

Diversity

- Background

When I moved to lead Kings 15 years ago **I thought that the church was already diverse**. 10 to 15% of those attending came from the black community, but **everything else about the church was white** – the way we did everything and all the leadership. We had around 40 extended leaders which included just 2 or 3 black people, predominantly Caribbean, first and second generation.

While we were aware of the issue, in the first few years we had enough to keep our attention elsewhere – including a major building project. It wasn't until we moved back into our new building that the first black African couple arrived, causing great excitement! **Today, there appears no outright majority in our church.**

We are on a massive journey. I may view things differently in three months time - we think we see things clearly and then as time goes on and situations open up even more, we have to change. **We are learning all the time** – I'm aware that most of our Newfrontiers churches are white but seeing increased diversity in those attending, so churches want to learn about this vital issue. If all we do is get excited about diversity, we miss the point. **There are radical implications for how we lead our churches.**

Let's talk about something really basic first. Food! In the early days Deb and I invited an African couple for a meal. We asked if there was anything they didn't eat - they said they ate anything but when we served strawberries, it was clear that the husband had never tasted one before. We all laugh now, but were all embarrassed at the time. We didn't see - **Food is an issue**. When we began Alpha at church and were providing food there, we served white western (bland) food! We were **trying to reach out to local people with the gospel and were giving them a hurdle to overcome** by providing food they found difficult. I used to sit at an Alpha table in a diverse group and I would be the only one eating the food. 'It's alright – we ate before we came...' they would say – it took me about three Alphas to work that one out!

Then, we got to know a family through the school our boys attend, and the Mum came along to one of our prayer meetings. I was very aware that she came from a different church background – a black majority church. We were doing our usual prayer meeting (which we thought was liberated!) and when I asked her how she was finding the evening, she said, '**I've never attended a white majority church before**'. I was stunned. I thought we were diverse! I wanted to say to her, 'Look! There's a black person, and there's an Asian - and they aren't sitting at the back!' (I'd been to other churches and observed where people sat...) And then the penny dropped. **I was looking from a white western perspective.**

- A Biblical Conviction

The drive within us on this issue comes from **a biblical conviction**. It is **based in theology, not just pragmatically driven by a multi-cultural situation**.

Simon Pettit spoke some years ago at the Leadership Conference on 'One New Man in Christ'. Multi-coloured diversity had been pioneered in the church he led, Jubilee

Church, Cape Town. It seems to me that only one or two churches could work this out in the UK where we have mostly provincial towns, predominately white. We must take the theology and work it out. We can cast a biblical picture and things have changed over the last 5 yrs as we have done so.

So we look at the following passages:

Col 3:11–12. Here there is no Greek or Jew...

Eph 2:14 He himself is our peace... and has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility.

In a surface reading of the New Testament there is a **race issue** as the gospel breaks out and impacts both Jew and Gentile. There are also **cross-class** and **cross-generational issues** for us to deal with. **These biblical principles cover those issues, too.** We have the privilege of living in places where we can work it out.

Terminology

You need to work out in your context the **terminology you are comfortable with.** We discussed this for hours and decided on the term 'multi-cultural'. Others have gone for 'multi-racial' or 'multi-ethnic'. The terms are often interchangeable, but Lex Loizides, the Newfrontiers' evangelist from Cape Town, SA, argues passionately for multi-racial. Dave Devenish, a senior leader within our movement, prefers the term 'multi-ethnic'. I received an e-mail from him explaining his concern with our choice on the grounds of what he would see as the failure of multi-culturalism in the UK. But we have chosen 'multi-cultural' because, apart from a varied racial mix, we also have in our church a **deaf community** who have a culture of their own, also second generation black Britons who do not think of themselves as a separate ethnic group.

Avoid being politically correct – we haven't got into quotas. Try to be sensitive but keep humour in the situation. We are aware we have made and are going to make mistakes, unintentionally offending people from time to time. We are grateful that **our black community continues to extend grace to us in this as we move forward into new territory.**

- Why are people of diversity joining our churches?

- **Immigration** – a huge influx – especially from Africa and Eastern Europe. All those who live in a town with an immigrant population will be aware of this. These arrivals often bring to our churches their robust faith and vibrancy.
- **Reaction to a particular leadership style.** They join us having left churches with an authoritarian leadership style.
- **A desire to integrate.** If you move into a foreign land, your kids go to a new school and you may go to work, so a church that consists entirely of your own culture can be a safe place. But over time, sometimes a Gospel-driven challenge comes – 'If I witness to my white neighbour and he/she got saved, no way would he/she feel at home in my Nigerian church.' A mother told me that her children had been asking, 'Why do we have black friends **and** white friends and then go to a church where we are all black?' There is a realization that every other area of life is integrated. When they start to look and find a place like Kings – it's a halfway house. And those in mixed marriages feel they can identify with us, especially.

- **Location.** People often travel miles across London to go to a church/worship centre/teaching ministry of the type they prefer. Then, if kids come along and they can't get to their own church one Sunday - they look locally, find 'people like me' in our church and say - 'if **they** have made the journey to a church like this then I can, too'.

Of course **we** get excited, but it's a big thing for them just to attend. Among other things, they have come to a different worship style and preaching style. We must remember as we consider this journey we are making that **those who come from a completely different background have made a massive, massive move just to come into our churches.**

The Leadership Challenge this brings:

It is honestly **the biggest leadership challenge I have ever faced.** My difficulty is that I have never been down this path before and have few reference points. As a church planting movement we know it is easier to put in foundations at the beginning but now most of us are established as white majority churches with diverse people coming in after the fact. As Bill Hybels says, we now face **the re-engineering challenge.** God is blessing the way we do church, but now we have to make changes - and **to re-engineer takes longer than to build from new.** It brings tension and we have to hold it together. My only reference point from the past has been that of **leaders handling renewal,** which I will pick up on next time.

- The New Wineskin Challenge

Some of us will recall when our churches went through renewal - typically, the Baptist church I attended went through this in the 70s and 80s when services were a traditional hymn/prayer sandwich - our theology was a little bit liberal but getting more Bible-based. In charismatic renewal, churches started to talk about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit started to take us back to Scripture and to **new wine in new wineskins.**

I got saved at 19 when Christians began looking like they believed it. I observed that leaders/pastors struggled with renewal - there was a **personal challenge, pressure to change, conflict in the congregation** - the leaders knew change was needed but didn't know what the new wineskin looked like.

That's how I feel sometimes about diversity - I feel **uncertain and unsettled.** Not a great place to be when leading a church. Am I getting it right? Am I getting it wrong? Where do I go now? Am I under-reacting - or over-reacting? It's unsettling for both leader and congregation. In renewal, it led to conflict and sometimes to a number of people leaving. Some of us were part of that migration to house churches. The churches that made it through were often led by experienced pastors who had been there a long time - they had **a strong trust deposit, went slowly and got the pace of change right.** They didn't lose the pioneers nor did they let the conservatives keep things the same.

At Kings, as we registered the need to re-engineer the whole church, **we looked round the world to find models to help us** - to Jubilee Church in Cape Town and to David Anderson's church, Bridgeway Community Church, Columbia, USA. There are no well worn paths here...

Recognizing Leadership

I am a leader – it's my primary gift and I have learned that I can recognize other leaders very quickly and want to place them in a leadership role. The trouble is – **it's a white leader that I recognize**. When a black leader walks in – I'm still trying to learn what the reference points are and don't always see it so instinctively. In a cross-cultural situation – one side of me can see it clearly but the other is unsure. It's confusing and can lead to avoidance if we aren't careful. In our church we are always looking for leaders – if we 'see' white leaders quicker, being under pressure to recruit can reinforce the bias as white leaders come through more rapidly. It's unintentional but reinforces the problem. **The process of vetting black leaders can take longer because we can misread the qualities of cross cultural leaders.**

Within the Newfrontiers' movement we **recognize** leaders – we give space as God raises them up for their gifts to develop and we recognize them. In African culture there is a high value on being submissive to authority (a good value!) and not so much on the need to be pro-active. So, if we wait for leadership to emerge western-style, we can wait a long time. We can see potential black leaders as passive if we are not fully aware.

- Areas of Church Life to Examine:

Community:

Here we need to have a good laugh at ourselves!

For **the white community**: our home is our castle. I go in with my nuclear family and I close my front door. If you want to do friendship with me you've got to get your diary out! So we e-mail round 'Need to get together, I can do Friday in 4 weeks time'...'I can't make that'...'OK, find a day you can make'...

If someone just turns up on my door it can be 'What are you doing here? I've got things to do today – don't cut across my agenda. I'm busy...'

For **the black community**: it's family and friendship – there are aunts and uncles, cousins everywhere and if anyone turns up, everyone is fed. All are welcomed and the whole day rearranged if necessary! You can stay to midnight and beyond, while I, being white, go to bed at 10pm. And for 'fellowship', the white community has the 'small group system' at 8pm on Wednesday eve where we 'share together'. Our black members go, 'Huh?' They want a central Bible study at the church led by one of the teachers... a massive difference in expectations.

It is important for us to **encourage our black community to step in** – white leaders sometimes say that black members don't come and are therefore 'not committed'. *This can be a major misreading of what's going on.*

Worship

We need to look at this radically. **Our song lists and our style of worship need particular examination**. Another of the major examples of this at Kings has been the Choir! I was adamant - we don't do choirs, we are into body ministry - not presentations. **Simon Pettit** was very helpful to me on this. In the end I decided that we wouldn't call it a choir but 'a singing group' – because we don't do choirs! I

realised that I was being picky about terminology when everyone reflected back to me - 'We're having a choir!' So... we have a choir now for major events and still have prophecies etc. But we have a long way to go on this, primarily because as a movement we 'do' white Newfrontiers songs – the Brighton conference platform is our prime example. Sometimes the only model of anything else would be children's action songs – a small slice of the variety we could reflect.

Raising money:

The white community tends to give by banking standing order. The black community is more likely to respond to an inspirational style of exhortation. We have come to realise that our **black members are often financing extended family** back in their home countries –there are **legacy/heritage issues** here, multiple demands are often being made upon their finances.

Prayer:

Francis is one of our African members – when he prays, God agrees! His exhortations are stirring! He and others with him have brought **a different style to our prayer meetings, convincing others of us that we need to loosen up a bit!** We may have thought that they would join our church and do it our way but we now know better. Some time ago Francis and some of our African men asked to meet and pray on Fridays for a half night of prayer. But we already met on Wednesday at 8pm for prayer. For a while – I was telling people they couldn't pray! (Good leadership, Steve!) But – **the thing I didn't want was one prayer meeting on this day that was black and another that was white.** We now see black and white together at our half-nights of prayer.

Life moments:

Baby dedications! I have learned that there is another way to do these things! We are sometimes invited to go round to someone's house on the 7th day after the birth of a baby and take part in a naming ceremony – our filters as to 'how it's done' have had to be changed. **The pastoral issues and legacy issues from slavery, colonialism and ongoing racism, are huge.**

- IMPORTANT!

Most white people, including myself, have thought that we have a **level playing field.** We have believed that legislation in the 70s and since has taken away any bias and may have thought that some people had a chip on their shoulder...

It's not true. It is not a level playing field and the evidence for this is found in the areas of employment, interaction with the police, educational opportunities, wealth and inheritance. When we touch these areas, we find ourselves dealing with issues of pain and anger.

While in South Africa, I visited **Nelson Mandela's** cell on Robin Island. Our guide was a young black man who had been in prison on the island and was released after the fall of apartheid. I asked him why he still worked on the island and he told me that on his release he had gone back to his township home, but he was not famous, there was no counselling for him, no-one understood what he had gone through and there was no work. And this was the only job available. He was a free man but was living on an island that had been his prison. That was his legacy.

– Successful Multi-Racial Churches

I'd like to recommend a book - *One Body, One Spirit by George Yancey*. It lists what he sees as the key principles of **successful multi-racial churches**. The USA has greater experience of this and therefore, more models to draw from. Yancey cites seven principles and I will comment on a few:

1. **Inclusive Worship**
2. **Diverse Leadership**
3. **An Over-Arching Goal**
4. **Intentionality**
5. **Personal Skills**
6. **Location**
7. **Adaptability**

Diverse Leadership: All the principles are important, but this one serves as a foundation that makes it easier to implement the others. The right people in place will shape the church. **A leader needs to have a cross-cultural gift and interpersonal skills.** As I travel around to different churches, some of the 'issues' I see are essentially team dynamics between white people. If we add in the pain of the cross-cultural legacy we can misread a situation or miss some signals completely.

An Over-Arching Goal: There is a goal beyond diversity – for us, **the missional vision of growing a 1000 member church predominantly through seeing people saved.** We are reconciled to God and then reconciled to one another – this is the biblical picture. If not, then we wouldn't bother to build to one another. In reaching people and needing to build them together into a family, diversity is the outworking of the gospel.

Intentionality: Here I would commend **David Anderson** and his church (**Bridgeway Community Church, Baltimore, US**) on the example they have set. They have shown us that you need to look at who is on your platform on a Sunday (black and white), who is doing what – worship band, stewarding etc – through all the roles of church life, **focused inclusivity is important.** You may find that there are a lot of white people doing things and everything in the system is forcing it to stay as it is. Take the time (even in a busy schedule) to look at this area and make changes – *it will pay dividends!*

First steps to take:

Intentionally build cross-cultural friendships and invest in them. For me, it has been with Owen, one of our elders - a good friend. Few will be aware that Deb and I spent three years getting to know him and Pauline prior to him joining our full-time staff, building friendship and giving him responsibility. Build with a man of peace – you have to invest and there is no shortcut.

Read widely – increase your awareness and your self-awareness (book recommendations below). Be informed! The coming conference on '**Understanding World Views and Cultural Strongholds**' here at King's Church on **Sat 14th March** would be well worth attending. **Dave Devenish** will be speaking – his wealth of experience and his well-thought out, biblically-based principles in this area will give

us all the provocation and the encouragement to examine foundations and practice in our churches.

Book Recommendations:

Letters Across the Divide: David Anderson and Brent Zuercher – Baker Books, 2001

Gracism: David Anderson – IVP, 2007

Avoid stereotypes. Black people who are late/disorganized... I know a lot of white people who are late, too. I watch them come into church every Sunday! Timekeeping is often a more important value to a white person than that of community. If a black person is late it may be because they have met someone and stopped to talk – there is a **high value on community versus time keeping**. Keep a sense of humour about this, but take care with jokes.

Do not get ahead of the curve. By this I mean that you may want to establish the whole diversity thing in a short time. It can blow up if you open it up too quickly.

Know where you are – take it steadily. Wisdom is required! Weigh all you are learning and then apply it **in your context**.

– **Gratitude**

I want to finish this series on Diversity by thanking God for the pioneers in this area – that's not me – and if you are white, it's probably not you! It's those who have come across culture into our churches and said, 'we'll jump some hurdles, we like some stuff here'... It is time to honour them, but also to dream with them that we can truly build something that is in the heart of God and will honour Him and display to the world around that it can be done - a powerful model for the gospel.

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