities. He wants them to embrace God’s exile - the hard, torturous reality that they will have to remain away from their home in a pagan society - and he wants them to embrace, to use Bonhoeffer’s words, God’s earth. He encourages the exiles to be fruitful and multiply and to embrace the bounty of God’s creation in this new land. While saying ‘yes’ to God’s exile compels us to live fully dependant on God’s provision, makes us suspicious of the world-system fundamentally opposed to God’s Kingdom and nurtures a longing for a heavenly home - saying ‘yes’ to God’s earth compels us to creatively see where God’s kingdom is present today and invading present systems and homes; and it invites us to continue to live out God’s vision of humanity despite, and in the face of, the interruption of sin and death. My friends who are homeless often remind me to say ‘yes’ to God’s exile. They hold me to account that God’s

²⁵ Durber. *Poverty*, 65.

²⁶ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 59.

²⁷ Sandra Maria Van Opstal, “Chasing Justice with Sandra Maria Van Opstal” n.p. Cited 18 August 2020. Online: <http://dojustice.crcna.org/podcast>

²⁸ Durber. *Poverty*, 93.

²⁹ I elaborate on this concept more in a [blog](#) and [sermon](#)

kingdom is not found in the great skyscrapers of the city. Rather, “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom”. They remind me that my daily provision comes from God like rice from heaven - not the price of oil or the dance of the stock market. Instead of seeing the gospel through the lens of prosperity and abundance, they give me eyes to see it through suffering and exclusion. At the same time, I hope I can remind them of God’s sovereign grace even covering the rich and powerful. I hope I can remind them that their exile does not mean they should (or are condemned to) feel excluded by the mainstream church and that they do not have to face exile alone. I hope to remind them that God’s kingdom power is here today and that we should pray for the city for “in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jeremiah 29:7). The more I allow their perspective to guide my view of God and his word, the more the gospel comes alive for me.

On one occasion, I noticed my friend eyeing a bagged lunch he had just received from a street ministry. He said, “I am not trusting in God right now, Jeremiah”. I asked what he meant. “Well,” he said, “I am tempted to save this lunch for tomorrow. But I should be trusting God daily for my food”. Wordlessly he reached into his fanny pack and pulled out a small sandwich bag. In that bag was a New Testament. He opened the little Bible and I could not help but notice that nearly every verse was highlighted in a variety of colours. Finally, he came to the verse that he was looking for: “And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom and these things will be given as well” (Luke 12:30-31). In that moment God spoke to me. My friend had reminded me of God’s exile. I hope that through our friendship I reminded him of God’s earth.

Greg Paul experienced such a shift in perspective and then swung to the extreme side of the argument: *the rich need the poor more than the poor need the rich*. In time, he experienced a correction and concluded, *we both need each other*. In his book, *The Twenty Piece Shuffle*, Paul, compares the Christian life to a journey in which both those in material poverty and those in material prosperity are travelling partners. On this road trip, there are certain markers to help travellers on the way. On the way, we move from *Isolation to Intimacy, Productivity to Fruitfulness, and Suffering to Glory*. Paul argues that all of us, regardless of our economic status, are invited to the transformations on the journey. Isolation, productivity and suffering, though universal, manifest themselves in different ways for those of differing economic backgrounds. A man who

is homeless feels the isolation of being considered “disfiguring cancers on the face of the city” by the housed.³⁰ Another person who has a nice home, rather, may feel the isolation of not being understood by their spouse and not safe to share the frightening thoughts in their head. Paul argues that what one lacks, the other has. He says, “I believe that God urges the rich and powerful to care for the poor and vulnerable throughout Scripture because we each have what the other needs. He is so adamant and voluble about it that I must conclude that we can hardly expect to get ‘There’ unless we travel the Way together”.³¹ While the person who is housed has been accepted by wider society, the person who is experiencing homelessness has an unfiltered and completely transparent relationship with their street family. Each has what the other needs. In terms of productivity and fruitfulness, while someone who is housed may look productive in society, their heart can be utterly devoid of meaning. Also, a person who lacks a home may experience shame for “not making it in life”, while, at the same time, also blind to all the ways they are a blessing to those around them. In terms of suffering and glory, a person who is housed may stuff their pain and hide their suffering in order to be less disagreeable to their peers or to be more accepted at church. A person who is homeless may be so consumed by their pain that their path to glory is clouded by the numbing power of addiction. Each has what the other needs. While the housed person may be able to affirm the value of those excluded by society and have time and resources in themselves to journey with someone in their addiction, the person without a home can model unreserved vulnerability and the power of lament.³² Paul sums this up saying, “The reality, of course, is that the rich are usually, because of their riches, barely conscious of their deep poverty and the consequent invitation to embrace their true identity in relationship with their Maker that can be found only in those depths. And the poor (at least in a first world culture) generally have little sense of their blessedness, the amazing gifts they have to share with people who appear to them to already have it all”.³³

Sandra Maria Van Opstal argues that the church must move from hospitality (we welcome you) to solidarity (we walk with you) to mutuality (we wouldn’t be ‘us’ without you) in regards to

³⁰ Paul, *The Twenty Piece Shuffle*, 64.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

³² Sandra Maria Van Opstal argues that the marginalized refresh our theology by giving to us a robust theology of suffering and the discipline of lament. Van Opstal, “Chasing Justice with Sandra Maria Van Opstal” n.p. Cited 18 August 2020. Online: <http://dojustice.crcna.org/podcast>

³³ Paul, *The Twenty Piece Shuffle*, 44.

diverse communities.³⁴ I would argue that charity (serving those living in poverty) is a step behind even hospitality. Once we are able to get past that enormous chasm, we can begin to welcome those in poverty in our midst. After hearing their stories, appreciating their culture and empathizing with their struggle, we may find conviction to help carry their load and stand with issues they need addressing even if we don't fully understand. Finally, by God's grace, comes mutuality.

Durber uses the picture of the communion table to describe mutuality.³⁵ At the Lord's table are reminded of our dependence on each other. We need each other to pass along the bread and wine. In a similar way, mutuality recognizes our need for the other. At the table, we participate in giving and receiving the gifts we and the other have. We are also reminded of our dependence on God. It is his table and only by grace are we invited to sit at it. The table recognizes our mutual brokenness and need for grace. Our brokenness enables us to have a proper posture at the table of the Lord. Corbett and Fickett argue that "until we embrace our mutual brokenness, our work with low-income people is likely to do far more harm than good".³⁶ This mutuality, Durber argues, must occur though not in a way which diminishes the difference between the two experiences - especially one which downplays the horrendous violence that poverty inflicts.³⁷ When true mutuality occurs, the church itself will undergo a transformation. They too will embrace a form of poverty. The church will "want to embrace another kind of poverty, a simplicity of life, a new relationship to creation and a true and deepening sense of dependence on God".³⁸ With renewed eyes, the church can return back to the gospel of Jesus and his kingdom. What greater joy is there?

The final section will hopefully give practical direction to how a church can enter into this movement of giving and receiving.

³⁴ Van Opstal, "Chasing Justice with Sandra Maria Van Opstal" n.p. Cited 18 August 2020. Online: <http://dojustice.crcna.org/podcast>

³⁵ Durber. *Poverty*, 87.

³⁶ Corbett and Fillert, *When Helping Hurts*, 61.

³⁷ Durber. *Poverty*, 88.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

Practical Considerations

There is much to consider in this section. Based on my interactions with four churches who seek to celebrate socio-economic diversity, I will focus on two main areas: the service (or gathering) of a church and the structure of the church.

Service

The Sunday morning service, though only one part of a church, is the main way I learned from churches who celebrated socio-economic diversity. We shall use it like a window into the heart of a church's identity. Here we will look at practical considerations of a church service in regards to culture and power.

Culture

We ought, to use Volf's categories, assess our church's own *belonging* and *distance* to our culture. Charlesworth and Williams argue that much of church culture has been influenced by western values such as materialism and individualism.³⁹ Such has led to exclusionary actions toward those who have little material wealth. Individualism exacerbates the exclusion, for the myth of inclusion adopted by wealthy society tends to blame the individual for their own struggle in poverty and lack of success in the market. Charlesworth and Williams' research argues that our views of those in poverty is just as much (or more) shaped by media, our political preferences and our proximity to those in poverty, as the Biblical narrative.⁴⁰ Indeed our own cultural preferences manipulate the way we read the Bible. Introspection into belonging and distance of our own culture is *brutally* hard work.

Also, we must seek to learn from and understand the culture of those in different economic backgrounds. This takes just as much learning and effort. The beauty of mutuality is that the more we immerse ourselves in the culture of those in poverty, the more we can clearly evaluate our own. In Edmonton, for example, many of those in poverty and over 50% of individuals facing homelessness identify themselves as Indigenous. In response to this, the Community of

³⁹ Charlesworth and Williams. *A Church for the Poor*, 86.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

Immanuel has intentionally incorporated Indigenous culture (mainly Cree culture) into their worship services. They engage in smudging, have traditional elders who maintain protocols, and monthly do a [Standing Stones Sacred Gathering](#). My own participation in these acts of worship has increased my understanding of Indigenous and street culture; and it has challenged my own cultural preferences in terms of worship and the gospel of Jesus. Particularly, Indigenous and my own Filipino culture challenge an individualistic understanding of the gospel.

Two other cultural elements, which I believe are important for socio-economic diversity, are cultural concepts of time and what has been called the 'excluded middle'. Corbett and Fikkert argue that while North American view time in more monochronic terms (usually doing one thing at a time, in an efficient, orderly and uninterrupted manner) many other cultures, including subcultures within people living in poverty, view time in more polychronic terms (an openness to many things happening at one time and often prioritizing relationships over tasks management).⁴¹ Should punctuality be an important way we show faithfulness to God? What would a church look like if it embraced a polychronic view of time? During a church planting conference one of the facilitators shared an experience he had with an African Christian. The African told the settler man, "you have the clock. We have the time". At the Altar, Sanctuary and the Community of Immanuel, starting on time seemed less important than just being together. Getting everyone to say the liturgy at the same time was less important than allowing space for God to work in different ways for different people - in even side conversations, sleeping, or laughing.

Another aspect to consider is what Paul Heibert calls the 'excluded middle'. He argues that Western missionaries, influenced by Platonic dualism, are ill-equipped to assist cultures who have visceral confrontations with the unscientific spiritual world.⁴² Because these missionaries lack a robust theology of spirits, ancestors, invisible powers, suffering misfortune and death, many people, even after receiving the gospel, return back to diviners, shamans and medicine men to deal with their spiritual encounters. Such is very similar to people living in poverty. In the inner-city, the spiritual world is alive. The Altar, a charismatic church plant, directly deals with demon-possession, evil spirits and the like. Though I may not agree with all of their approaches

⁴¹ Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 153.

⁴² Paul G. Heibert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle" n.p. Cited 18 August 2020. Online: <http://hiebertglobalcenter.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/29.-1999.-The-Flaw-of-the-Excluded-Middle.pdf>

and interpretations of scripture, I am thankful they have some resources for people in poverty and homelessness to deal with the unseen they experience on a daily basis.

Within church cultures too, Charlesworth and Williams remind us that there are various subcultures at play. At my own church, while there is great diversity, there is also the reality of cliques. What a tragedy it would be if you finally come to a place of great socio-economic diversity on a Sunday morning only to realize the wealthy sit in one area, the middle class in another and those in poverty in yet another. Though not intentional, at The Father's House, many who are homeless feel more comfortable to stay (or sleep) in the foyer just outside the sanctuary while everyone else goes inside. My friends, who do cross the threshold, find it a beautiful and warm community and they invite me often to visit them there.

Power

In order to *distance* ourselves from our culture well we need to give power to those who are more distant than ourselves. We have already explored how Sanctuary Church has designed its service to dispense power to the people. I am not sure if they have maintained this practise, as the temptation of efficiency and control is powerful. All the other churches I visited were structured in a more hierarchical way. The visible leader held the most power, yet they dispensed it readily to others. I appreciated the wonderful birthday celebrations at the Father's House. My heart was showered by the grace of God when the Pastor of the Altar gave each of the people in the room a blessing from God. I was touched by the confidence of the members of the Community of Immanuel who felt empowered enough to share their lament or thoughts from God (even right in the middle of a sermon). However, when one church gathers with those from different economic powers, it must prevent the exacerbation of the poverty of self in those who are impoverished (though considered to be "rich in faith" by James) and poverty of self of the materially rich. It would be well for those given power to create a sense of mutuality throughout the whole service.

One example to note is the time of Offering and Tithes. Such can create a visual reminder of walls dividing the congregation. Sanctuary has decided to opt-out of the practise. The rest of the churches have this time in the service in a way similar to middle class churches. The Pastor of the Community of Immanuel suggests that they actually do generate funds through the offering,

which directly goes back to the people. It is for many an empowering way to transform feelings of inferiority. The irony is that those who have little often prove to be more generous than those who have much.⁴³ The more you are invested in the world-system - which is imbued with the “illusion that riches can bring (that you can control our own future)”⁴⁴ - the more one has to lose in it. Again my friends teach me to sacrifice what I have for God and others.

This aside, might there be other options to worship the Lord through our giving than simply that of worship-through-money? Many cultures, including many indigenous cultures, value gift-giving. This can be seen in many First Nations ceremonies and cultural events. I have gotten a backpack and some resealable containers the last time I went to a Pow Wow. Might there be a way to celebrate gift-giving with the time of offering which still celebrates the gift and worth of people who do not have or want money? Like Lord’s supper, can we adapt our time of offering in a way which encourages the giving and receiving of everyone in the community? Such questions can be asked in regard to all aspects of a service.

Structure

Charlesworth and Williams offer different ways churches which celebrate socio-economic diversity can be structured. Churches can ‘deconstruct’ themselves by going through the brutal work of cultural assessments which seek to discern what parts of the church are middle class in nature. This can look like transforming an established church or trying a “new expression” of church. Others utilize the funds and resources of a middle class church or denomination to support other churches in the frontlines. This is similar to the Community of Immanuel which gets support from mainline denominations as well as faith communities who come every week to cook and hand out a meal. Charlesworth and Williams warn that this type of relationship can be dangerous as it simply reinforces the poverty of self in both the giver and receiver and it does nothing to challenge the dominant middle class culture of the churches who serve.⁴⁵

Another option is sending missionaries to engage in church planting. This, for Charlesworth and Williams, is one of the most effective ways to engage with those in poverty and build a new

⁴³ Charlesworth and Williams. *A Church for the Poor*, 83.

⁴⁴ Durber. *Poverty*, 88.

⁴⁵ Charlesworth and Williams. *A Church for the Poor*, 137.

culture from the bottom up. In this way, leaders from the marginalized culture can be raised up more readily. The Father's House was a church plant from a middle class church. The Sanctuary Church was started by a missionary, Greg Paul, with a team of people from the street as well as middle class individuals. Instead of getting a team of middle class church-goers to serve a meal, Sanctuary's program gets everyone to help out to get the meal ready. In this way, they try to limit the difference between *us* and *them* even at the dinner table. The hard part for these church plants is to not become completely separated from other churches in the same area or city. It is the hope that the riches found in that community will be shared with the wider church just as the resources of other churches can aid the vision of the new church plant.

One gift to be shared is the fact that all of these churches have structured justice right into their identity as a church. While some churches participate in justice activities, very few make it a core part of their mission. In each of these churches, not only are souls saved, but bodies and even systems are caught up in the redemption of Christ. In a similar vein, Charlesworth and Williams also argue that there are four keys from the New Testament to successful churches which celebrate socio-economic diversity:

1. **Practical Care**
2. **Advocacy**
3. **Evangelism**
4. **Discipleship**⁴⁶

In terms of practical care, The Father's House has a drop-in where individuals can come to get a meal, socks and even help volunteer. The Altar is part of the Mission Hall which supports people in the evenings when everyone else is closed. Advocacy is a prophetic calling which seeks to speak truth into systems of deceitful injustice on behalf of the oppressed. Sanctuary Church has outreach workers who advocate for their community to landlords and governments. Evangelism is also key. Though maybe shorter, sermons in these churches are no less robust, theological and powerful for Jesus is the centre and his Spirit is power. Many of those in poverty care less about what others in society think and are often bold to share Jesus. I take groups on an educational walk around the inner-city of Edmonton and a few times we were evangelized by people on the street. Finally becoming more like Christ in discipleship is a key to a faithful

⁴⁶ Charlesworth and Williams. *A Church for the Poor*, 149.

church. This of course means mutual discipleship. For as we give to the poor, we should also expect to receive from them abundantly. Greg Paul says that as we are the presence of Jesus to those in poverty we must also equally see the presence of Jesus in those in poverty for “theirs is the kingdom of heaven”.⁴⁷

Whatever structure is utilized and even when keys are practised, questions of culture and power must be scrutinized again and again to the brutal detail. O Spirit be our guide as we humbly participate in the good work you are doing in Jesus our Lord!

Conclusion

In this section of the church planting manual we have looked at the challenges and joys of socio-economic diversity. Though a beautiful picture of the kingdom of God, such diversity is brutally hard, near impossible. Praise be to God for with him all things are possible.

The image in the beginning of this section is a statue called the *Homeless Jesus*. It is a reminder of God’s heart for the poor and is an image of Jesus’ kingdom. In the mutuality offered by the cross, may we together draw closer, by the Spirit, to the Lord Jesus and his mission for the church.

Supplemental Material (in order of appearance)

The Network, [“A Tale of Two Wives: Scenes of Systemic Racism in Canada”](#)

Do Justice Blog, [“A Tale of Two Wives: Scenes of Systemic Racism and the First Wife”](#)

The Christian Courier, [“Why I Worship Whiteness”](#)

[“What is Poverty Video”](#)

mosaicHouse Church sermon, [“Voice to the Voiceless: The Marginalized”](#)

Central Baptist sermon, [“Kingdom Come Justice and the Kingdom of Heaven: The Marginalized”](#)

[Toxic Charity Study Guide](#)

Do Justice, Blog, [“Saying Yes to God’s Earth and God’s Exile”](#)

First Baptist Church sermon, [“Jeremiah’s Letter to the Exiles”](#)

⁴⁷ Greg Paul. *God in the Alley* (Waterpress Brooks, 2004), 126.

mosaicHouse

The logo for mosaicHouse features the word "mosaicHouse" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a circular arrangement of numerous small, multi-colored squares (mosaic tiles) in shades of green, blue, yellow, and grey, which together form a stylized house shape.

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