

Our discernment is based not solely on the process by which decisions are made, but on the fruits of those decisions and the extent to which we recognize ourselves as children of God in them. We make this prayerful discernment as the body of Christ aligned with the Spirit in our commitments, our relationships with one another, and our growth in the light of Christ.

We encourage the Executive of the General Council to attend to processes throughout the church that develop and build trust.

INTERCULTURAL MINISTRIES: A PROCESS OF CHURCH-WIDE TRANSFORMATION (INTERIM REPORT)

Origin: Permanent Committee on Programs for Ministry and Mission
Task Group on Intercultural Ministries

Background and Introduction

In 2006, The United Church of Canada committed itself to becoming an intercultural¹ church. In “A Transformative Vision for The United Church of Canada,” approved at the 39th General Council, the church declared that

intercultural dimensions of ministries [will] be a denominational priority in living out its commitment to racial justice, where there is mutually respectful diversity and full and equitable participation of all Aboriginal, francophone, ethnic minority, and ethnic majority constituencies in the total life, mission, and practices of the whole church.”²

The church affirmed that this commitment will be a process — a prayerful journey of transformation — affecting all areas of the church’s life. The Executive of General Council, in 2007, reaffirmed intercultural ministries as a denominational priority for the church. The vision of an intercultural church calls all to move toward becoming mutually welcoming and racially just communities, and calls all people to be changed.

God is calling us to transformation as individuals, as communities, as church, with all the traditions and cultures we have been gifted with. Not one thing will be left untouched in God’s transformative power, including our culture that is the intersection of our beliefs, our values, our worldviews, our language(s), our customs, our traditions, our ethnic heritages, our memories. Are we willing to risk letting go of our hold on our cultures to God’s transformation and grieve the passing of old structures and unearned privileges?³

¹ “Mutually reciprocal relationships among and between cultures” (*Canadian Oxford Dictionary*).

² “A Transformative Vision for The United Church of Canada,” Report to the 39th General Council of The United Church of Canada, 2006, *Record of Proceedings*, p. 137.

³ “A Transformative Vision for The United Church of Canada,” p. 145.

As the church risks letting go of some structures, traditions, and manifestations of cultural empire, there will inevitably be grief, as there is with any kind of change. Yet, the promise of transformation and our theological understanding of new life means that, as some old things pass on, new things will also come to life:

“The dwelling of God is with human beings. God will dwell with them, and they shall be God’s people, and God will indeed be with them. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And the one who sat upon the throne said, “See, I make all things new.”

Revelation 21:3b–5a, *An Inclusive-Language Lectionary*⁴

How does a church culture, which is based in relationships, begin to relate differently? How do people risk letting go of their hold on their cultures — and the hold our cultures have on us? How do we make space for new perspectives of interacting with God’s peoples through diverse intercultural communities? The exploration of these and other questions will further the recommendations in “A Transformative Vision for The United Church of Canada” and continue the development of church-wide transformation.

This document, “Intercultural Ministries: A Process of Church-Wide Transformation,” is therefore presented as an interim report at an early stage in the process. A more comprehensive report, with recommendations, will be offered to the 41st General Council in 2012.

Task Group on Intercultural Ministries

The Task Group on Intercultural Ministries—with Aboriginal, francophone, Deaf, and cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities—is established to assist the United Church in its efforts to become an intercultural and racially just church. It began meeting in January 2008 to continue to shape programs, processes, and policies about intercultural ministries, from representatives’ community perspectives, for the church as a whole. It is a multilingual, multiracial, intercultural group that operates with simultaneous translation between English, French, and American Sign Language (ASL).

The task group is working to better understand similarities and differences between diverse cultural communities in the United Church, and has realized that intercultural ministries are highly contextual. Consequently, the task group has begun to immerse itself in diverse cultural communities. To date, the task group has visited an Aboriginal community and the Francophone context in Quebec. The group will continue to immerse itself in diverse cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities, to enable the insights thus gleaned to shape the final report and recommendations for the church.

Intense cultural immersions will help the task group ground its report, and its proposals to the 41st General Council (2012), in the realities of diverse communities. These experiences and contexts will help to offer a framework for the church as a whole. Intercultural immersions

⁴ *An Inclusive-Language Lectionary: Readings for Year C*. Revised Edition. Published for The Cooperative Publication Association by John Knox Press, Atlanta; The Pilgrim Press, New York; The Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1988, p. 143.

provide people with greater insight into their own contexts, and help all people ask questions about their own cultural contexts in relation to others. These encounters help people define their own cultural contexts with more clarity, question ways they can facilitate and be catalysts for others, and begin processes to enable individuals and groups to better see things through an intercultural lens. Intercultural immersions, therefore, provide an important opportunity for leadership development.

The task group is also clear that the way in which the intercultural church manifests itself will be quite different in different parts of the country. Rural and urban differences, the makeup of existing cultural communities, languages, and many other differences will affect how a community lives into the intercultural reality. The final report, therefore, must be grounded in these differences; a one-size-fits-all approach will not work for our diverse nation.

The task group will develop an intercultural lens to help the church as a whole view its entire ministry, programs, and processes to better encompass intercultural perspectives. This lens will be integrated with the empire lens and other lenses used in the church, such as those of racial justice and inclusive language. Part of the group's work over the next few years will be to help determine ways in which these lenses can be integrated and potentially used together.

High on the task group's agenda is a focus on process and on ways of being together. The task group has intentionally created intercultural spaces in its gatherings, such that each person and the diverse cultural groups are changed through their interactions with each other. It is not a typical task group that meets and makes motions; rather, its members have created space for each other, learn from each other, and enable those learnings to help shape the group's desires for the church. The group will offer its reflections from this process, and how such processes could be used by other committees and task groups. These ways of being together are grounded in a commitment to racial justice and the inclusion of all peoples in the life of the church.

It is a rare space where diverse cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities come together for dialogue, to consider the meaning of ministry in their contexts, and to develop intercultural theologies from their community perspectives. In the United Church, through the Apology to First Nations Peoples, the legacy of residential schools, and Circle and Cross processes, the church has had some interactions between Aboriginal and White peoples. However, it is rare for there to be intentional interactions between francophone and racialized peoples, Aboriginal and racialized peoples, or other community interactions.

The task group will make recommendations on how such interactions can be intentional for the various courts and meetings of the church, including General Councils, and how intercultural dynamics could help to transform the church as a whole.

Mission and Identity

As the intercultural church takes shape, there are ongoing questions about identity, the meaning of mission, and what this means for diverse cultural communities and theologies. The intercultural church is essentially about the mission of God in the world. Intercultural ministries are not an optional extra added onto existing programs; rather, they are the mission of the church as a whole, for all peoples in all places.

Our church's understanding of mission continues to evolve. Currently, however, the United Church does not have a firm mission strategy or focus to support new cultural communities. The engagement of cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities will affect the perceived identity of the church. Consequently, there needs to be discussion of the framework of the church's identity in the context of mission.

In living into this intercultural mission, the intercultural programmatic piece focuses on four major areas:

- education and animation
- new ministries
- leadership development
- transforming structures and systems

Education and Animation

The "animation" of the intercultural church includes people and processes that make things come alive. To effectively animate interculturalism, several program initiatives will take place.

1. Presbytery/District Workshops:

Workshops with presbyteries/districts are an expression of our denomination's concern to address racial justice and intercultural injuries. They are also a way to help discover and create more leaders who can effectively work in the growing intercultural church. These training workshops seek to both consciously help people to develop intercultural skills for use in ministry contexts, and also to strengthen existing leaders who already have some knowledge of leadership for the intercultural church.

A racial justice education component will be included in the training as one of the first steps in what will be a long journey toward becoming an intercultural denomination.

The purposes of the workshops are as follows:

- to increase the intercultural competence of those in pastoral relations, pastoral oversight, and Education and Students (E&S) networks who oversee cultural, linguistic, and racialized congregations and ministry personnel
- to work with congregations with ministry personnel from cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities that are different from the congregation
- to gather insights from these pilot projects and pass them on to the task group for consideration of next steps in the education process

In addition to the presbytery/district workshops, educational resources are being developed for animation at a variety of levels.

2. Transformative and Life-Long Learning:

Working with presbyteries/districts is one aspect of becoming an intercultural church; at the same time, some cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities also need to learn more about the tradition, history, and current structure of the United Church. These two educational processes will be taking place simultaneously.

But education is not all that is needed to help the church move toward church-wide transformation. One of the challenges is that intercultural training programs may lead to producing “graduates” who think they know all that they need to know. In reality, ongoing, lifelong learning and engagement are needed for leadership in the changing church. Further, a transformation by God’s Spirit of hearts — in addition to minds and spirits — is needed for interculturalism to blossom in our church today.

New Ministries in an Intercultural Context

1. Intercultural Theologies:

The task group has begun to explore the meanings of intercultural theologies in the Canadian context. There are feminist theologies, Africentric theologies, theologies of *Han*, womanist theologies, Aboriginal spiritualities, and more: these emerged from unique community-based perspectives and were rooted in their cultural contexts. Intercultural theologies will be similarly rooted in context. Hence, the immersion of the task group in diverse cultural communities is crucial to its development of contextual intercultural theologies. The work on intercultural theologies will not be done in isolation from theological work that has already been done by the United Church; the task group will seek to make links to the “Song of Faith” and to work with the Committee on Theology and Faith.

Congregations and individuals in The United Church of Canada embrace diverse theologies: the theological spectrum in the United Church ranges from very conservative to post-Christian. This diversity exists in almost all cultural communities; hence, no one cultural community can be labelled as having only one particular theological perspective. The intercultural theologies that the task group is developing will take into consideration the breadth of theological diversity that exists in the church. The theologies will also be formed within the tradition of The United Church of Canada in relation to the celebration of diversity and journeys of radical welcoming.

The task group has reflected that all peoples are shaped by their cultural communities, and many people have shared that stories are significant to both their faith and culture. The development of intercultural theologies in the Canadian context will therefore likely be a narrative one, based in community, and using stories.

2. Core Values and Cultural Values:

In becoming an intercultural church, many cultural communities may begin to interact in ways they have not interacted before. There are times, however, when such intensive interactions have the potential to create conflict—especially when cultural values clash with core values of The United Church of Canada.

The United Church, for example, deeply values non-literal interpretations when reading the Bible, as well as the ordination of women and of gay and lesbian people. The church came to understandings of each of these values through broad, at times painful, processes of prayerful discernment. These processes do not need to be revisited.

But some individuals and some communities have very different understandings of the scriptures and different perspectives on who should be ordained in the United Church. For example, for some, the ordination of women is a justice issue, which is well supported through scriptures; for

others, it runs contrary to their understanding of the Bible and of the role of women in the church. Some might also say that their understandings of women's leadership and other church-related issues are cultural values, and if they are cultural values, that they supersede values held in the church.

The church must begin to discern the differences between cultural values and core values. What is absolutely essential to who we are and what we believe? The whole church needs to be involved in this conversation. What does it mean to be in The United Church of Canada? What is the difference between a cultural value and a core value? Such questions should be directly considered through national conversations.

3. New Church Development:

The United Church of Canada has generally assumed that people who share the historic commitment of the United Church would find congregations in The United Church of Canada. Dr. Phyllis Airhart, Associate Professor of History of Christianity at Emmanuel College, observes the following:

The name "United" that was fought over and prized by the first generation means little to many newcomers to Canada, even those who identify themselves as Christian. Do Methodists coming from Ghana know enough about who we are to find their way to our door? What about a Presbyterian from Korea?⁵

These questions are not only for global partners and newcomers to Canada, but are also relevant to francophone peoples. For example, do Catholics from Trois Rivières, Montréal, or Duclos know enough about the United Church to find their way to the church's door? Similar questions may echo in other cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities.

The United Church has generally expected that people would seek out the church, rather than reaching out to them. Perhaps our posture regarding membership was more relevant to the period of new church development in the 1950s than it is today. Some congregations have made a commitment to work with neighbours, relating with mutual respect with all who wish to work for justice in their communities. Everyone is welcome to join the church, but there is no obligation to be Christian in order to work interculturally for God's justice. Everyone's identity is to be respected.

This has implications for new ministries with diverse cultural communities. In general, there is a steady decline in immigration from communities that form most of the church's cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities. For example, there is a decline in Japanese, Italian, Welsh, Hungarian, Armenian, and Cantonese-speaking Chinese immigrants. At the same time, there is significant growth in South Asian communities and the Mandarin-speaking Chinese population. These offer new ministry opportunities and opportunities to facilitate the participation of diverse groups in the church.

⁵ Presentation Paper to Amnprior Assembly, 2005.

This data is presented not so that the church will solely focus on numbers. Rather, one of the basic marks of a living organism is growth (Ephesians 2: 21). The body of Christ, as a living organism, is strengthened through healthy and sustainable growth. And ministries that engage these diverse cultural communities will strengthen and stretch the whole of The United Church of Canada. In offering a vision for transformation, we are called to active love for all as Jesus spelled out in the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37–40).

Many of us lament the decline in church membership and attendance and financial resources. Perhaps the church can dare to reclaim such terms as evangelism, church planting, and discipleship, and engage new ministries with peoples who have traditionally been excluded. This is not an attempt to avoid becoming an endangered species; but rather, to live into active love with communities that have not been widely represented in the United Church. And, through the inclusion of diverse communities, the church as a whole may grow and be strengthened.

The church is called to invite into its doors those who have been excluded. The Great Commandment challenges us all to live into reconciliation, reflect on history, and consider who is missing from our midst.

4. *Changing Demographics:*

Cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity were the context of the early Christian Church, and remain the context of the church today. In keeping with the United Church's justice-seeking and inclusive history, it is imperative for the church to respond to today's intercultural reality.⁶

The demographic landscape of Canada is changing rapidly, due in part to immigration. This changing landscape offers both challenges and opportunities for the church. It will require conversations with the various courts of the church on how to express a radical hospitality to these newcomers, and how to relate with our global partners to support people coming from diverse countries.

Stating realities about changing demographics does not mean that the success of our intercultural ministries relies solely on the numerical growth of cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities. However, increasing immigrant populations mean that we need to learn more about different cultures and traditions in order to participate in mutual dialogue and justice work.

Canada is a culturally diverse and complex country. One in five Canadians (20%) is an immigrant, and one in six (16.7%) is a racialized person.⁷ By contrast, racialized peoples compose only about 1.4% of the membership of The United Church of Canada.⁸

⁶ "A Transformative Vision for The United Church of Canada," p. 2

⁷ Statistics Canada, 2006, Canada's Ethno-cultural Mosaic, 2006 Census, Catalogue no. 97-562-X, pp. 5–9.

⁸ *Year Book*, The United Church of Canada.

Table 1. IMMIGRANT POPULATION (2006)

Group	% of Total Population	% of Immigrant Population
South Asian	4 (1,262,900 people)	24.9
Chinese	3.9 (1,216,600 people)	24.0
Black	2.5 (783,800 people)	15.5
Other ⁹	5.1	31.6

As well, a growing number of racialized peoples are Canadian-born, which highlights the importance of developing 1.5 generation¹⁰ and second-generation ministry. Ministry with Canadian-born children of immigrant parents, and with post-adolescent youth who immigrate, offers particular opportunities for the whole church to seek to shape its mission to be more relevant to the changing cultural context of Canada.

The task group will continue to explore ways in which the church can respond to this changing reality.

5. Re-imagining the Mutuality in Mission Program:

The Mutuality in Mission program enables congregations — with the support of Conference and presbytery/district — to invite global partners into their local context from overseas to share in ministry. There are possibilities of re-imagining this process, as a way of helping the church reach new immigrants from our partner communities around the world.

As the church seeks to strengthen cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities and to offer them radical hospitality, it will be important to develop a “toolkit” of opportunities and responses to this diversity. Given our cultural context, diversity must be the key.

There will also need to be significant inter-unit conversations about the role of global mission partners. One possibility is a consultation with overseas ministry personnel who have returned home, to identify how their skills — language and cultural competencies — might assist congregations in our existing cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities and support immigrants from the countries where overseas personnel have served.

Currently, the oversight of the Mutuality in Mission program is housed in the Justice, Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit (JGER), and inter-unit conversations have already begun about ways to continue to re-imagine this program. Together, staff from JGER and from the Intercultural and Diverse Communities in Ministry Unit (ICDC) have been in conversation about future possibilities for this work to strengthen the process for the intercultural church. Next steps will be brought back to the Task Group on Intercultural Ministries; this is named in the work plan for the next triennium.

⁹ This group includes Filipinos (8.1%), Latin Americans (6.0%), Arabs (5.2%), Southeast Asians (4.7%), West Asians (3.1%) Koreans (2.8%), Japanese (1.6%).

¹⁰ The 1.5 generation refers to children and youth who immigrated to Canada, and who therefore have a clear memory of their country of birth, as well as their country to which they have immigrated.

6. *New Ecumenical Partnerships:*

The commitment of the church to becoming intercultural is founded on a desire to be intentionally diverse, inclusive, and just. The commitment requires that the United Church become flexible, and that the whole church be a diverse one. It also requires that the church move beyond “one box fits all” to a variety of spaces and new ecumenical relationships.

It is clear that The United Church of Canada is not the only church or ecumenical body with a commitment to becoming intercultural. For this reason, the development of new ecumenical partnerships with historical allies as well as with new allies who find themselves in similar changing context would be helpful.

In addition to sharing resources among staff with common portfolios, another aspect of new partnerships would be through the recognition of immigrant church communities wishing to associate with The United Church of Canada. The United Church does not have current ecumenical partnerships with overseas partners such as the Korean Methodist Church, the Methodist Church Ghana, and the Church of South India. These same churches are experiencing a growing churchgoing immigrant population in Canada. New ecumenical partnerships could be developed with these churches to strengthen the immigrant churches in Canada.

The focus of these new partnerships would be much more on mission in Canada than on global mission. These new relationships could potentially be called partnerships of exchange, in addition to the church’s historic partnerships.

7. *Community Ministries:*

Many community ministries work in neighbourhoods that are intercultural and multi-faith. Many such ministries also work in economically challenged communities, where social class and poverty are significant issues. The Task Group on Intercultural Ministries recognizes that conversation will be needed with community ministries, in order to effectively integrate questions about multi-faith communities and of social class.

8. *Ministry with Other Marginalized Groups:*

Deaf communities have recently come into the intercultural space as a cultural community, and the Deaf Ministries Working Group is being integrated into the life of the ICDC Unit. Other cultural groups have expressed an interest in exploring the relationship between their cultural context and the broader intercultural space: Affirm United—an organization of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities within the United Church—would like stronger connections. Questions are also emerging about the United Church’s ministries with people who have disabilities, and where these ministries might fit.

A further question remains about the relationship between racial justice and the intercultural church. These conversations will be further explored as work on intercultural ministries continues.

Leadership Development

1. Behold! One Another: An Intercultural Conference:

The United Church of Canada's first conference on intercultural ministries took place October 30–November 2, 2008, in downtown Toronto. It was an inspirational and transformative encounter, for all people in The United Church of Canada, where participants could experience the joy of the intercultural church, explore what “intercultural” might mean in their contexts, and engage in a deep and rich experience.

“Behold! One Another” offered many opportunities for face-to-face encounter, discovery, and dialogue. There was time to explore theology, to gather tips and tools, and to consider deep structural issues of systemic injustice. It presented, for many, a leadership development opportunity and a space to further engage intercultural ministries. Nearly 300 people attended the conference, representing a wide diversity of racialized, cultural, and linguistic communities. Intercultural worship and interactions among diverse communities were key components of the gathering.

The task group believes that regional and national events similar to the “Behold!” conference need to continue to help the church experience the reality of becoming intercultural and to continue to spark processes of transformation, as “Behold!” did with Knox United in Winnipeg. Knox sent 12 people to the “Behold!” conference; they represented key traditional leaders as well as leaders from the newcomer communities. Knox United, grounded in a diverse cultural community, had been seeking transformation for several years. They opened their doors to the community, to conversations, dreams, and initiatives—such as an African market—and these initiatives took shape and grew; however, the Sunday morning crowd remained largely unchanged. After a number of alternative worship initiatives sputtered, it became clear that God's intent was to transform the Sunday morning community into a “global church”—that they were called to both hold on to their traditions and also add traditions of peoples from other places.

2. Training of Ministry Personnel:

Ministry personnel and church leaders must be trained to work in the changing intercultural reality. Intercultural training will have implications for both theological schools and education centres. The task group has had passionate discussions about theological formation for worship leaders, and the need to include intercultural sensitivity training in seminaries and cultural realities in course work.

There is a difference between providing a workshop and influencing university programs. The task group is keen to see the formation of candidates for ministry produce clergy who are interculturally competent. Inter-unit conversations on training will continue.

3. Intercultural Immersion:

The intercultural immersion experiences that have shaped the development of the task group are needed for leadership development across the church as a whole.

Transforming Structures and Systems

One challenge to inclusion is that of spoken language. The Task Group on Intercultural Ministries and the ICDC Unit-Wide Committee feel the need to explore how best to address this issue — one approach is through simultaneous interpretation.

1. Simultaneous Interpretation:

Simultaneous interpretation helps create access for people who currently cannot fully participate in the church's life, since their first language neither English nor French. The equipment and personnel needed can be quite costly. By offering simultaneous interpretation at national meetings and events from 2009 to 2012, the church will be able to gain experience-based information on the costs and benefits of providing simultaneous interpretation for a wide variety of national meetings. After this three-year trial period, the task group will be able to make recommendations regarding policies and practices for providing multilingual services.

During the test phase, simultaneous interpretation could be provided for four languages at several different events. Languages to be included may be French, American Sign Language (ASL), and at least two others. During this period, the project will explore the relationship between language and the participation of diverse cultural communities.

Simultaneous interpretation has already been used at a meeting of the Executive of General Council in November 2008, and at the "Behold!" conference. Informal simultaneous interpretation—without specialized equipment—is regularly used at meetings of the Task Group on Intercultural Ministries.

Simultaneous interpretation needs a cost-benefit analysis, recognizing that the church exists in a broader context of shrinking finances, at the same that the church also values inclusivity. Many voices—like the Rev. Rosa-Elena Donoso-Cruz, minister of a Spanish- and French-speaking United Church in Montreal, called *Église Unie Camino de Emaus*—are missing from full participation in the church. Her experience is relevant:

Working in both French and Spanish is not a huge challenge, says Rosa-Elena, because while the members' first language is Spanish, they are working hard to integrate into Montreal's French community.

However, she says language issues mean that *Camino de Emmaus* can participate in the life of the wider United Church only up to the Conference level.

"We can't go beyond the Montreal and Ottawa Conference level, so we don't really have a connection with the United Church nationally," she says, adding that if the national church would like some Spanish-language worship or workshop materials, they are willing to share.¹¹

¹¹ *Mandate*, The United Church of Canada, November 2008, pp. 16–17.

Consequently, the task group proposes that the United Church use simultaneous interpretation at a variety of national meetings and events between 2009 and 2012, and offer a report back to the 41st General Council regarding policies and practices of translation.

2. Diverse Representation:

The church affirms that there are no differentiations in the body of Christ; we are all “one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). We are called to be fellow workers with God to fulfill the Great Commission (1 Corinthians 3:9; Matthew 28:18–20). We understand that it takes all cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities to fulfill God’s mission on earth.

The 39th General Council 2006 discerned and adopted the “Call to Purpose” affirming the church’s longing for “a deeper relationship with God” and “deeper connection with one another.” At the same time, almost all racialized communities are concentrated in larger urban centres, while the church draws most of the commissioners to General Council from non-urban areas. Therefore, many racialized peoples are excluded from the national decision-making process, and certain deeper relationships at General Council are not formed among the diverse peoples present in our church.

A challenge is that the current structure for electing commissioners to go to General Council does not specifically name and ensure the inclusion of cultural and racialized minorities as commissioners. Some community voices are continually excluded from decision-making processes at the national level.

Current structures of the church require active participation in the presbyteries/districts, which is not always possible for members of these communities. Until the United Church can get to a new system for participation, the task group proposes considering at least two racialized people and at least one Deaf person to be named as commissioners to the 40th General Council 2009, and racialized and Deaf peoples at the 41st General Council 2012 and each subsequent council be represented by corresponding members.

In addition, Conferences could consider appointing people from diverse communities. Just as consideration is given to gender, ordination status, and age in appointing delegates, consideration could also be given to racialized and Deaf peoples, with the intention of building an intentionally intercultural church. An ongoing review of delegates to General Council may further aid this endeavour.

3. Intercultural Audit:

In committing itself to becoming intercultural, the United Church understood that interculturalism would be a core identity of the church and a part of its structural life. As a result, integration of interculturalism in all aspects of the programmatic, procedural, and policy life of the church is essential. In seeking this integration, the church could build on models used in the past to increase the number of women in visible leadership positions and to achieve appropriate balances of lay people and clergy on committees. It could create a model to conduct an audit of the involvement of racialized peoples in committees. In this way, interculturalism may be seen as the “norm.” Various courts of the church will need to develop strategies to ensure diversity of participation.

This could be an intentional audit of the all the church's courts and educational institutions to identify barriers to full participation — and opportunities for increased participation—of diverse cultural, linguistic, Deaf, and racialized communities. The audit could look how the church is presented to the public and how leadership is identified for national events, and seek to identify hidden cultural, socio-economic, and power biases. The audit could be reported back to the 41st General Council in 2012.

4. Cultural Empire:

Within the United Church, there are many systems of cultural domination, or “cultural empire.” Ways of doing and of being often have unspoken cultural codes. These may exclude people from non-dominant groups who cannot easily decipher the code that dictates the ways in which we are church together. Just as each of us participates in empire, knowingly or unknowingly, the church participates in cultural empire through cultural values that dominate our ways of being church together.

To challenge cultural empire, the intercultural church offers a positive vision for transformation. It invites the church to embrace intentional institutional change that would enable full participation of diverse cultural communities. The church is called to examine its own cultural practices and the ways in which systems of cultural domination exclude. To effectively challenge cultural empire, the intercultural vision anticipates that all will be changed.

In this process of transformation, the church needs to be open to relinquishing some of its old traditions and ways of being in order to embrace the new space where God calls the church to live. The church will experience a time of grief, and attention will need to be given to this experience.

Unfortunately, in spite of striving to become a justice-seeking church, the United Church still embraces dominant cultural ways of being church together. Perhaps the church has woven the gospel, dominant cultural values, and a way of being church together in ways that make it difficult to discern where what we do in church is a cultural value, not necessarily a gospel value. This can lead to the dominant culture being perceived as a superior culture. As part of a process of transformation, power dynamics must change and centres of power must shift.

A challenge is that there appears to be a paradox between the model for relating defined by our United Church as conciliar and the ways in which the model is diminished when persons (unwittingly) surrender their authority to the few. In considering cultural empire, we need to remind ourselves that perhaps all will be changed, and that both the oppressed and oppressor are in need of God's grace!

5. Admissions Working Group and Recruitment of Ministry Personnel:

The Admissions Working Group is under the umbrella of the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services (PC-MEPS). The changing of admissions policies represents a significant example of the church integrating the intercultural lens into its wider work.

Summary of Intercultural Programmatic Initiatives

Several intercultural initiatives are already underway, and are taking place as programs and structural changes.

To date, several concrete steps have been taken:

- the name of the Ethnic Ministries Unit was changed to the Intercultural and Diverse Communities in Ministry Unit
- the Deaf Ministries Working Group, as a linguistic and cultural community, became part of the Intercultural and Diverse Communities in Ministry Unit
- a Task Group on Intercultural Ministries was formed to further the work of becoming an intercultural church
- continued conversations are taking place between Aboriginal, francophone, and cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities about the implications of intercultural ministries for their cultural communities through the Task Group on Intercultural Ministries
- the role and relationship of other cultural communities with the intercultural unit—such as Affirm United — is being discerned
- further dialogue is taking place about the appropriate use of language in referring to diverse cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities, in place of the term “ethnic”¹²

Conclusions

The Task Group on Intercultural Ministries has been privileged to offer leadership in the area of intercultural ministries. The task group looks forward to continuing to develop intercultural policies and practices, with the spirit of creating processes for church-wide transformation.

Members of the Task Group on Intercultural Ministries:

Helen Bickle, Thierry Delay, Gisèle Gilfillan, Ettie Gordon, Su Won Hong, Elaine Jacobs, Victor Kitagawa, Marie-Claude Manga, Emmanuel Kwadwo Ofori, Martin Rumscheidt, Herbert Russell

Staff Support to the Task Group on Intercultural Ministries:

Michael Blair, Pierre Goldberger, Adele Halliday (staff resource to the task group), Laverne Jacobs

¹² “A Transformative Vision for The United Church of Canada” offered considerable critique of the term “ethnic,” which has its origins in the term “ethnos”, and which has roots in the terms “pagan/heathen.” The term “racialized” is commonly used in social sciences as a more inclusive and progressive term, instead of “racial/ethnic minority.” Used together as “cultural, linguistic, and racialized communities,” included in this collective term are people who are White, Aboriginal, francophone, people once referred to as “racial/ethnic minority,” and diverse language groups. There is still work being done on language and terms; further reporting will be offered to the 41st General Council.