

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**A Strategy to Transition a Traditional African American Church to a
Multicultural Church Where All People Are Welcome to Worship**

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
the Faculty of the Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by
Darold A. Ingram, Jr.

Lynchburg, Virginia

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Seth N. Polk, PhD
Assistant Professor
Mentor

Derwin E. Lewis, EdD
Adjunct Professor
Reader

Abstract

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Darold Ingram

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, 2022

Mentor: Dr. Seth N. Polk

The purpose for this action research thesis is to develop a strategy to transition the MHBC from a traditional African American church to a multicultural church. Looking at the temperature of our country, civil unrest has reached an all-time high. Our society has been separated by every aspect of life and this is not how God intended for us to live out our lives. While the battle amongst cultures thrives, the only thing that can change this climate is Christ, by way of His church.

In the following pages you will be exposed to a strategic plan that will help the church become the leading force in uniting men and women of all cultures to worship in the spirit of unity. This thesis will clearly lay out the issue of how segregated a house of worship can be, raise the Biblical image of the church, and expose a 7-week process filtered through a hand selected focus group composed of several cultures.

The results of the dialogue were both honest, and enlightening. The surveys collected spoke to the reality of segregation, and the hope for unity to return to the Lord's church. At the conclusion of this project, you will discover that change can happen for the better when all hearts and minds are turned towards God. Having walked this plan out it is evident that Christ is alive, and the efforts of this project were not in vain.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The United States is multicultural, but many churches remain monocultural. In April of 1960, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. asserted, “One of the tragedies of our nation is that eleven o’clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated, if not the most segregated hour within Christianity in America.”¹ More than sixty years later, segregation is still a problem. Dr. Charles Ware suggests, “The sad fact is the church has a greater conformity to the world than the Bible in the issues of segregation.” He also states, “The dirty secret in America is that we are a racially segregated society, and we are comfortable in the segregation.”² Reasons vary for the lack of diversity and integration in churches. Churches have grown in diversity while others have failed in efforts to become more multicultural. The Mount Hermon Baptist Church (MHBC) in Avondale, Louisiana made attempts in the past to diversify, but it has not become a multicultural church. This project will focus on how to transition MHBC, a traditional African American church, into a multicultural church where all people are welcome to worship.

A diversity of cultures exists in Louisiana as a whole. Current demographics reflect the diversity.

Louisiana is one of the most culturally diverse places in America. As per the 2020 US Census, Avondale has a 2020 population of 5,321. The population of Avondale has increased by 7.41% since the most recent census, which recorded a

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Interview by Net Brooks,” *NBC News Meet the Press*, April 20, 1965, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAtsAwGreyE>.

² Dehner Maurer, *The Blended Church: The Emergence of Multicultural Christianity* (Tulsa: Thorncrown Publishing, 2010), 113.

population of 4,954 in 2010. Avondale reached its highest population of 5,585 in 2012. 47.28% of the entire population in Avondale is White, while 35.35% are African American, 15.90% Asian, and 1.24% are consider “some other race.”³

How can the church engage cultural diversity? This question will be addressed theoretically while also exploring practical solutions.

Ministry Context

The history of the MHBC is a story of the grace and mercy of God. Rev. Joseph Johnson started MHBC in 1947 under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The church thrived in the community since its inception. In the 1940s and 1950s, the entire Avondale community was comprised of African Americans. Due to racial tension at the time, Avondale was one of very few areas in Southeast Louisiana that allowed African Americans to live without fear of harm because of the color of their skin.

As industry grew in the area, the population grew and became more diverse. Many factors contributed to diverse growth. Gas stations, eateries, hotels, casinos, drug stores, and grocery stores emerged. These businesses produced a large number of jobs in the area. A major catalyst of population increase was the opening of the Avondale Marine Ways Shipyard in 1938. Avondale Shipyard, as it is locally known, is a ship building company owned and operated by the Litton Industries corporation that currently employs approximately twenty-six thousand employees worldwide and two hundred employees locally. As time progressed every ethnicity came to the shipyard and many people moved to Avondale to live closer to their jobs. Housing in the area grew to accommodate the new employees. Commerce and industry grew around the influx of residents.

³“Avondale, Louisiana Population 2021,” World Population Review, Inc., accessed October 1, 2021, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/avondale-la-population>.

Mount Hermon Baptist Church Currently

Membership at MHBC has grown to more than six hundred members but remains primarily an African American church. With a growing congregation, the activity of the church transitioned to facilitate the growth, including new facilities, increased ministries, and an additional worship service. The staff of MHBC has grown to twenty-three employees, mostly part-time.

MHBC has a Deacon Board historically vested with a considerable amount of authority in the church. The board is comprised of twenty-five men who are long-tenured in the church; their average age is sixty-seven. Following the former senior pastor's departure, the Deacon Board became leaders of every component of the church. The former twenty-one-year tenured pastor had some intense spiritual struggles that negatively affected his behavior. These struggles ranged from stealing church resources, gambling, adultery, and other serious immorality. When forced to resign by the Deacon Board, the deacons filled the leadership vacuum. If the music ministry had an issue, the deacons managed it. A deacon was assigned to every ministry. The deacons decided where the church's funds were allocated, who received the contracts, and how guest speakers were compensated. They hired and fired employees as well.

The deacons also led the pastoral search committee to find the next senior pastor. The deacons took on the responsibilities of the pastor and ministered on Sunday mornings. The church belonged to them. The deacons were in danger of becoming mini-pastors.

The Deacon Board strongly resisted becoming a multicultural congregation. Due to their influence, other leadership also struggled to embrace the concept of a multicultural church. Many leaders in the church are old enough to have first-hand experiences of racism in the South. Their experiences included being forced to attend school for African Americans only, being prohibited

from certain “Whites only” areas, and much more. The drive to continue segregation for some African Americans today is the result of their experience during much of the twentieth century.

Paul Street wrote:

Years ago, following slavery, there was the Reconstruction Era. The Reconstruction Era was when freed African Americans obtained political power and begin the long march towards greater social and economic equality. Whites reacted with panic and outrage. Southern conservatives vowed to reverse Reconstruction and sought the “abolition of the Freedmen’s Bureau and all political instrumentalities designed to secure Negro supremacy.”⁴

The political response encouraged Jim Crow laws and other social segregation. The effort proved successful after the withdrawal of federal troops from the South and the effective abandonment of African Americans and the fight for racial equality. The federal government no longer made any effort to enforce federal civil rights legislation and slashed the funding for the Freedmen’s Bureau to such a degree the agency became virtually defunct. Once again, vagrancy laws and other laws defined *mischievous* and *insulting gestures* as crimes were enforced vigorously against Black people.⁵

While not a biblical approach for believers of any color, segregated worship experiences are the residue of the horrible treatment of African Americans during and following slavery. Some African Americans would even argue that the mindset and methods of Jim Crow still exist today, under different names. Historically, African American schools, restaurants, banks, swimming pools, and churches segregated by necessity. They were safe places for people of color to learn, eat, enjoy, and worship. While the resistance to becoming multicultural is understandable, it is not a biblically tenable position.

⁴ Paul Street, *The Vicious Circle: Race, Prison, Jobs, and Community in Chicago, Illinois, and the Nation* (Chicago: Chicago Urban League, Department of Research and Planning, 2002).

⁵ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New York Press), 31.

Civic Engagement

MHBC has expanded its civic engagement. The Mount Hermon Community Development Outreach Organization is a nonprofit arm of the church. The nonprofit has empowered the organization to reach the community with the love of Jesus in practical ways.

The nonprofit conducts many community programs:

- Back to School Giveaways
- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)
- Scholarship Gala
- Public Housing
- Summer Camps
- After-School Tutoring
- Weekly Meals (Second Harvest/USDA)

Years ago, MHBC wanted to branch out into the community for greater civic engagement but lacked the resources to do so. Several deacons from the church led the charge to form a nonprofit. In 2001, the MHCDOO board started with seven deacons from MHBC. Later women were added. The board currently consists of six people: three male deacons from the church, two women from the church, and the Senior Pastor. Unfortunately, the board does not have bylaws to govern length of terms for members. As a result, the average age of the nonprofit board is sixty-nine, with little opportunity for new members to provide fresh ideas. The board meets monthly to hear from the Executive Director, provide insight, ask questions, and vote on fund allocation.

The MHCDOO recently hired a new Executive Director, who also serves MHBC as the Minister of Music. The director has a variety of talents and insight. The original goal of the

organization was to receive federal grants and other government agency funding the church could not. The federal government and other local governing agencies are hesitant to provide churches with money. Experts suggest that several churches will become victims of embezzlement.⁶ Churches are often risk for mismanagement of funds. MHCDOO is funded through federal, state, and local sources separate from the church. Absolutely no funds mix between the church and the nonprofit, in keeping with federal law.

MHCDOO is on the property of MHBC. The church provides an office for the nonprofit to use during the week. MHBC does not charge for the space, helping the nonprofit keep expenses down. No board member is compensated for their time or work for the organization. The only compensated individual is the Executive Director, paid monthly.

The MHCDO programs serve a broad range of cultures in the Avondale community. This shows that some are willing to help and feed people they are unwilling to worship alongside. MHBC should open its doors for others to worship, just as it has opened its doors to serve those in the local community.

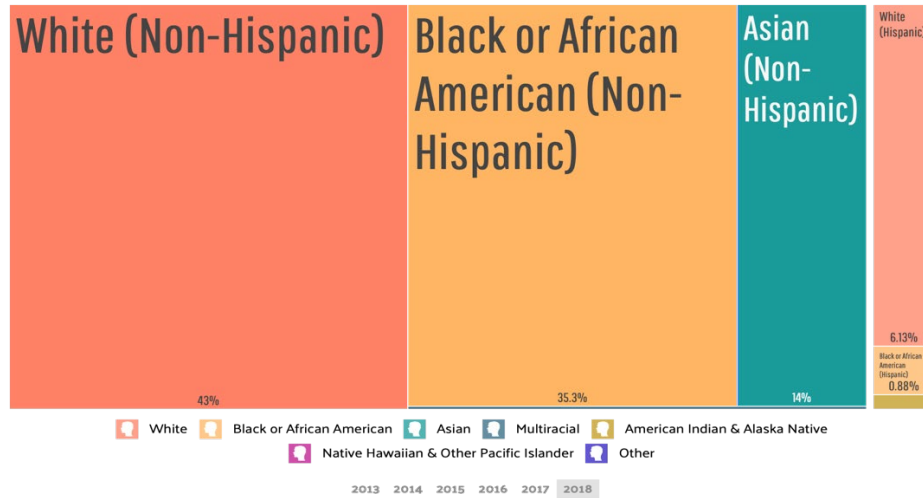
Demographics

The growth of diversity in the community is different than the demographics of the church. Avondale is located on the south side of the Mississippi River, referred to by residents as “Westbank of New Orleans.” There are also other small cities in the surrounding areas. In recent years population of Avondale was 4,989.⁷ White (Non-Hispanics) are 49.17% of the population, African Americans are 36.22%, Hispanics are 13.95%, and Asians are .26%. The median age in

⁶ Anne Stych, “One in Three Churches Will Be Victims of Embezzlement, Experts Say,” MinistryWatch, April 21, 2022, <https://ministrywatch.com/one-in-three-churches-will-be-victims-of-embezzlement-experts-say/>.

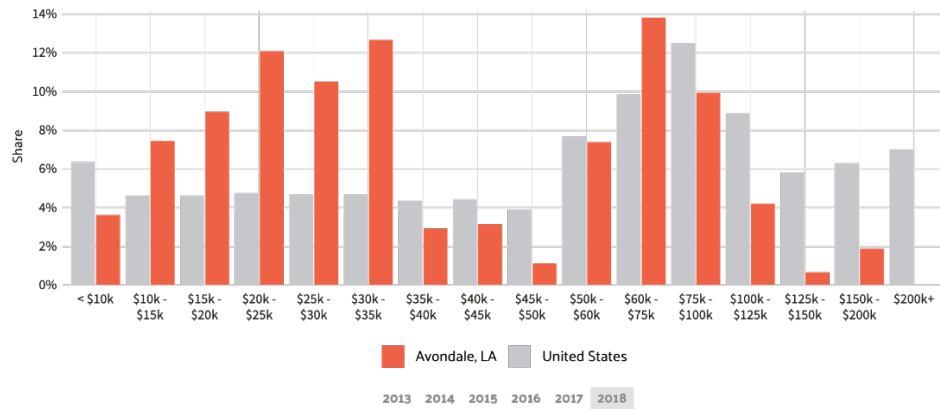
⁷ “DataUSA: Avondale, LA,” *Datausa.io*, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/avondale-la>.

the city is 37 years. The median age for males is twenty-eight years and for females is forty-one years. As of 2018, the number of foreign-born individuals in the city was 12.2% compared to 11.6% in 2016.



The average household income is \$32,913, with an average poverty rate of 19.36%. The median rental cost is \$1,128 per month and the median house value is \$88,500. The average male salary (yearly) in the state is \$62,488, while the average female wage is \$40,269. In 2018, 63.9% of the population owned homes, compared to 67.7% in 2017, an indication that homeownership had declined.⁸

⁸ “Avondale, Louisiana,” City Data, last modified December 2020, accessed January 6, 2021, <https://www.city-data.com/city/Avondale-Louisiana.html>.



Approximately 90.1% of the population has active health coverage: 34.2% on employee plans, 11.6% on Medicare, 32.8% on Medicaid, 10.7% on non-group plans, and 0.782% on military plans. The patient to clinician ratio is currently at 1,133:1, a 0.176% decrease.⁹ Less than half of people, 47.95%, have high school degrees and 16.44% have college degrees. Whites have the highest number of graduates, 1,675, followed by African Americans, 796, Asians, 471, and Hispanics, 277. An estimated 42.9% of the population is married.

Statement of the Problem

MHBC is a segregated place of worship. Despite increasing diversity in the community, the church has not grown in diversity. Efforts to change in the past have not been successful. The idea met resistance, and the response was insufficient. The lists of failed attempts are vast. Many MHBC members have tried to connect the church with local civic associations to unify other ethnicities and have been unsuccessful. Unifying MHBC with the local police and clergy organizations to promote diversity through conversations and programming (e.g., the yearly “night out against crime” event) was also unsuccessful. Evangelism in the local community has

⁹ “Avondale, Louisiana Population 2022,” World Population Review, last modified 2020, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/avondale-la-population>.

not been as effective as it potentially could have been, if MHBC shared Christ more with people beyond the African American community.

Local White and Asian churches have reached out to MHBC for joint worship services, joint community meals, and joint meetings. They have been unsuccessful. Some within the fellowship desired to make the move, but unfortunately they were consumed by the majority. The focus of the project is to consider the limitations of the segregated worship experience and create a strategic plan for MBCH to work toward becoming a multicultural church.

People of all cultures need a place to worship. However, MHBC, the largest church in the area, has failed to create a safe place for all cultures to worship. MHBC has effectively barred those who are not African American through behaviors that make other ethnicities uncomfortable. This includes setting every component of the church tailored solely to African American cultures and traditions. Another tendency is to look at other ethnicities offensively when they come to attend the worship experience, posing questions and comments to them such as, “*What are you doing here?*,” or “*This is our church.*” Actions speak louder than words, and historically the actions of many members have discouraged the presence of other cultures. A territorial spirit permeates the door keepers so that someone of another race may even be ignored or laughed at as they enter the facility. Offensive cultural jokes are uttered, and people’s vision of Christ is blurred by the horrible behavior of those who say they follow Him.

Revelation 7:9 describes, “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” Heaven will be multicultural. The church on earth should also be multicultural. The Bible says the Spirit of God has no favoritism among those on earth. Acts 2:17 reads, “In the

last days,' God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people.'" Revelation 14:6 states, "Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people." The biblical support for a multicultural approach will be expanded in the theological section of this paper.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is to develop a transition strategy for MHBC, a traditional African American church, to become a multicultural church. This project will lead MHBC through a seven-week process focused on transforming the church into a more welcoming place of worship for all cultures. Furthermore, it aims to reflect the unity the Bible instructs Christians to pursue. The focus will coincide with New Testament patterns of inclusion and attempt to resolve the segregation in MHBC's tradition. A multicultural approach could propel the church to new levels of spirituality, physical growth, and service to others for the glory of God. The seven-week process will explore the purpose of the church, biblical teaching, styles of worship, evangelism, fellowship, hospitality, and civic engagement. The goal of the project is to convict and convince the leaders and congregants of MHBC to understand the biblical nature of a multicultural church.

Basic Assumptions

The project assumes obstacles and resistance to change can be overcome. The hypothesis is when presented with compelling evidence, MHBC congregants will embrace change. Change is a process and often a war in the African American church world for many reasons, primarily culture. Culture, rather than vision or strategy, is the most powerful factor in any organization. It determines the receptivity of staff and volunteers to innovative ideas, unleashes or dampens creativity, builds or erodes enthusiasm, and creates a sense of pride or deep discouragement. The

culture of an organization, particularly in churches and nonprofit organizations, shapes morale, teamwork, and effectiveness.¹⁰

In many cases anger surfaces at the suggestion of change. People are often comfortable with where they are and what they do and so they resist change. Anecdotally, the quickest way for a pastor to be fired in a traditional Baptist church is to change something. A pastor may be dismissed if he changes too many things at once or too quickly. However, there is likely a deeper concern. Often behind anger, is a spirit of fear. When most hear the word change, they also hear questions. They may wonder, “Does change mean get rid of me?” or “Can I keep up with the changes or will I be obsolete?” They may ask themselves, “Will I still have as much power and authority in this new system of change?”

Many churches seem to ignore biblical insight about sharing Christ in the present age. In 1762, Charles Wesley produced a hymn, *A Charge to Keep I Have*. The second stanza reads, “To serve the present age, my calling to fulfill; oh, may it all my pow’rs engage, to do my Master’s will!”¹¹ To fulfill the calling is to share Christ in manner the current age can receive and understand our Savior, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Change to meet the needs of the present age for the glory of God is only an issue when the church becomes about us and not Christ!

A hurdle for effective change in a church context is methodology. Presentation affects acceptance and effectiveness of change. Traditional Baptist congregants often resist being told what to do if they feel they are forced. All types of defense mechanisms may come into play. The process presented in the following pages attempts to approach change with a softer, more

¹⁰ Samuel R. Chand, *Cracking your Church’s Culture Code: Seven Keys to Unleashing Vision and Inspiration* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 2.

¹¹ Charles Wesley, “A Charge To Keep I Have,” Hymnary, accessed November 23, 2021, <http://www.hymnary.org>.

inclusive manner, rather than the aggressive manner often passed down in African American churches today. The history of MHBC demonstrates the former pastor ruled in a strong manner and did not welcome others providing input.

This project will include input from multiple voices in the congregation over a seven-week period. Using this approach, hopefully MHBC is willing to embrace change for the glory of God. Often, people feel more inclined to accept the change when they are included in the process. This project will empower the church to mirror the growth and diversity in the community and enhance its ability to reach people.

The potential of the project to help other churches is significant. While commonly practiced in the last century, segregated worship was evident long ago in the Bible, among Jews and Gentiles. The issue is vast; this project can help many congregations be the Church God desires. Some churches may have a desire to make this shift in their congregation but do not know how to go about it. Segregated churches could potentially limit access to worship close to home. Color or culture does not necessarily have to be a barrier. This project will help others by providing insight and instruction in areas that warrant attention, a practical blueprint applicable to their own context, and most importantly, an example that things can change for the better. The church is a kingdom effort. A vision for healthy relationships could impact evangelistic effectiveness. Erica Ryu Wong in *Christians and the Color Line: Race and Religion after Divided by Faith*, included a quote from the pastor of Mannington Church, a church located in a large East Coast metropolitan area that is nondenominational, evangelical, and multicultural from its founding, Pastor Bryce stated:

Church is...the joining of people's lives, the being interested in somebody's dreams, the preferring one another...the sacrifice, one for another, the seeing how one another is doing, the praying for one another...The sacrifice, one for another, is the way that we show something different than the world expects from a group of people...This is where

people are to notice our love and then, being then witnessed, they are to come to understand who God is.¹²

Honesty and transparency are expected from participants in the research, in hope that all will find congregational segregation problematic. The chief goal of the focus group will be to gather information to guide the church to a healthier biblical model. As believers and students of Scripture, it is clear God does not favor segregation. The ideas and aims of this project are not for selfish or personal advancement. The chief aim is to build the house of God for everyone.

Definitions

The focus of the thesis project is the MHBC. The key terms and phrases are *Black Church*, *multicultural*, *rural*, *hermeneutic*, and *segregation*. The key terms and phrases are important to understand the perspective of the writer and the context of the project.

Black Church

A particular color prefacing a universal term like church may be divisive. While interpreted several ways, within the confines of this project, the phrase is defined as James Cone describes *Black church*. According to Cone, *Black church* is “Church of and for black people that examines their stories, tales, sayings, and pilgrimage, telling the story of how we got over.”¹³

If this is accurate, it has proven to be a limitation on reaching different types of people in the modern era and is a barrier this study seeks to overcome. In some areas of the country, it seems

¹² J Russell Hawkins, and Phillip Luke Sinitiere. *Christians and the Color Line: Race and Religion After Divided by Faith* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), 210.

¹³ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 16. Cone is a well-known proponent of black theology. For Cone, everything is filtered through the lens of race. Cone’s observations and questions are helpful in identifying some of the racial problems. However, the author of this project has a strong view of the Scripture as applying to all peoples, and does not endorse all of Cone’s ideas and concepts.

Blacks have been closely connected to their church as part of their heritage, which may limit their views of the importance of reaching beyond their heritage. The birth of the African American Church was the result of the slaves' search for meaning, evangelization, natural integration of their religious foundations, the Bible, and the Black preacher.¹⁴ Cultural norms such as negro spirituals, overly emphasized levels of praise, and charismatic litanies promoting call and response are all summed up in the Black Church experience.¹⁵

In the following chapters the phrase *African American* will be used to identify a particular ethnicity. While a helpful delineation in this project, the phrase *African American* has been the subject of great debate. The intentions of this paper are not to argue the inception and/or validity of the phrase but to demarcate Black people of the African Diaspora from other ethnicities living in the United States of America. In the following chapters the phrase *Black church* will be used to define the manner and style of traditional African American churches.

For clarity, the Black church really exists as multiple Black churches across denominational, theological, and regional lines. To an extent the Black church is the historically Black denominations: National Baptist, Progressive Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal (AME), African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ), Church of God in Christ (COGIC), etc. But increasingly we must also recognize that one part of the *Black Church* exists as predominantly Black congregations in majority White denominations, like the Southern Baptist Convention.¹⁶

¹⁴ Tony Evans and Cheryl Dunlop, *Oneness Embraced: Reconciliation, the Kingdom, and How We Are Stronger Together* (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 148.

¹⁵ It is important to keep in mind the theological context within which the cultural ideas of Dr. Cone are set. They currently operate within a larger theological framework of Black Liberation Theology. Dr. Cone founded Black Liberation Theology, which has its roots in 1960s civil-rights activism.

¹⁶ Thabiti Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2001), 7.

Multicultural

The term *multicultural* is used throughout the Christian Church to describe deviation from the norm of congregations gathered based on their monolithic ethnic or cultural heritage. Black churches, white churches, Hispanic churches, etc., are a result of those norms. Merriam Webster defines multicultural as “relating to, reflecting, or adapted to diverse culture.”¹⁷ Similarly, in this project it will refer not to ethnicity, but to the diverse cultures in the area discussed. Someone can be of a particular ethnicity and conform to another culture. The word *multicultural* will be used throughout this research when discussing the various cultures and ethnicities represented within the Avondale community. While widely used, this project shall embrace the term as McIntosh labels it, *heterogenous churches*.¹⁸

Rural

Rural is a term used discussing the layout and geography of the country. In the context of this research, the term will be used to describe small towns or communities lacking the industrial upgrades and population growth of major cities or towns across the United States. Merriam Webster defines the term as, “of or relating to the country, country people, or agriculture.”¹⁹ In common terms *rural* describes the areas dominated by fields, crops, and less entertainment, as well as lower populated cities. Rural areas are similar urban environments, but differ based on numbers of inhabitants, influx of traffic, and antiquated methods of living.

¹⁷ “Merriam-Webster’s School Dictionary, s.v. “Multicultural.”

¹⁸ Gary L. McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 138.

¹⁹ Merriam-Webster’s School Dictionary, s.v. “Rural.”

Hermeneutic

The word *hermeneutic* may originate from the name *Hermes*, the Greek god who served as a messenger for the gods by transmitting and interpreting their communications to the fortunate, or often unfortunate, recipients.²⁰ By the first century, the verb *herneuo* meant “explain,” “interpret,” or “translate.” In its technical meaning, *hermeneutic* is often defined as the science and art of biblical interpretation. This paper will use historical, grammatical, and contextual hermeneutics.²¹

Resources are available on hermeneutics tailored toward various cultures. The basic principles of hermeneutics are not rooted in culture, but biblical interpretation. These include the faith principles, illumination principle, plain sense principle, authorial intent principle, contextual principle, grammatical principle, historical principle, and others.

The chief goal is not to use a term without clarifying its original meaning. While used in theological circles, within the confines of this research the term will mean the lens through which something or someone is interpreted based on culture. Furthermore, to capture the cause of cultural division within the church, the following chapters will strive to compare and contrast a series of cultural hermeneutics concerning church history. More intently, how that cultural interpretation molded MHBC.

The *cultural hermeneutic* of MHBC is rooted in a disdain for other cultures that ties back to how Black people were treated in this country in the past. Historical evidence reveals Blacks have not always received the respect other cultures have received. This disdain stems back to

²⁰ Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group), 15-16.

²¹ Daniel Akin, “Engaging Exposition: 10 Basic Principles of Hermeneutics,” *Between the Times* (blog), <https://equipthepeople.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/engaging-exposition-principles-of-hermeneutics-article-by-daniel-akin.pdf>.

how Black people were brought to this land and their enslavement. As late as 1857, the highest court of the land decreed that Black people “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect. The history of slavery in this country reveals how low human depravity can sink.”²² This is why the church is interpreted as the only thing that Black people have every really owned and operated. A strong tribal and territorial spirit thrived and effected how MHBC interprets the landscape of the culture.

Segregation

The term *segregation* is complex to define. Merriam Webster defines the term as, “to cut off from others; to separate esp., by races or ethnic groups.”²³ There is a differentiation between legal and preferential segregation. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court decided segregation in schools was unconstitutional in the matter of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. later wrote a rider stating that schools in the South could not get federal funds until they fell in line with desegregation. He attached the rider to a several bills in Congress. That latter became part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.²⁴ The Civil Rights Act of 1964, signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, also outlawed racial segregation in all public accommodations, including hotels, restaurants, theaters, and stores, making employment discrimination illegal. This was *legal segregation*.

The practice at MHBC and in many other churches is *preferential segregation*. This act of segregation is solely based on preference. While unfortunate, this often stemmed from past hurts and unforgiveness that bred bitterness. During the enslavement of Blacks in the United

²² James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 27.

²³ Merriam-Webster’s School Dictionary, s.v., “Segregation.”

²⁴ Dick Gregory, *Defining Moments in Black History: Reading Between the Lies* (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 2017), 65.

States, they were not allowed to worship with their slave owners or other Caucasians. This practice continued after the emancipation of enslaved people. Although legal segregation is no longer enforced, MHBC continues to retreat to its own corner to worship the God of all people in preferential segregation. For the sake of the research, *segregation* will be used as it relates to the racial, physical separation of worshipers through modern history.

Statement of Limitations

Due to the extent of the project, several limitations are present within this study. Firstly, the scope of this work will be limited to the rural city of Avondale, Louisiana. Application of the principles will transfer to other contexts, but the rural city setting is unique. One of the writer's main concerns is resources on the history of MHBC. Engrained in this church is an oral tradition of both cultural and consequential oppression. It is critical to demonstrate the significance it has in the church. No academic work has critically engaged the problem of segregation at MHBC thus far. Oral tradition is important to the church and will be included in the project. Because the problem has never been academically addressed, there is not sufficient information readily available to the researcher.

Delimitations

Clear objectives will be implemented to ensure the goals for the project are reached. Each survey question will be consistent, and the words will be well defined. Only ten individuals comprised of MHBC members will be interviewed for this modified case study. The maximum number of ten was selected because there are not many members who would fit into each category, as MHBC is a predominately Black church. Keeping the number at ten allows the project to receive equal consideration and feedback from a diverse group of people. The individuals selected will not be chosen from a particular sector within MHBC but selected from

the general roster of the church. While membership at MHBC is an overall requirement to participate in the project, other aspects played a major role; race, age and level of affluence are factors in the proficiency of the project.

Surveys will include quantitative and qualitative questions. Implementing a variety of questions should produce valuable data from the focus group. The particular problem of a segregated MHBC congregation was and is evident. The segregation of the church is simply one of many problems that can be researched within the local Avondale community. The intentionality of this topic is due to the civil unrest currently taking place within the United States of America. The focus must be placed on unifying MHBC beyond cultural barriers so this act of unity and Christian love may filter over into the local community and beyond.

Thesis Statement

This project will focus on how to transition Mount Hermon Baptist Church, a traditional African American church, to a multicultural church where all people are welcome to worship. As stated above, segregated worship while evident at MHBC, it is not an ideal model for worship. The attitude of the MHBC leadership has not yielded to the idea of multicultural worship. God has charged all believers in His word with loving one another as themselves.²⁵ The prayer is that this seven-week focus group will plant seeds for change.

Summary

In the following chapters this project will focus on how to transition MHBC, a traditional African American church, to a multicultural church where all people are welcome to worship. If MHBC applies the principles in the project all cultures in Avondale, Louisiana can have a

²⁵ Matt 22:36-40.

unified place of worship. Throughout this project the reader will discover biblical arguments supporting a multicultural congregation. In later chapters, the overall argument will be strengthened with sociological arguments, theological arguments, surveys from the selected focus group, and a critically examined seven-week curriculum to transition MHBC into the church that would please God.

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The growth of segregation within the church is an issue of major concern for many Christians. People attend their various churches based on race without seeing integrative spaces. Many congregants today still attend church based on their racial affiliations.¹ This chapter examines this phenomenon and the socio-structural factors that encourage trends. The literature review will cover issues such as race and injustice, problematic leadership, lack of biblical obedience, lack of spiritual maturity, and differences in worship styles, are the key themes in conceptualizing issues leading to segregation in places of worship.

Literature Review

Race and Injustice

Emerson and Smith state evangelicals, and Christians at large, believe Christ died for all and anyone who accepts Christ by faith is born again.² Scripture encourages all who have accepted Jesus to act in love for their neighbors and to do unto others as they would wish done unto them. However, the racialization of the teachings of the Bible has generated divisiveness within the church structure and discouraged racial integration.³ Religion has become a tool used

¹ Gregory, *Defining Moments in Black History*, 22.

² Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

³ Jeffrey Siker, "Historicizing a Racialized Jesus: Case Studies in the 'Black Christ,' the 'Mestizo Christ,' and White Critique." *Biblical Interpretation* 15, no. 1 (January 2007): 27-28.

by some to maintain the racial divide, rather than creating love and bridging existing gaps. The imprint of slavery influenced religious practice in churches and denominations. The Bible was used to endorse slavery which caused violence and brutality. In some cases, there are perceptions that the *white man* is an impediment against religious prosperity of the black community.⁴ On the other hand, Emerson and Smith find some Evangelicals blame Blacks for the racial inequality and theologically obscure structural inequality.⁵ The consequent impact is poor and narrow perceptions of the race issue within church from both perspectives and blame shifting that leads to poor social changes.

DiAngelo argues the discussion of race among White people tends to be difficult.⁶ Some feel immense discomfort and are defensive when confronted about current and past racial actions. As a result, some in the majority culture have difficulty seeing their worldview may be racialized to their favor.

Discrimination has adversely affected people of color, but affirmative action has provided some equity. Even so, affirmative action is often viewed as reverse discrimination. DiAngelo highlights instances of Black movements calling for equality facing resistance from white groups that aim to diminish the gravity of their message.⁷ Black Lives Matter, for example, had All Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter.⁸ At times there is fear and anxiety the white

⁴ Love L. Sechrest and David G. Horrell, "Double Vision for Revolutionary Religion: Race Relations, Moral Analogies, and African-American Biblical Interpretation," in *Ethnicity, Race, Religion: Identities and Ideologies in Early Jewish and Christian Texts, and in Modern Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 202.

⁵ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 107.

⁶ Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 55.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁸ Black Lives Matter has served a function societally to draw attention to existing problems, and start discussions focused on solutions. However, there are significant problems with aspects of the Black Lives Matter manifesto that are inconsistent with biblical truth. Recognizing the value of the movement does imply an

population will become a minority in the future. These influences move from social settings to influence religious contexts as well.⁹

Certain evangelicals, based on their theological interpretations, historically perceived slavery sanctioned by Scripture. Their cultural superiority as a race would remain unfettered over people of color.¹⁰ White fragility can impede the recognition of racism as inherently evil. Evangelical Christians, according to Evans, reject the social gospel that asserts access to God's kingdom is possible through making life better on earth.¹¹

The failure to recognize the implicit effects of this created a divide with Black Christians who ask for acceptance of their suffering and its impediment to their life outcomes.¹² It is difficult to normalize positive appraisal of race for the Black community still living in marginalization. The inherent suspicion and mistrust of whites diminishes chances of integration. Whites, according to DiAngelo, are sometimes hesitant to face challenges about their positions on fragility or face guilt and possible shame for the actions of their forefathers.¹³ Hill, on the other hand, depicts scenarios of disorientation of others that aid in the rejection of whites as Christians.¹⁴ Notably, the deep emotional responses of whites to race and their cultural identity

endorsement of unbiblical beliefs or practices. Further, there are aspects of All Lives Matter, Blue Lives Matter and other opposing forums that are problematic as well and to which the same filters apply.

⁹ DeAngelo, *White Fragility*, 64.

¹⁰ Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 167.

¹¹ Christopher H. Evans, *The Social Gospel in American Religion: A History* (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 190.

¹² David A. Anderson, *Gracism: The Art of Inclusion* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 19.

¹³ DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 65.

¹⁴ Danie Hill and Brenda Salter McNeil, *White Awake: An Honest Look at What It Means to Be White* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 89-90.

inhibit awareness of dissonance regarding their acceptance of racism and inability to discuss issues pertaining to it.¹⁵

Pastor Lenny Duncan in his examination of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America calls for the “*whitest denomination*” to stand and act against structures of capitalism, nationalism, and racism by actively calling out the negative effects created in the American religious community.¹⁶ In the midst of political upheaval regarding George Floyd and the unjust shootings of African Americans by police officers, more church leaders in African American denominations are calling for a greater response from white evangelical and religious communities. Some white evangelicals have failed to discuss racism and its ill effects. However, Duncan calls for radical and bold actions, just as Jesus called out the shortcomings of the Pharisees.¹⁷ Bridging gaps in serious issues of contention about race could increase the multicultural appeal of following the teachings of Christ. Hill further advocates for transformation through which evangelical Christians more easily shed cultural identity they profoundly consider American (e.g., white superiority) and visualize the image of God in people of all races.¹⁸

Biblical Disobedience

Scripture is the authority in guiding the actions of Christians.¹⁹ It is unifying and, in its inerrancy, presents the word of God on which Christians base their actions. The Bible’s

¹⁵ Hill and McNeil, *White Awake*, 89.

¹⁶ Lenny Duncan, *Dear Church: A Love Letter from a Black Preacher to the Whitest Denomination in the US* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 33.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁸ Hill and McNeil, *White Awake*, 91.

¹⁹ Mark Deymaz, *Building A Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 5.

teachings are bound in love.²⁰ The incorporation of practices that demonstrate an aversion for the word of God influenced hate for groups with different religious values. The perceptions of differences as a reason to deny the dignity and rights of others demonstrates Christians and churches often fail to search their own hearts, find their disobedience, repent, and act as required. This failure to confront injustice demonstrates a moral failure.²¹

The Bible teaches against pride and ego, characterizing them as the enemy.²² If people are conceited, they will be antagonistic with those who deny their status or seek to demonstrate otherwise.²³ While this problem is pervasive among many church leaders who seek to receive praise and adoration from their congregations, members revel in this pride as well, passing judgment and using the church as a cover for poor actions. Considering the case of racial segregation in American churches, the major discourse shows some white Christians and churches feel they are superior to Black churches, receive more favor, and thus have greater say.²⁴ Numerous religious communities have failed to allow interventions to help the community, fearing their interpretation of religious teaching may be proven wrong. Pride has created doctrine so intertwined with cultural identity that scriptural study and understanding nuances are based on identity experiences, not the Holy Spirit.²⁵ There is at times a failure to

²⁰ Evans and Dunlop, *Oneness Embraced*, 25.

²¹ Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 5-8.

²² Ryan Holiday, *Ego Is the Enemy* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016), 4-6.

²³ Byoung Ok Koo, Steven Ybarrola, and Ruth Tucker, *Transitioning from an Ethnic to a Multicultural Church: A Transformational Model* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 32.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁵ Gary L. McIntosh and Alan McMahan, *Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community: Why it Matters and How it Works* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2012), 25.

show empathy, consideration, love, and humility, subsequently leading to alienation within the church.²⁶

One of the common issues that affects class and race relations in America is income. Income disparity allows poverty to be seen as the result of sin and a punishment from God. Economic and financial differences contribute to poor theological interpretation of the Bible and the characterization of poverty as punishment.²⁷ Proverbs 14:31 reflects, “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for the Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.” Nonetheless, churches target wealthier classes to finance their activities. The commercialization of spiritual gifts not only encourages exclusion of the poor, but also goes against Scripture.²⁸ Social structural factors put African Americans in poor wage classes compared to their white and Asian counterparts.²⁹ The prosperity gospel has divided the family of Christ, preferring the sale of the gifts of the Spirit, and limiting access to the poor. Their actions demonstrate an accompanying lack of spiritual inventory.³⁰ Thus, even within the existing racial divide, there lie smaller forms of discrimination encouraging financial prosperity over biblical teachings.

Social and political divisiveness also foster segregation in churches.³¹ Matthew 12:25 indicates every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; no city or house divided against itself will stand. However, it is clear there are multiple divisions among Christians in America.

²⁶ Mason, *Woke Church*, 25.

²⁷ Keri Day, *Unfinished Business: Black Women, the Black Church, and the Struggle to Thrive in America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 52.

²⁸ Renee Neh Chinkwo, “Poverty, Prosperity and Faith: An Analysis of the Prosperity Gospel in the Neo-Pentecostal Church Winners Chapel International in Bamenda, Cameroon,” (master’s thesis, MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2018), 55.

²⁹ Day, *Unfinished Business*, 25.

³⁰ Peter Scazzero. *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 25.

³¹ Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer, *Essential Church?: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville: B & H Books, 2008), 44.

According to Dr. Chan, Christians must be devoid of division.³² However, political affiliations and leveraging power led to some Christians seeking imposition of their political agenda by painting other groups as undeserving.³³ The division of the Church along party lines highlights disobedience to Scripture; political games take precedent over the word of God. Detrimentially, there is an underlying inability to engage across party, religious, and cultural identity lines to create a congregation focused on preaching the love of God.³⁴ Marginalized groups in this context lack visibility and suffer oppression under dominance of specific groups. This aversion to teaching because of personal or institutional interests, not loving the word of God, and acting in love, further destroys the church and denies that Christ is all and in all.³⁵

Theological Foundations

The Biblical Problem

The Apostle Paul instructed the church at Corinth all believers should agree, with no division and with the same mind.³⁶ The local church is supposed to be the example for unity, peace, and reconciliation. Yet the segregated church is seemingly more influenced by the culture than the Bible. Where are those outside of the African American culture supposed to worship in Avondale? How many souls are being lost because of this problem? Spiritual isolationism is credited to several things: the history of slavery, economics, tradition, and even styles of worship contribute. Many souls within the Avondale area beyond the African American community may

³² Chand, *Cracking Your Church's Culture Code*, 194.

³³ Anderson, *Gracism*, 66.

³⁴ Chand, *Cracking Your Church's Culture Code*, 189.

³⁵ Gal 3:13.

³⁶ I Cor 1:10.

not receive the spiritual guidance and love that all people should receive from a place of worship that honors the Almighty and loving God.

Differences can grow communities; however, cultural differences also divide them. The unfortunate reality is many see the same God in totally different ways. This section will explore theological foundations and biblical perspective for a multicultural church. Biblical diversity should motivate building churches to accommodate all Christians, where everyone feels welcome to come worship. Therefore, it is important to build churches based on inclusivity, not segregation. Churches create and foster interactive spaces across traditional cultures and social statuses.³⁷ The purpose is to promote social inclusion, both spiritually and socially.

Recruiting new members from diverse cultures is possible in the church. MHBC and other congregations must look to their religious traditions in all symbolic (e.g., sermons, rituals) and pragmatic ways, with hope changing certain things within the church may help them grow in reaching others. What is multiculturalism? According to Sullivan, concerning the theological and biblical context within the Church and society, “multiculturalism is a movement to establish a Church that brings people of different ethnicities, races, cultures, and colors together.”³⁸ The aim is to change the traditional Black Church structure to a more multicultural one. Several passages of Scripture will be explored to help consider how MHBC might build its efforts on a multicultural theology in the uniquely diverse social environment of Avondale.

³⁷ Penny Edgell Becker, “Making Inclusive Communities: Congregations and the ‘Problem’ of Race,” *Social Problems* 45, no. 4 (1998): 452.

³⁸ Ronald J. Sullivan, “The Biblical Urgency of Multiculturalism in the Black Church,” (PhD diss., Drew University, 2022), 3.

Created in the Image of God

What does it entail to be a creation of God's image? God said, "Let us create people in our image."³⁹ Human beings are considered made in God's image. *Imago Dei*, or 'image of God,' focuses on two things at the most fundamental level: the self-actualization of God through humankind and the caring nature of God towards humankind. K. A. Matthews states:

The crown of God's handiwork is human life. The narrative marks the prominence of this creative act in several ways: (1) the creation account shows an ascending order of significance with human life as the final, thus pinnacle, creative act; (2) of the creative acts, this is the only one preceded by divine deliberation ("Let us make" in v. 26); (3) this expression replaces the impersonal words spoken in the previous creation acts (e.g., "Let there be," "Let the earth"); (4) human life alone is created in the "image" of God and has the special assignment to rule over the created order (vv. 26–28); (5) the verb *bārā'* occurs three times in v. 27; (6) the event is given a longer description than previous ones; (7) in v. 27 the chiastic arrangement highlights the emphasis on "image"; and (8) unlike the animals, who are said to have come from the land in v. 24 (though v. 25 makes clear that God created them), mankind is referred to only as a direct creation of God.⁴⁰

The proclamation of the image of God recognizes the distinctive nature of humanity that allows God to dwell in people. It refers to having a conscious recognition of bearing God's image. It means God's designs and purposes are realized and made known through people, irrespective of color or culture. In the context of diversity, inclusivity, and the development of a multicultural church, the moral consequences of the *Imago Dei* doctrine are evident. If humans love God, they should also show love to one another because every human bears the image of God.

We can grasp humans' resemblance to God by contrasting it with that which does not resemble God, entities without awareness and practice of love for others. The Bible makes man a unity: acting, thinking, and feeling with his whole being. This living creature, then, not some

³⁹ Gen 1:26.

⁴⁰ K. A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, vol. 1A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 160.

distillation of him, is an expression of the eternal, incorporeal Creator. In terms of temporal, bodily, creaturely existence, one might attempt a transcription of epic into a sculpture, or a symphony into a sonnet. Likeness, in this sense, survived the fall since it is structural. If we are human, we are, by definition, in the image of God. But spiritual likeness, in a single word, love, can be present only where God and man are in fellowship; the fall destroyed it, and our redemption recreates and perfects it.⁴¹

Humans differ from other animals because they possess a reasoning structure that enables them to think about things and make independent choices. This freedom gives the person a sense of fullness and centeredness, allowing for self-actualization and involvement in a sacred world. God created everyone in his image. It shows there should be no discrimination among people because everyone represents God's image, despite the social divisions. This image should be emphasized far above any unfortunate incidents in history or ungodly incidents noted in our current reality.

Diversity Among the Nations

According to Gen 10-11, the Bible gives an accounting of how the nations and modern groups developed in society. What is the significance of this? Secular notions of the current Church are often predicated on disconnection from the past. The question of multiculturalism one must explore, and answer is how theology speaks to the challenges confronting the Church and society, today and in the future. Genesis 10 is called the Table of Nations. It is the account of seventy nations that came from Shem, Ham, and Japheth, Noah's sons. Whether the list of nations was intended to be exhaustive, or representative is not clear. This remarkable text sets

⁴¹ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 55.

Israel within the context of the world known to the Old Testament writers. It lists seventy nations (probably a symbolic round number; *cf.* the seventy sons of Jacob who went down to Egypt, Gen 46:27) to represent all the peoples of the world and is not an exhaustive list of all groups known in ancient Israel. It reads like a family tree, but all the relationships described may not be genealogical. In the ancient world, treaties and covenants led to people calling themselves brothers or sons of their treaty-partner. The Table of Nations describes the relationship between the different peoples; however, they may have originated historically.⁴²

Firstly, it is clear is all the nations descended from common ancestors. Secondly, it is clear they maintained distinct cultural differences. Thirdly, Gen 11 demonstrates what human beings are capable of if they are united in the wrong things. God commanded people after the flood, to “increase in number and fill the earth.”⁴³ They decided to come together and build a city with a tower that would reach the heavens. The tower was a symbol of power, for the purpose of making a name for themselves.⁴⁴ God confused their languages limiting their communication.⁴⁵ People gathered with others who spoke their common language and settled in various parts of the world. The sin of the people brought separation and disbursement of the nations but that did not change in any way God’s plan to redeem the nations and reconcile them to himself in the Messiah.

In Gen 12, God called Abram from his home in Ur of the Chaldees and changed his name to Abraham. “Now the Lord said to Abraham, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to that land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will

⁴² Gordon J. Wenham, “Genesis,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 67-68.

⁴³ Gen 9:1.

⁴⁴ Gen 11:4.

⁴⁵ Gen 11:7.

bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”⁴⁶ These two verses present seven statements to Abram that explore the aspects of God’s blessing. The first three and the fifth and sixth statements are promises of what God will do. The fourth statement is about Abram; the seventh about all peoples on earth.⁴⁷

1. *I will make you a great nation* (God’s promise).
2. *I will bless you* (God’s promise).
3. *I will make your name great* (God’s promise).
4. *Be a blessing* (an imperative, expressing an invitation to Abram).
5. *I will bless those who bless you* (God’s promise).
6. *I will curse those who treat you with contempt* (God’s promise).
7. *All the peoples of the earth will consider themselves blessed through you* (the peoples’ reaction).

The nation Israel would come from him, and they would be a blessing to all nations, because of Jesus the Messiah. The remainder of the Old Testament is the story of God dealing with the nation of Israel, their relationship to other nations, and the promise of Messiah.

Diversity in the First Century Church

The diversity in the first church would serve this project well to explore. Polhill gives a great picture of the first church in the New Testament.

The worldwide scope of the Christian witness is anticipated at Pentecost in the roll call of nations (vv. 9–11). To be sure, it was a question of only Jews and Jewish proselytes at this point, but they were Diaspora Jews and represented “every nation under heaven” (v. 5). Already the national barrier had been overcome. The racial barriers would be overcome, and the gospel would be shared with “every *people* under heaven” (alternate rendering of the Greek *ethnos*). Pentecost foreshadowed the worldwide mission. Finally, the pouring out of the Spirit has eschatological significance. It inaugurated the final period in God’s

⁴⁶ Gen 12:1-2.

⁴⁷ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, The Tyndale Commentary Series, ed. David G. Firth (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2019), 144-45.

plan of salvation. He acted decisively and definitely in Jesus Christ to create a people for his own. The Spirit is the sign of these final times. This central emphasis comprised a major part of Peter's sermon.⁴⁸

The interaction and growth of the church was complex. Some Christians from Jewish background insisted strongly on strict adherence to the Jewish laws. Others were open to welcome Gentiles without imposing the Jewish laws. This suggests there was diversity in early Christianity. Judaism was the Jewish religion in the first century. The Jews were different from other people because they believed there was only one God. They, like others, gave animal sacrifices and had a temple, located in Jerusalem. In addition, Jews believed God had appointed them for His worship and to obey the commands. They maintained a large distance from others. They were convinced that God had summoned them to be *a light to the Gentiles*, as a guide for the Gentiles to acknowledge the only God. It was part of the conflict between them and the Gentiles. Paul forged an alliance between the Jewish and the Gentile Church.⁴⁹ It was, however, if they could distance themselves from each other. Each kept the law differently.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, this interaction formed a foundation for the integrated Roman Empire that was soon to be.

Prejudice Addressed in the First Century Church

Regardless of how open-mindedly one sees oneself; no one is free from bias and prejudice. Everyone is encapsulated by events of their own experiences.⁵¹ According to Acts 10, God told Peter no person was holier than another due to the laws they followed. "You know, it is prohibited for a Jew to keep company with or visit foreigners," Peter explained to the assembly.

⁴⁸ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 106.

⁴⁹ Paul Carus, "Jew and Gentile in Early Christianity," *The Monist* (1901): 267-76.

⁵⁰ Gal 3:9-12.

⁵¹ Frank E. Eakin, *What Price Prejudice?: Christian Antisemitism in America* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998), 1.

What did Peter intend by that? First, we should recognize that it was common knowledge Jews did not associate with non-Jews. Peter would not begin his sentence “You know” if he did not. We can find this division between Jews and Gentiles throughout the Bible.⁵² Jews even refused to speak to non-Jews.⁵³ They also avoided entering buildings where foreigners were present.⁵⁴ Had God Almighty established such a rule? On the contrary, God always counselled Israel not to pursue the nations and their ways, but to keep company and learn from them. Peter made his understanding of the vision clear. God does not show favoritism (προσωπολήμπτης, *prosōpolēmtēs*).⁵⁵ Peter used this word, an “acceptor of faces,” to show God did not show preference among nationalities. The context of this statement was the Jewish prejudice against Gentiles. God does not show favoritism among nations, though He does favor those “who fear him and do what is right.”⁵⁶

God even instructed Israel to observe His laws so Gentiles might perceive God’s goodness and obey Him.⁵⁷ But, like the law of separation between Jew and Gentile, their instructors and rulers imposed more regulations on Israel. In other words, it was a custom, or a man-made law, that no Jew might visit or be in the company of a Gentile. In the vision to Peter about unclean animals, God showed he had dissolved previous barricades formerly set for isolation of His people from the neighboring countries. This required Peter to recognize Gentiles as complete members of the bigger Church and that the Lord allowed all animals to be

⁵² John 4:9.

⁵³ John 4:27.

⁵⁴ John 18:28.

⁵⁵ Dennis Gaertner, *Acts*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), Acts 10:34–43.

⁵⁶ Ps 147:11.

⁵⁷ Deut 4:6-8.

slaughtered for food. This allowed all Jewish Christians to no longer be bound by food laws and regulations set and heeded from the time of Moses.

Before he completed this thought, however, Paul breaks off midsentence to describe to his readers his own role in God's plan to place Gentile believers on the same footing with Jewish believers, in a newly constituted people. God has graciously given to Paul, along with other apostles and prophets, the insight that through Christ's death God was making Gentile believers one body together and heirs together with Jewish believers. This complete equality between Gentiles and Jews in one new people of God is something that neither Paul nor the other apostles and prophets could have known apart from God's revelation to them. It is in this sense a mystery to us all.

God gave Paul the responsibility of administering this mystery to the Gentiles and making known to them they could have a place in God's people if they believed the gospel. When God gave this responsibility to Paul, he was the least likely person God could have chosen for the task. This is how God works: He uses His great power in gracious ways to transform His enemies into His servants.⁵⁸

Diversity in Heaven

The throne and the Lamb are surrounded by an endless multitude.⁵⁹ They give God and the Lamb glory, proclaiming that God and the Lamb are the sources of salvation. The angels, elders, and four living beings bow down before the throne and adore God, setting off a chorus of praise. The verse jumps ahead in time to the end of the tribulation period, after countless Jews

⁵⁸ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 207-08.

⁵⁹ Rev 7:9-10.

and Gentiles placed their faith in Jesus. Every nation, tribe, people group, and language is represented. It is a powerful and moving reminder God loves everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, or background.⁶⁰ The gospel message is fundamentally anti-racist and anti-ethnic.⁶¹

Different Styles of Worship

One of the core limits to the integration of the Church is differences in worship and denominational practice. The Pentecostal movement in the United States rose in the post-civil rights era.⁶² This form of practice was attractive to African Americans because of its focus on personal religious experiences and connecting to God, opposed to the more structural, religion, and text focused approach during the slave era.⁶³ This charismatic approach called for the renewal of one's spirit in preparation for the end times. The church transformed its focus to works of grace, singing, sermons, offerings, testimonies, operating the gifts of the Spirit (e.g., faith healing), and scriptural readings. The approach to teaching is more spontaneous and with focus on orality. The messages tend to encourage prosperity of the soul, mind, and heart, against a backdrop of religious doctrine that calls for poverty, piety, and humility. Jonathan Langston Chism offers a connection between the affinity African Americans have with Pentecostalism and African religion.⁶⁴ This religious form of worship allows spirit possessions, visions, music, and dancing. This religious expression is not unique to black Pentecostals but exists in a variety of

⁶⁰ Gal 3:28.

⁶¹ 1 John 4:20.

⁶² Estrelida Y. Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 26.

⁶³ Alexander, *Black Fire*, 26-27.

⁶⁴ Jonathan Langston Chism, "'The Saints Go Marching': Black Pentecostal Critical Consciousness and the Political Protest Activism of Pastors and Leaders in the Church of God in Christ in the Civil Rights Era," *Pneuma* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2013), 425-7

other black denominations.⁶⁵ Some evangelicals denounce this doctrine, opting to follow the teachings of the Bible and adhere to protocols set in dogma and doctrine and passed on through generations. The theological differences across these denominations are problematic to integration.

Additionally, Marti presents variations in music tradition as a reason for racial segregation in church.⁶⁶ Worship music varies significantly and underlying assumptions about who can sing different genres of music for worship is a problem. Marti argues congregations that encourage music diversity in worship may be more integrated than those that do not.⁶⁷ The combination of Christian contemporary music and Black gospel may be effective in some quarters, but not in others.

Marti's findings can extend to emotions in evangelism.⁶⁸ Specific feeling rules affect behavior congregations consider appropriate in worship. The established behavioral norms indicate congregants must praise and sing within specific aspects to show their engagement. These feeling rules vary, depending on racial expression of church behavior and culture.⁶⁹ Within Black churches, loud music, talking in spirits, and verbalized responses to pastors' points is part of the normative standard expected. More conservative and majority white churches, especially in the southern states, tend to be less animated. Emotional experiences within

⁶⁵ Alexander, *Black Fire*, 26.

⁶⁶ Gerardo Marti, *Worship Across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation*, (Oxford: Oxford University, 2017), 14.

⁶⁷ Marti, *Worship Across the Racial Divide*, 14-15.

⁶⁸ Alexander, *Black Fire*, 113.

⁶⁹ Marti, "Worshipping Across the Racial Divide," 113-14.

evangelical churches also vary based on the doctrinal guidelines in use. Some prefer surface to deep acting in their demonstration of communication with the Holy Spirit according to Nelson.⁷⁰

Restrictions in acceptable behavioral norms is contentious and limits integration.⁷¹ Black churches, especially Pentecostal churches, have elaborate presentation of worship, praise, and animated singing, which may not be appealing to other cultural groups. While musicians and pastors are called to break down these barriers in worship, Kolb highlights cultural undertones based on socio-structural factors that may influence how acceptable changes and integration of worship may be.⁷² There is also greater correlation between emotionalism and religious practice. Riesebrodt and Konieczny say religion as an ideology tends to create a misrepresentation of social relations based on material conditions leading to alienation within class structures.⁷³ The expression of emotionalism in black churches offers comfort that they can potentially alleviate their suffering.⁷⁴ Norms in behavior such as testimonials, animated music, and worship is an expression of their liberation and joy in the winnings of the Lord. However, it keeps them unable to challenge forces in society and effect desirable change. The emotionalism presented in these churches, according to Rogers and Konieczny, tend to reflect the degree of hardship and living conditions.⁷⁵ Aspects of prayer, worship, and communal gatherings borrow from the existing social class, resulting in differences within racially divided churches.

⁷⁰ Timothy J. Nelson, "Sacrifice of Praise: Emotion and Collective Participation in an African-American Worship Service." *Sociology of Religion* 57, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 379-96.

⁷¹ Nelson, "Sacrifice of Praise," 380.

⁷² Kenneth H Kolb., "Emotional Subcultures," *Sociology Compass* 8, no. 11 (Summer 2014), 1235-236.

⁷³ Martin Riesebrodt and Mary Ellen Konieczny, "Sociology of Religion," *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005): 127.

⁷⁴ Kolb, "Emotional Subcultures," 1230.

⁷⁵ Megan Rogers and Mary Ellen Konieczny, "Does Religion Always Help the Poor?: Variations in Religion and Social Class in the West and Societies in the Global South," *Palgrave Communications* 4, no. 1 (2018): 4-6.

Different Theological Views

Not only worship prohibits embracing multicultural church; differences in theological views also play a key role. While all Christians profess to worship the same infinite God above, views of God drastically differs between color lines. Connecting theology to one's social existence, H. Richard Niebuhr asserts, "Though we direct our thought to eternal and transcendent beings, it is not eternal and transcendent; though we regard the universal, the image of the universal in our minds is not a universal image."⁷⁶ The image is a finite one, solely based on current existence. Theology is not universal language; it is interested language and thus is always a reflection of the goals and aspirations of a particular people in a definite social setting.⁷⁷ Unfortunately, American theologians from Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards to Richard Niebuhr and Schubert Ogden, both radicals and conservatives, at times interpreted the gospel according to the cultural and political interest of white people.⁷⁸

While the enslavement of African people was not the inception of Black Christianity, it plays a significant role in grasping the grass roots difference in theological interpretations. During slavery the social limitations of white theology was expressed in three main forms: (1) some white theologians ignored slavery as a theological issue; (2) others justified it; and (3) only a few spoke out against it.⁷⁹ Funneling theological views through an advantaged social structure could explain how whites accept unifying Jews and Gentiles of the Bible while ignoring the segregation of whites in superiority to Blacks. This school of thought also yields explanation for how white men could preach to justify the enslavement of African people, while worshiping a

⁷⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: MacMillian Co., 1941), 10.

⁷⁷ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 36.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Christ who came “to set free those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). Preaching spiritual liberations while ignoring physical liberations has appeared hypocritical and solely rooted in a social construct immersed in supremacy for years.

Just as Jesus the Christ was subject to the governmental authorities of his day, Black people have been subject to the governmental authorities since the beginning of modern colonialism. Yielding to the idea that theology is made up of a social construct, James Cone defines black theology as, “the story of Black people’s struggle for liberation in an extreme situation of oppression.”⁸⁰ White theologians built logical systems; Black folks told tales. Whites debated the validity of infant baptism or the issue of predestination and free will; Black people recited Bible stories about God leading the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, Joshua and the battle of Jericho, and the Hebrew children in the fiery furnace.⁸¹

Black theology often interprets Jesus the Christ as a Black man born to a poor family, reared in a poverty-stricken community, and wrongly sentenced to death for gaining influence and calling Himself a king. While this debate about the color and view of Scripture will likely never end, it is vital for understanding the differing theological views that inhibit embracing multicultural experience.

The purpose of this study is to unite all cultures in the Avondale community and welcome them to worship together at MHBC. In doing this, the theological response to both views must reflect the unifying forces of the Bible and the overwhelming love for fellow brothers and sister in Christ, revisiting the idea of how the Lord’s church intended to look. When examined in the original Greek, there are numerous interpretations of Jesus’ comments in Matt

⁸⁰ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 49.

⁸¹ Ibid.

16:18, “upon this rock I will build my church.” However, for the sake of this project, the focus is the church belongs to no one except Christ. Called the “chief cornerstone”⁸² and the “head of the church,”⁸³ it is clear the church belongs to Christ and should not segregate based on social constructs of any human race. The gospel of Jesus Christ ultimately unites all races. This project aims to embrace a Christo-centric prism while laying out a strategy to reflect the activity and intentions of Jesus referenced in the Bible. The life and legacy of Jesus Christ is the theological foundation. The Great Commission,⁸⁴ the Day of Pentecost,⁸⁵ Phillip and the Ethiopian Eunuch,⁸⁶ and Paul’s missionary journeys all speak to the idea of racial inclusion for the glory of God as well. In conclusion, Paul started the road to a build a multicultural church a long time ago. The goal then was to bridge the gap between the Jews and the Gentiles because none was holier than the other. Today, all called to serve by Christ should not divide across race, social class, or color. These are the factors that drive segregation in a modern church. Once segregation is investigated and solved, our churches will be places are acceptable to all Christians and, importantly, are an image of the diverse society we live in. The church also plays a leading role creating an inclusive society. Building churches that are multicultural is a big step toward uniting neighborhoods and communities.

Theoretical Foundations

Meeting the needs of MHBC and developing the strategy faces two major hurdles. In the following section the reader will examine two problematic areas concerning the inclusion of

⁸² I Pet 2:6-7.

⁸³ Eph 5:23.

⁸⁴ Matt 28.

⁸⁵ Acts 2.

⁸⁶ Acts 8.

multicultural church. While segregated congregations are nothing new, neither is the process of attacking the theorized causes of the divide: fixing problematic leadership and speaking to the sin problem that leads each negative action. This will shed light on what others see, what others have done, and how to carry the baton.

Problematic Leadership

Chand says church leadership has an imperative role in the determination of their church cultures.⁸⁷ Transformation of toxic church cultures requires actionable strategic planning focused on moving churches in the right direction. In many cases, leaders within churches influence church cultures toward demonstrably divisive and outside of the expectations of the Bible. The church's culture can lead to a lack of inclusivity. Poor leaders can impede the theological doctrine and practice their members share with others of differing beliefs, Dever offers.⁸⁸ For instance, the characterization of some ethnic communities as unworthy, dirty, or lower stature can impugn creating a cohesive church that presents the love of Christ.⁸⁹

In *What is A Healthy Church*, Dever finds the culture of church depends on the nature of music, preaching, and pastoral care, speaking directly to leadership.⁹⁰ Poor leadership and control practices creates a ripple effect making it impossible for churches to function as a family. Conflict, especially from poor leadership, can put the church in an antagonistic position and create impediments to change and better spiritual and social welfare of its members.⁹¹ It can also

⁸⁷ Chand, *Cracking Your Church's Culture Code*, 55.

⁸⁸ Mark Dever, *What Is a Healthy Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 137.

⁸⁹ Mark Hearn, *Technicolor: Inspiring Your Church to Embrace Multicultural Ministry* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 5-9.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹¹ Dever, *What Is a Healthy Church*, 56-57.

be the factor that leads them astray. When pastors align to political and social causes for reasons other than the exaltation of the Lord and the glory of His name it is a gap in leadership. For instance, some church leaders fail to call out the errors and sinful attitudes toward issues of race for fear of losing social and monetary support. As Duncan highlights, silence of church leaders in the face of injustice and protection of white privilege and fragility contributes poorly to racial integration.⁹² They fail to call their members to action as soldiers of Christ and activists of truth. Dever points out if the goal is to love all Christians, then one must commit to loving a small group of them with all their strengths and weaknesses, progressively being with them.⁹³ Leaders must be in the forefront of change towards acceptance and love of others.⁹⁴ Children of the Lord must have absolute commitment to transformative leadership encouraging departure from ideologies that do not abide by love.⁹⁵

Leaders must show understanding of the differences in cultural identity and the calling of Christ. Hill shows vastly problematic intersectionality of these factors.⁹⁶ Namely, pastors may build their doctrine on their cultural identity and, thus, fail to extend the love of Christ to outside social groups.⁹⁷ All cultures have leadership guilty of this sin. For instance, white superiority led some leaders in churches to discourage care and love for people of other races as though they are not living in God's plan.⁹⁸ Notable cases are the approach of the Catholic church to Jews, or the

⁹² Duncan, *Dear Church*, 45.

⁹³ Dever, *What Is A Healthy Church*, 36.

⁹⁴ Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Leading a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Seven Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 25.

⁹⁵ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 25-30.

⁹⁶ Hill and McNeil, *White Awake*, 90.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁹⁸ Duncan, *Dear Church*, 19.

use of religious teaching to justify genocide and war across parts of Africa and Europe.⁹⁹ The failure of church leaders to see beyond their agendas and their cultural identity is disadvantageous to the body of Christ and limits a wholesome family bound together by Christian love.¹⁰⁰

Leadership skills are necessary to develop multiculturalism and diversity.¹⁰¹ In church, interpretation of religious teaching leads either to meaningful integration efforts with other Christians or to divisive politics. Lerner and Davis discuss the concepts of multiculturalism as central to the growth of the church and the ability to get to heaven.¹⁰² The authors call for the recognition of the multicultural kingdom of God. Given that humans are created in the image of God, it is necessary for church leaders to see this as a call to action for greater good, irrespective of the ethnic, racial, and social background of the congregants. Worship and praise ought to reflect the love of God. Consequently, leaders must invest in skills and competences to help them challenge prejudices and narrowmindedness.¹⁰³

Lack of Spiritual Maturity

The old Christian cliché rings evident, “it’s not a skin problem, it’s a sin problem.” While many interpret this phrase to ignore the skin problem in America, one must understand outward actions all start on the inside and are spiritual issues. Things rot from the inside out; this is a hurdle for multicultural inclusiveness within MHBC. The Apostle Paul echoes this truth to the

⁹⁹ Anderson, *Gracism*, 114.

¹⁰⁰ Deymaz and Li, *Leading a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 14.

¹⁰¹ Maurer, *The Blended Church*, 3.

¹⁰² Josh Davis and Nikki Lerner, *Worship Together: in Your Church as in Heaven* (Nashville: Abingdon Publishing, 2015), 5.

¹⁰³ Maurer, *The Blended Church*, 158.

believers in Ephesus: the fight for believers is not of “flesh and blood,” but involves spiritual forces (Eph 6:12). Tony Evans defines this as spiritual reconciling: addressing the sin that caused the divide for the purpose of bonding together across racial lines, based on a shared commitment to Jesus Christ, with the goal of service to others.¹⁰⁴ Maurer also agrees, Racism is not a problem of skin but a problem of sin and preconceived ideas that will not change through only social efforts. However, dealing with it spiritually can make a change.¹⁰⁵

Reflecting on these assertions, the root problem is unseen spiritual warfare. Many have failed to examine exactly how subtle and deep this battle really is. The spiritual battle with sin significantly prohibits multicultural worship. Sin supports greed, pride, hate, cultural grudges, and much more. Salvation and spiritual maturity are the only way MHBC can embrace multicultural ministry, and it must start with honest repentance. This level of repentance should humbly admit the segregated church of today is not the biblical image of the Lord’s church. Leaning to fleshly understanding pushed MHBC for years to form God’s church their way. Growing spiritual maturity will allow the church to positively impact the culture in a spirit of unity, rather than allow the culture to negatively impact the church with a spirit of division.

In *Affinity, Identity, and Transcendence*, Marti asserts for churches to embrace multiculturalism successfully, they ought to retain three qualities: identity reorientation, affinity with the congregation, and ethnic transcendence.¹⁰⁶ Marti states affinity appears between church members in the presence of shared or common interests to bind the members together, offering grounds for further interaction. As a result, individuals form social clusters grounded on

¹⁰⁴ Evans, *Oneness Embraced*, 32.

¹⁰⁵ Maurer, *The Blended Church*, 111.

¹⁰⁶ Gerardo Marti, “Affinity, Identity, and Transcendence: The Experience of Religious Racial Integration in Diverse Congregations,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48, no.1 (March 2009): 53-68.

interests, outside of ethnicity or race.¹⁰⁷ The quality of identity reorientation happens when the *self* of a congregation member is grounded on shared identity established within the church. For instance, the members of the Mosaic Southern Baptist Church in Los Angeles were part of the entrepreneurial missionary team. Marti observed the church members searched for non-believers in different schools, homes, colors, and workplaces. Ethnic transcendence is the quality of shared religious identity of a member superseding ethnic affiliation.¹⁰⁸ Marti found participants consistently viewed religious identity above ethnic identity in the two churches.

In *Fluid Ethnicity and Ethnic Transcendence in Multiracial Churches*, Marti also noted the sociological concept of fluid ethnicity was an indicator of successful multiculturalism in churches. Despite earlier belief ethnicity is permanent, he realized people could alter their ethnic identities by gathering based on shared and mutual interests. In his theory, Marti noted ethnicity is contingent, negotiated, and volitional.¹⁰⁹ Multicultural churches practice fluid ethnicity by stressing other aspects of social status rather than ethnicity. In a multicultural church, leadership is grounded in the numerous layers of social identity to inspire and foster involvement in the congregation's different ministries. He contended the distinctive multiracial church's achievement is churches promote an inclusive religious identity, one that supplants ethnic identity. In fluid ethnicity theory, informal and formal mechanisms, building connections with the church members and actively participating in the congregation, enable churches to create a novel identity directed on novel interests. An example is church choir in which their

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 54.

¹⁰⁸ Marti, "Affinity, Identity, and Transcendence," 56.

¹⁰⁹ Gerardo Marti, "Fluid Ethnicity and Ethnic Transcendence in Multiracial Churches," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 1 (March 2008): 11-16.

collaborative work becomes more important than the racial identity or ethnicity of the individuals making up the group.

In *Strategic Ethnicity*, Stanczak discusses the theory behind the success of multiculturalism in churches. Using the Los Angeles Church of Christ, a successful multicultural church, as a case study Stanczak argued that success results from establishing a community via a common identity.¹¹⁰ This involves framing of the public, definition of their goals, the religious resources and structure of the organization, and members' experience. Successful multicultural churches implement a mutual multi-ethnic, multiracial identity. The leaders establish the grounds for successful growth and integration and reciprocal legitimacy by the approval of the religious authority for community integration. In turn, integration bestows authenticity back to religious assertions and church demands. In his theory, Stanczak examined the capability of the Los Angeles Church of Christ to establish a locality where ethnic and racial identities could be conferred on and represented by both the congregation and individual. This, however, barely insinuates race is unacknowledged around certain groups and ministries. Contrarily, it means strategic ethnicity employs the member's cultural and racial resources for organizational involvement and interpersonal interactions. Yet, the culturally and racially based church subsets hardly prevent the establishment of newly negotiated member identities. The theory asserts the purposeful goal is maintaining or perpetuating the church based on elevating membership and diversity.

⁸⁹ Gregory C. Stanczak, "Strategic Ethnicity: The Construction of Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic Religious Community," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, no. 5 (February 2007): 856-81.

Summary

Personal preference is a major factor in continuing segregated worship at MHBC. Nevertheless, with new leadership and different methods to speak to the core of the issues, sin, MHBC is on the road to becoming a multicultural church where all of God's children are welcome to worship.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

At the onset of this thesis project the overarching purpose was to transition the Mount Hermon Baptist Church, a rural traditional church in Southeastern Louisiana, into a multicultural congregation in which all cultures are welcome to worship Christ. While a major task to take on, this case study can be broken down in small steps. This chapters discusses the seven-module integration design and creation of the curriculum. Furthermore, it will explain the creation process for the focus group participants. Lastly, it will analyze each module in detail.

Selected Curriculum

There are several areas of the church that can be explored to transition a rural traditional African American church like Mount Hermon into a multicultural church. Accordingly, numerous resources on this topic were researched for the project. The modules for the case study were selected by drawing ideas and thoughts from a group of experts on the topic.

Module one is the *Purpose* of the church. This idea stems from Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Church*. Warren suggests it is not our job to create the purpose of the church but to discover the purpose of the church.¹ A clear purpose not only defines what a church does, it defines what it does not do.² Often those who hold the church by stewardship override the

¹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 98.

² *Ibid.*, 87.

original purpose of He who holds the church by ownership. Revisiting the purpose of the Mount Hermon Baptist Church will lead to a smoother transition into the multicultural context.

Module two in the transition plan is *Biblical Teaching*. An expert on the art and science of preaching, Joe H. Cothen asserts pastoral preaching requires a man to begin where he is with people as they are and share the Word of God in the strength of the Spirit to help them to become what they can be.³ Preaching for change is paramount in transitioning the church's context.

Module three of this case study will be *Styles of Worship*. In their book *Six Views on Exploring the Worship Spectrum*, Engle and Basden assert the Old Testament reveals varying emphases on worship in different periods of Israel's history, while the New Testament shows varying approaches to worship based on locations and cultures.⁴ A major component in transitioning MHBC to a multicultural congregation will be styles of worship. Making this change will embrace the idea of a worship community for all, and not just a church service for African Americans.

Module four is *Evangelism*. Donald McGavran proposes in *Building the Bridges of God* the heart of any church growth movement anywhere in the world is the great commission. The church must never lose sight of this perspective, encompassing the entire world and every human being.

The fifth module of the curriculum is *Fellowship*. According to megachurch pastor Robert Morris, a sense of belonging to community is one of the deepest and most fundamental

³ Joe H. Cothen and Jerry N. Barlow, *Equipped for Good Work: A Guide for Pastors*, 3rd ed.(Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1996), 82.

⁴ Paul E. Engle and Paul A. Basden, *Six Views On Exploring The Worship Spectrum* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 15.

human needs. Yet, a sense of community is harder and harder to build within the church in this day.⁵

The sixth module in the curriculum, taken from church expert, Thom S. Rainer, is *Hospitality*. The seventh and final module is *Community Engagement*. Programming is vital and needed at MHBC. Engaging the community with programs can not only be a blessing to every culture, but also be a pipeline for every culture to embrace the source of their help, Christ. People do not voluntarily jump into church; the church must penetrate the culture and community.⁶ These modules from the experts listed will constitute the curriculum for the case study.

Focus Group

For this project, the modified case study will consist of ten individuals from the Mount Hermon Baptist Church. Each person within the group must represent a different component of MHBC's congregation. The ten members each meet a different criterion: Hispanic (1), African American (1), White (1), age 65+ Hispanic (1), age 21 or below White (1), age 40-50 African American (1), Membership, one year or less White (1), Membership, ten or more years Hispanic (1), 1% Tax Bracket White (1), 10% Tax Bracket African American.⁷ This group will be the advocating voice for every angle of MHBC's membership. The purpose of the diversity of the focus group is to gain the accurate perspective from different background that include Hispanics, African Americans, and Whites. Using the church's confidential database, each person will be identified by category and solicited for a meeting via recruitment letter (See Appendix A). In the

⁵ Robert Morris, *The Blessed Church: The Simple Secrets to Growing the Church You Love* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2014), 195.

⁶ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 196.

⁷ Internal Revenue Service, "IRS Provides Tax Inflation Adjustments for Tax Year 2022," November 20, 2021, <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-provides-tax-inflation-adjustments-for-tax-year-2022>.

introductory meeting each person will receive an overview of the scope of the project and notified of requirements for participation. Once each person has agreed to move forward, everyone will be issued a consent form (see Appendix B) for their participation. Once all forms are signed and successfully submitted, all will begin the process with a preliminary questionnaire (see Appendix C). This form will not only assess their knowledge at the onset of the process, but the exact survey will be given again at the conclusion of this project to determine if the participants grew.

Seven- Module Curriculum

The seven-module curriculum consists of a seven-week journey. Each member must be available to meet seven consecutive Sundays for evening sessions of two hours per session, via Zoom. The Zoom platform will provide an opportunity for each participant to be open and honest about the frightening actions and practices that segregate worship experience.

Module 1: Purpose

The curriculum will begin with *purpose*. The purpose module is unique to the overall transition to multicultural context as a congregation. The purpose of MHBC must be rooted in the biblical text. Warren asserts that it is not the church's job to create purpose, but to discover it.⁸ Yielding to this school of thought, this module must first establish what it means to be the church of the Bible. Passages where the church is called to be the salt of the earth⁹ and the light of the world,¹⁰ will be examined to secure a biblical foundation for the purpose of the church. After the biblical foundation of the module has been set, the second objective is to dissect

⁸ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 98.

⁹ Matt 5:13-16.

¹⁰ I John 1:5-7.

MHBC and question what is *purpose driven* vs. *tradition*. Often the church has shredded biblical purpose for earthly tradition. The church should be innovative with the style of ministry, but the church must never alter the substance and purpose of it.¹¹ The focus group will engage in intense conversation to answer these questions: (1) Why does MHBC do this? (2) Is this rooted in the biblical purpose of the church? (3) By doing particular activities, who is getting the glory? (4) What are we to do as the church? (5) How are we to do it?

The third objective of this module will be establishing a contextual picture of how MHBC could communicate the purpose of the church in a way that all cultures will embrace. While purpose is vital, if communicated ineffectively it dies without reaching its full potential. The third objective will force the focus group to examine how to push the idea of a biblically purposed church to a diverse community with a segregated mindset, rooted in the social traditions of the deep South in America.

Module 2: Biblical Teaching

E.K. Bailey, co-author of *“Preaching in Black and White”* avows that the perception in Black churches is white preaching is unrelatable, cognitive, and abstract, moving to lectures while never moving the heart.¹² Wiersbe says, the white preacher’s approach is cognitive because they want to be good exegetes and rightly divide the word of truth, so people leave white churches with full notebooks and cold, empty hearts.¹³ The charge and challenge within this module for the focus group will be divided into three objectives. The first objective will be to understand and unite a multicultural hermeneutic of the biblical text. This objective would force

¹¹ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 98.

¹² E. K. Bailey and Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching in Black and White: What We Can Learn From Each Other* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 39.

¹³ *Ibid.*

the focus group to erase their social presuppositions and embrace the biblical text for its original meaning. While all cultures will testify, “this is already what we do,” it is far from the truth. Study Bibles, commentaries, scholarly articles, and sermons are all rooted in the author’s social construct. This objective will wrestle with texts, such as Gen 9 concerning Noah and his sons, and theological perspectives on slavery, justice, and equality for all cultures.

The second objective will be to examine to styles of preaching. Every culture has a style of preaching, ranging from the lecturing white preacher to the energetic Black preacher to the calm Vietnamese preacher. The presentation of the sermon will be examined in the hopes of merging all familiar styles to comprise one preaching style that all cultures will embrace. Under the umbrella of presentation, the focus group will also examine the physical presentation of the preacher pertaining to attire, asking questions: (1) Does the preacher’s attire attract or distract the listener? (2) Might the ascetics of the preacher’s attire offend a particular culture?

The last objective in this module will be to explore the idea of diversity in the preaching staff and the visiting preachers. Will a diverse preaching staff promote the idea of a progressive multicultural church? Should visiting ministers be of different nationalities to engage each ethnicity within the envisioned church? Exploring theological differences rooted in the culture, the myriad of preaching styles possible, and the diversity in the pulpit is the chief goal.

Module 3: Styles of Worship

The third module in the curriculum is *styles of worship*. In this module the focus group will be exposed to teaching inspired by Acts 2. While undergoing this module the biblical basis for unifying in worship will be the Day of Pentecost; different cultures were added to the church as a result of the hand of God working in one place. It is critically important to the outcome of this project that the focus group understand the power of God when woven through the

uniqueness of distinct cultures. Furthermore, this module will seek to evaluate the John chapter 4 encounter that Jesus (Jew) has with the unnamed woman at the well (Samaritan). The vital point will be how Jesus warrants us to combat the racial guidelines that our social constructs have presented and worship the Father in spirit and in truth with all men.

This module's objective is to spend quality time exploring the biblical concept of worship. The hope is that when exposed to the biblical concept of true worship and what it should look like, the focus group will see even more what God requires for His people in His house. The second objective in this module is to solicit the focus group to shine the light on MHBC's style of worship and examine the following: (1) Is this a biblical model of worship? (2) Is the MHBC style of worship conducive for all cultures? (3) What aspects of the worship experience has drawn silent but notable lines in the sand that prohibit other cultures? (4) Might attire, and even length and types of songs be a distraction for other cultures? This objective is simply for the MHBC focus group to recognize that there is a discrepancy in what worship will look like in heaven and what worship looks like at MHBC.

The third and final objective of this module is to create a solution to diversify the congregational worship style. Stating the problem is vital; however, there must be a plan of action in place. To reach buy-in from the membership representatives, a plan will be created to diversify the experience. This plan will include minor changes ranging from songs and tempos to attire and lighting during the worship experience. The last objective will also raise questions for the focus group, (1) Can a portion of a song be sung in another language? (2) Can attire that promotes one culture be dismissed? (3) How can we add a diversified look to the aesthetics of the worship experience?

Module 4: Evangelism

The resurrected Christ reunites with his disciples and gives them the Great Commission. After commissioning the disciples, Jesus promises them commitment and loyalty for their assignment. Matthew 28:20 says, “And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” The backbone of any Christ centered church is the ability to share Christ with others. Knowing this, in module four *evangelism* must be explained and taken seriously in the life of MHBC if the transition is going to be successful. While evangelistic methods already exist, to make this transition successful MHBC must reexamine the core of evangelism through a multicultural lens. The first objective of this module will be to walk the focus group through an in-dept study Acts 1:8, Acts 2, and Act 8. All three scriptures not only embrace the art of effective evangelism, but they are cross-cultural activity. After this objective, the focus group will have a clear understanding it is the believer’s responsibility to share Christ with all cultures; Jesus is a gift for everyone.

The second objective of this module will be to develop strong in-house ministries that are open and welcoming to those beyond the African American context. If the first objective of this module is successful and many are brought into the local church, the lack of cross-cultural ministries will deter the believer from getting involved in the local church ministry. One of the biggest fears of new members is not fitting. Ministries inside MHBC for all cultures to fit in will aid in gaining and retaining members from other cultures. The third objective this module will produce is evangelizing through technology. During the current pandemic, many churches are unable to engage in-person worship; the only avenue to engage people is the world wide web. This objective will solicit the focus group to wrestle with questions: (1) Who is my target audience when marketing MHBC? (2) Do the graphics only feature one cultural group? (3) Are

we producing material in only one familiar language or are we marketing events in different languages? These are just a few questions to embrace the idea that all marketing must be inviting to everyone, no matter the language or culture. Rainer states the social media presence of a church is vital because most guests go to a church website before they ever step foot on church property; what they find on the website could very well determine if they will be a guest of the church or not.¹⁴ Reimagining biblical evangelism as it is manifested across cultural lines, creating multicultural in-house ministries in the local church, and creating a marketing plan that targets all cultures will aid MHBC in transitioning to a multicultural congregation,

Module 5: Fellowship

The writer of Hebrews instructs the believer to never forsake the fellowship of the saints as many have done but encourage one another as the day approaches.¹⁵ In this module the first learning objective of the focus group will be to examine the core value and meaning of *koinonia*, translated *fellowship* in English. The second objective within the module will be to consider and set ecumenical worship services with other churches in the Avondale community. Cross pollinating with churches beyond the African American tradition and context will grant MHBC opportunity to be exposed to how others do church. This practice will also provide a context to what could be offensive while worshiping with others. Opening the doors of the church to other cultures by way of ecumenical fellowships will break the barrier of racial prejudices that hold strong today at MHBC.

The final objective in this module will explore celebrating a minimum of one holiday for each culture represented in the community. This is a unique act of love toward others, and it is

¹⁴ Thom S. Rainer, *Becoming A Welcoming Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2018), 37.

¹⁵ Heb 10:25.

dipped in intentionality. To do this, the focus group must first study the holidays of diverse cultures Christians can celebrate. The holidays could consist of Black History Month and Juneteenth for Black people, the Day of Commemoration for those of Jewish decent, Cinco de Mayo for Mexicans, etc.

Module 6: Hospitality

The next module to transition MHBC into a multicultural congregation is *hospitality*. The world is full of mean and hateful people and spirits; the last thing people desire to deal with at a church is people who behave like the world. Paul instructs the believers in Galatia, “as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”¹⁶ Yielding to this school of thought teaches the believer there should be a special dose of niceness in God’s house and when dealing with God’s people. Throughout the entire New Testament, the body of Christ is instructed to be hospitable.¹⁷

While a broad term, many define the act of being hospitable differently. With this clear understanding the first objective in this module will be to invite a trained customer service expert to teach the focus group about hospitality. Within this training the expert will inform the focus group of customer service for diverse cultures. The training will answer concerns: (1) What can be offensive to other cultures? (2) What vocabulary is universal? In his book *Cracking Your Church’s Culture*, Chand suggests words have the power to shape lives and organizations. Too often, however, leaders are not aware of their vocabulary and causally spoken statements can have profound effects.¹⁸

¹⁶ Gal 6:10.

¹⁷ Rom 12:13, Heb 13:2, 1 Pet 4:9.

¹⁸ Chand, *Cracking Your Church’s Culture*, 62.

The second objective within this final module will emphasize the MHBC facilities. If the church is going to transition to a multicultural congregation, the facility must embrace diverse cultures. The focus group will explore things like cleanliness and altering church signage. People of other cultures feel more comfortable an unfamiliar place with signs they can read in their native language. On the importance of signs in the facility, church expert Thom Rainer says guests do not know where to take their children, guests do not know where to park, and guests don't know where the restrooms are located.¹⁹ Another aspect of this second objective is flags. Seeing an American flag makes an American proud, safe, and welcomed. Not having a flag of one's native country may deter others from embracing the experience or make them feel left out. MHBC will explore hanging flags of other countries in the sanctuary, alongside the American flag. This will let every nationality feel represented and welcomed at MHBC.

The final objective of Module 6 is developing relationships with diverse personnel. The focus group will explore the pros and cons of a diverse greeting team stationed before and after each worship experience. This objective will allow MHBC to host meet and greet meetings after each worship service, including those who can speak other languages. An added notion is providing diverse cultural snacks.

Module 7: Community Engagement

Tony Evans, in his book *Oeness Embraced*, asserts because the church is the primary manifestation of the kingdom and is the primary means by which God is extending His kingdom rule in the world, local churches must be willing to work across racial and class lines to become intentional about comprehensive programs to connect both the spiritual and social.²⁰ The first

¹⁹ Rainer, *Becoming A Welcoming Church*, 37.

²⁰ Evans, *Oeness Embraced*, 290.

objective of this module will encourage the focus group to view the idea of civic engagement through a Christo-centric prism. This will require the focus group to spend time considering Jesus's comments in Matt 25 and his attitude of servanthood. The second objective leans towards a unified problem. What problem can the church solve in the Avondale community that all cultures can benefit from? Can MHBC find a different social problem in each of its surrounding cultures and address it? Attacking social problems in the community for the betterment of all cultures (e.g., food insecurities, educational programs for students, financial assistance, grants, and daycare) will move MHBC to embrace a more multicultural appeal. Only solving one culture's social issues will turn away opposing cultures.

After seeing the community through the lens of Jesus the Christ and discovering diversity in community problem solving, the final objective to transition this module will be to create cross cultural partnerships within the community. Efforts to embrace the progressive multicultural idea of MHBC must build partnerships outside the boundaries of the church. The focus group will be charged with examining how MHBC is connected in the community. The partnerships should include, but not be limited to, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Council for Latino Workplace Equity, political leaders in the community, the local school board, and the local police department. Fighting social issues will only unite MHBC across racial lines to fight spiritual issues and embrace a welcoming place to worship for all. Loving neighbors as a Christian consists of fighting for their betterment socially and spiritually.

This will require MHBC to move beyond the borders of the church to embrace a servanthood mentality, collect data of diverse social dilemmas, and build partnerships in the

community across social lines. Following this rubric will aid in more cultures feeling comfortable to worship within the walls of MHBC for the glory of God.

Summary

The curriculum will engage MHBC members in an opportunity to contribute to the transition process. This focus group will be strengthened, encouraged, and enlightened throughout this seven-week project. The hope is that the focus group will write what they have learned on the tables of their hearts and allow this spirit of change to permeate the entire congregation. Each member of the focus group will serve as an aid (liaison) in moving this process forward beyond the confines of this project. All will be eager to serve, and excited to maximize the potential that MHBC has once available for all cultures.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

The core objective of this thesis project was to evaluate different components of operation at MHBC. Knowing this, seven major categories that could potentially play a key role in transitioning a traditional African American church to a multicultural church were selected. Making a transition of this magnitude after the church's seventy plus year history is no easy task and could not be done solely by the leadership of the church. This was an operation that mandated the participation and thoughts of the lay members as well. An effective Bible-based church always accepts all cultures. In 1 Cor 9, Paul says he became all things to all people in hopes of winning them to Christ. This should be the goal and purpose of every Christian church, to win people to Christ at all costs. Winning souls to Christ can become a tedious task when cultural barriers are in place to prevent the gathering of souls solely based upon their culture.

For this problem to be addressed, the leadership and laity of MHBC must be reminded of the biblical mandate for the church and its practices. In addition, both leadership and lay members must take the time to explore the operations of the church in its current context. Intentional conversation must take place to manage this issue, and this conversation will serve as the springboard for any change that will take place within the local congregation.

Meeting with the Focus Group

For this project, the focus group consists of ten individuals from the MHBC. All selections were active members in good standings. The selection of this focus group was Spirit

led, yet rigorous. Each person within the group represented a different component of MHBC's congregation. The ten members of the focus group were categorized: Hispanic (1), African American (1), White (1), age 65+ Hispanic (1), age 21 or below White (1), age 40-50 African American (1), Membership, one year or less White (1), Membership, ten or more years Hispanic (1), 1% Tax Bracket White (1), 10% Tax Bracket African American. This group was the advocating voice for every angle of MHBC's membership. Using the church's confidential database, each person was identified per category, then solicited for a meeting via recruitment letter (See Appendix A). Once each person agreed to move forward, everyone was issued a consent form (See Appendix B) for their participation. Once all forms were signed and electronically submitted, the focus group was official. In the following days everyone received and successfully submitted a preliminary questionnaire (see Appendix C).

The focus group started meeting on Sunday, January 16, 2022, at 6:30 PM Central Standard Time. While intended to meet in person on the property of MHBC, due to the Coronavirus pandemic it was best to meet via Zoom for the safety of all participants. The focus group met for seven Sundays via Zoom with full participation. Each week a fresh component of the church was raised and explored via conversation.

After analyzing the data from the preliminary questionnaires, the goal was to create an intentional guide for each conversation. This process infused the project with more content, engaging an application portion for each week and a five-question follow-up questionnaire concluding each Sunday evening conversation. The seven categories of topics were:

- Module 1: Purpose
- Module 2: Biblical Teaching
- Module 3: Styles of Worship

- Module 4: Evangelism
- Module 5: Fellowship
- Module 6: Hospitality
- Module 7: Community Engagement

To maintain the integrity of the project all participants will be recorded as Participant #1, Participant #2, etc. All names, associations, and identifiable information beyond MHBC will remain confidential. For clarity of the reader, focus group participants are listed below based on categorization and how they will be referenced in the following pages.

- Participant #1- Hispanic (Cultural Selection)
- Participant #2- African American (Cultural Selection)
- Participant #3- White (Cultural Selection)
- Participant #4- Hispanic (Age 65+)
- Participant #5- White (Age 21 or Below)
- Participant #6- African American (Age 40-50)
- Participant #7- White (MHBC Membership one year or less)
- Participant #8- Hispanic (MHBC Membership ten years or more)
- Participant #9- White (1% Tax Bracket)
- Participant #10- African American (10% Tax Bracket)

Results of Module 1: Purpose

Merriam Webster defines purpose as the object or result aimed at; intention.¹ The purpose of the church had to be explored before looking at other areas of MHBC to make strides

¹ Merriam-Webster's School Dictionary, s.v., "Purpose."

toward the transition. To master the following modules without first exploring the purpose of the church could become unhelpful, as everything should be rooted in its purpose. Therefore, the question to begin the conversation was, “What does it mean to be the church?” Participant #9 opened the dialogue stating, “The purpose of the church is to be the reflection of Christ and his principles.” Participant #1 followed with a similar response suggesting, the difference between the building and the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The group gave responses based on personal opinion, then was taken through a journey describing the church from a biblical perspective. The selected scriptures were Jesus’s words in Matt 5:13-16. 1 John 1:5-7 and Eph 4:12 also conveyed to the focus group what it means to be the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God manifested the church centuries ago; the job of today’s church is not to change its purpose but to discover it and then live it out. After walking through the scriptures to explore the original meaning of the New Testament church, the next and vital question was posed, “Is MHBC biblically driven, or tradition driven?” Participant #4 stated, “MHBC has become more biblically purposed than traditionally driven since the inception of the current senior pastor.” MHBC still has traditionally driven actions (e.g., the order of worship or the diaconate community’s uniform on communion Sunday) MHBC caters to the biblical purpose more than to the traditions. All other opinions leaned heavily towards this idea.

A biblically based, purpose driven church is vital for identity and for growth. While many within the MHBC congregation hold strongly to the traditions of their forebears, it stunted growth, as traditions only reverence the wishes of the deceased. MHBC can go further in living out of purpose by allowing new things while remaining connected to the core of the situation. Walking in the biblical purpose allows the church to marry the purpose and message, but date the method. Methods change over time, but the message and purpose are still dictated by Christ.

Tradition only permits repeating what has already been done in the past. There is a movement toward being biblically based in MHBC's purpose. However, one cannot dismiss MHBC has not yet completely accomplished this. Traditions still linger.

The next issue that the focus group had to wrestle with was identifying the major hurdles to prevent MHBC from walking in the biblical purpose set in the Scriptures. Participant #3 stated, "Knowledge is the biggest hurdle for MHBC." In short, the people of the church have yet to break away from tradition because they lack knowledge of the biblical purpose of the church. Other participants in the focus group disagreed. Participant #2 affirmed that biblical sermons, bible studies, small groups, outreach activities, and more have made the church's purpose evident. Most agreed that those who lack the knowledge of the church's biblical purpose have decided not to know. The most popular and noteworthy response to the question of hurdles from Participant #9. The unfortunate reality is some MHBC members interpret the biblical purpose as a threat because it is not their personal purpose. Ownership and stewardship roles have been redefined and many abide by their rules, not those of the Lord. Past comments have been, "They are coming to take over," or, "I will no longer have my position." Change creates fear and fear has been a major hurdle to relinquishing tradition and following purpose.

MHBC has a purpose statement. No one in the focus group could recite it word for word. This moment in the conversation was revealing. The focus group knew the biblical purpose of the New Testament church, but they did not know MHBC's purpose in context. The purpose and vision statement of MHBC:

Purpose Statement: The Mount Hermon Baptist Church is committed to bringing men and women who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ into fellowship with Him and into responsible church membership through evangelism and discipleship.

Vision Statement: Building Families for Christ.

Going deeper into the multicultural aspect of the conversation, the focus group was asked, “Are all cultures included inside of the purpose statement? If not, what wording should change?” Participant #8 produced a thought-provoking response. “While all cultures are included in the purpose statement, all cultures are not included in the carrying out of the purpose statement.” Processing this statement took a moment for the focus group because it meant MHBC says one thing on paper but does something different in its actions.

So many strong, yet conflicting thoughts have come forth in the conversation thus far. Is MHBC ready to become a multicultural church? Sadly, the overarching thought of the focus group was a resounding no. The entire focus group and church itself knows the biblical mandate to accept and worship with all cultures, yet many have dismissed this truth. This school of thought unfortunately led back to an unwillingness to change. Clearly power and position seem more valuable to some than God’s purpose for his church. Overall, MHBC has a biblical focus, but unknown to the membership, which further explains why other cultures are not as welcomed to the worship experience. In the following chapter there are action items that will be infused in hopes of having MHBC walk out their biblical purpose in word and in deed.

Results of Module 2: Biblical Teaching

After a spirited conversation on the purpose of MHBC and its pros and cons related to a multicultural group of people, the next module topic was biblical teaching. The one inquiry that opened the door for this module is, “What does it mean to have a multicultural hermeneutic?” Many did not have a clear understanding of the term hermeneutics, nor did they have a working concept of the phrase multicultural hermeneutic. In the book *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* hermeneutics is described as the task of explaining the meaning of the Scriptures.

The word derives from the Greek verb form of *hermeneia*, which means to interpret or to translate, while the noun *hermeneia* means interpretation or translations.²

Using this definition, the focus group paused to consider a tough reality: it is not their job to give meaning to the Bible, but to discover the meaning of the original writers. One's current culture should never dictate how one interpret the Bible. The interpretation has only one meaning and it is the same meaning today as centuries ago. Moving forward, the question was revamped to inquire how this historical meaning can be preached in a way multicultural groups can receive with love and clarity?

Participant #10 shared, "The biblical text is cultural, yet colorless, and the things the text speaks of should not be dipped in our current culture or financial stability but standing on the truth of the biblical text in its original culture." Jesus is the example because He died for all without considering anyone's educational level, culture, or tax bracket. This quickly became the dominant and overwhelming response of the focus group. Participant #10 followed the comment expressing, "To sit under a leader that formulates sermons with a current day poverty stricken hermeneutic would be very disturbing, as many within the MHBC congregation are a long way from the poverty line." Participant #7 followed up the previous idea that embracing the biblical text contextually will supersede any current context and eventually minister to everyone, no matter the culture.

Delivering the text based upon its original context, not the current context, will serve as a proactive method. In short, whatever the Bible meant when first written is the same thing is means now centuries later. Readers must be cautious to separate the interpretation of the text and

² William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1993), 4.

the application in the text: how God deemed His word be understood throughout the ages and how the rich timeless principles can be applied to one's current day and time. Shifting the conversation to spotlight MHBC, the next task for the focus group was to describe the preaching/teaching style at MHBC. The first response to this question separated preaching and teaching. Participant #9, who is "not a Bible scholar" shared that "the preaching is brief, clear, and portable." However, the weekly small groups are slightly uncomfortable because questions are asked "only Bible scholars would know." Participant #3 presented the opposite opinion, suggesting that the teaching is great, but the preaching is not long enough or heavy enough. The comment leaned to the thought of the proclaimer missing valuable points spotted in their study commentaries at home. A credentialed teacher, Participant #7 stated, "The preaching and teaching style is colorful, clear, and captivating with animation." Shifting to a more culturally sensitive portion of the conversation, an uncomfortable question was presented. "While serving a predominantly African American congregation and community, where is the middle ground between becoming too engulfed in the African American culture and the total opposite of not embracing it at all?" Silence permeated the Zoom room. Participant #5 expressed, "To create a safe space is to sell yourself short, as the Bible is colorless in terms of putting one culture above the others as it relates to the color of one's skin." Eager to respond, Participant #10 stated, "As a Black preacher, you cannot help but be a Black preacher." While a sensitive topic, Participant #3 asked, "What does it mean to be a Black preacher beyond one's pigmentation?" No one had a response that was valid beyond their personal definitions. At this point, the phrases multicultural hermeneutic and Black preacher (beyond pigmentation) were abolished from the conversation.

"How are we as African Americans not to celebrate our culture and our way while in our church?" While interpreted in a possessive tone, this question posed by Participant #6 was valid

to an extent. However, it must be clear it is the church of the Lord Jesus. The church is human by stewardship but Christ's by ownership. Participant #4 raised the reminder that their cultural holidays (such as Cinco de Mayo) were never observed during their tenure at MHBC. The mixing of comments posed questions that many traditional African American churches must wrestle with. Is the preacher in the pulpit a teacher of cultural history or biblical history? And secondly, should the church celebrate cultural holidays? If so, which ones? This was vital to the conversation because cultural holidays to be celebrated within the confines of the church can become very unclear, as everyone has cultural holidays to celebrate except white members. Participant #3 stated that the schools and other institutions do an excellent job teaching history and said, "Leave that to them and teach me Bible."

Venturing off into anything other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the pulpit has served to be a dangerous road to failure and heresy. It is the Gospel that saves, not the revisiting of what any culture has survived or done to another culture. Even so, diversity in the preaching staff and visiting preachers can be helpful as well. One gospel preached by a diverse preaching staff and visiting ministers opens the idea of the gospel even the more. The gospel is for all to hear and for all to preach. Furthermore, when other cultures see the diversity on MHBC's staff it will compel other cultures to join in. By human nature, people feel more comfortable attending a church where they see their culture present. These ideas were discussed and placed in an application form to help MHBC move forward in their quest to shift the biblical preaching and teaching to a more welcoming encounter for all cultures.

Results of Module 3: Styles of Worship

Singing songs and praises to the Lord is vital in any church experience. Module 3 was geared to the style of worship, how songs are presented within MHBC context. For the sake of

this project there is a demarcation between the act of worship and the moment of singing called *praise and worship* preceding the biblical proclamation. The springboard for this conversation was the question, “How important is praise and worship to the church experience?” Participant #1 labeled it “a spiritual cleansing.” Participant #5 stated, “The segment of praise and worship is a way to temporarily lift the weight of the world off of their shoulder and solely focus of God.” Participants #7 and #8 formulated their response in terms of food: the sermon as the meat; the praise and worship was the appetizer to prepare them for the main dish.

The praise and worship segment in today’s culture often carries with it man-made ideas that may not be biblical. For example, defining praise and worship on a tempo (praise is up-tempo and worship is slower tempo) or suggesting that this short segment allows the presences of an omnipotent God to be invited into the experience. God is everywhere at the same time and a feeble song presentation is not grounds for Him to be invited into the experience. After the group gave personal opinions on this topic, a biblical foundation was set. The focus group was taken through a brief biblical journey of 1 Chron 16, learning how the priests ministered before the Ark. John 4 was raised to explore the idea of worshipping in spirit and in truth. In addition, 1 Cor 14:26 showed how vital it is for brothers and sisters in Christ to gather to perform this act of praise and worship routinely.

The beginning for this module’s dialogue was, “How would you describe the praise and worship segment at MHBC?” Participant #4 immediately responded how “effective and diverse” the segment is. Following comments were not as pleasant. Participant #3 conducted a period of reflection glancing over the segment’s history at MHBC. This comparison was described as “chaotic.” Participant #3 stated they “often wonder if the singers are in place for compensation, as their presentation fails to give off a spirit led experience.” Participant #8 shocked the room by

informing the group they skip praise and worship regularly. Participant #7 described the praise and worship segment at MHBC as “pay to praise.” The dominant interpretation was that the singers are singing solely for a paycheck and nothing more.

Participant #1 also made it known that while virtual due to the pandemic, they log on fifteen minutes late simply to avoid the praise and worship segment every Sunday because it is not consistent in style or personnel. The petition of Participant #10 was reembracing of the old songs. Connection issues seemed to be the concern of the older generation of MHBC members. While making attempts to keep the segment fresh with new material, it can become difficult for the older generation.

With such a distasteful view, the question on the floor was, “Might the segment be conducive to other cultures?” An overwhelming “no” was the response. Participant #8 shared MHBC has become extremely biased in worship, most songs presented for the African American community. When asked if there should be more diversity within the praise and worship component, the overwhelming response was “yes.” It was clear for hopes of having the church match the community’s diverse population the segment must look and sound different: different groups, different sounds, different instruments, and different languages for portions of songs. Instrumental segments were even a suggestion.

The aesthetics of the experience also played a significant role in compelling of other cultures. It was at this moment in the conversation that the group realized that certain attire could deter other cultures and age groups. If the attire is too dressy, it turns off the younger members; if the attire is too urban, the older crowd is distracted. If the attire is geared towards one culture, it deters those of other cultures.

The dominant thought was that if the Holy Spirit is evident in the worship experience the length of the singing should not be an issue. Before crafting a plan of action for this module, the question was geared toward the hurdles that could prevent MHBC from shifting the segment to reach the levels of diversity discussed in this conversation. Participant #3 expressed, “The largest hurdle in this module is the mindset of the member and the willingness to accept the shift to praise and worship that’s beyond what they are accustomed to.” The whole focus group was asked, “Can you engage worship if by chance you are unfamiliar with the words to the song?” Participant #8 stated, “The larger multicultural churches do not survey the crowds to solicit what they desire to hear in their praise and worship segment. Rather, they pick colorless songs that focus all hearts and minds on Christ and not culture.”

Another hurdle was ignorance of the music ministry leadership. If the leadership is not open and aware of the variety of styles that could cater to all cultures, it becomes an issue. While quiet for this module, Participant #9 stated, “The group and the church in its entirety must learn how to heighten tolerance and accept differences. If we’re going to invite other cultures in, these are things we must first master amongst each other.” So often many make suggestions that are solely based upon personal preferences. However, this setting is a corporate one and it must minister to more than just African Americans. This conversation yielded good insight concerning the praise and worship at MHBC. The entire focus group thought the segment of praise and worship is important to experience. However, the friction within the focus group was not the concept of praise and worship, but how it is conducted at MHBC. In the following chapter a plan of action to better the praise and worship segment to better cater to all cultures will be presented.

Results of Module 4: Evangelism

In the Great Commission, the resurrected Jesus gave his disciples instructions to make disciples of all nations. In Acts Chapter 1, Luke wrote the disciples should go to a place called Jerusalem and wait. They were to wait until the power of the Holy Spirit came upon them. When revealed, this Spirit was given to empower them to be the witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ in all parts of the known world. Neither text places any cultural barrier on who the believers should evangelize. This is to convey the Lord is no respecter of persons to the disciples, and the readers. No matter the culture or color of skin, all need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

Evangelism is a vital part of the universal church, and it must play a vibrant role in transitioning a traditional African American church to a multicultural church where all are welcome to worship. Module 4 is where this issue was explored. As in the previous conversations the module must be biblically based. The focus group went through a brief exploration of Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8, 8; 1 Cor 9:22; and 2 Cor 5:20. The Scriptures gave the group a biblical idea of the command to evangelize and the unlimited bounds of evangelism concerning culture. To ensure that each participant in the focus group had a clear understanding of the believer's responsibility, they each explained evangelism in their own words. Participant #5 stated, "It is our duty to make disciples by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Participant #4 carried a similar response but added "all cultures" to the responsibility. The entire group thought if Jesus is the key figure and factor, the culture of the lost does not matter.

The follow-up question to the group was, "Do you think MHBC has a culture of evangelism? If not, explain." The dominant response of the group was swift. They all said, "no." While performed in many ways at MHBC, evangelism is not something the church prioritizes. It is cause for concern. However, this was a vital and healthy conversation to make the transition

possible. A problem must be honestly identified before it can be corrected. (For the sake of the reader, please note this is not to suggest that no types of evangelism are employed at MHBC, but it is not what the church is known for in the Avondale community. Module 7, community engagement, was the response given as the identity of MHBC.)

Many people make assessments of MHBC before experiencing a worship encounter. The graphics, website and other social media platforms influence how and whom the church evangelizes. The questions to the focus group were, “What does the social media, graphics and website say to the public? If you were to glance over these items what message would be derived from a simple look?” “Warm, welcoming, inviting, and youthfulness” are the words Participant #9 used to describe the platforms and graphics. Participant #1 stated the graphics, videos, and all other social media activities have a stronger pull to the younger generations. In a world so easily offended by everything, it was vital to spend time exploring how MHBC’s graphics and social media platforms can be offensive to other cultures outside of African Americans. If one of the avenues MHBC evangelizes through is social media platforms, something offensive could be the determining factor of someone attending the church or even accepting Christ. Participant #3 shared, “Restrictions in marketing can be considered offensive to other cultures. Such as, but not limited to, bias colors, phrases or strict attires.” Criteria through marketing can become offensive very easily. Participants #1, #4, and #8 all agreed having nothing placed in Spanish was slightly offensive to the Hispanic community. When people do not see their native language evident it often gives the idea that they are not welcome.

Shifting to another aspect of evangelism, the next question in the conversation was, “As a member of MHBC do you feel equipped to evangelize other cultures?” Participant #10 stated high level of comfort evangelizing other cultures. A majority of the focus group leaned towards a

high level of comfort. Participants #7 and #9 said no. But most of the focus group, though diverse in culture, were elite and scholarly in their knowledge of the Bible. The phrase *average member* would not describe the focus group. Many members have an awareness of the responsibility to share Christ but lack the tools and courage to do so. While many will not embrace this fact, it is why many Christians refrain from evangelizing.

Concerning cross-cultural evangelism at MHBC, the biggest hurdle, according to the focus group, was arrogance. One of the significant issues in the New Testament Jesus disputed so often was the Jewish arrogance displayed when dealing with non-Jewish people. Subscribing to a spirit of humility would not only empowers the person, but also empowers the Spirit of God within them. In the kingdom of God there are no popularity contests. All are sinners saved by grace. Humility that with understanding grace should be evident in sharing of the Gospel. While not disputed, Participant #6 presented the idea that the major hurdle for MHBC in cross-cultural evangelism is comfort in the current culture. When people become comfortable doing things the way they always have, even a biblical correction is difficult to embrace. In conclusion, evangelism must be a vital part of transition to a multicultural church. The focus group had a healthy dialogue and produced several methods of application.

Results of Module 5: Fellowship

Psalms 133:1 says, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” This is one of the many places in Scripture to pronounce the idea of Christian unity. The Module 5 conversation was geared toward fellowship. A better term to express this truth is *koinonia*. The word *koinonia* is intimate spiritual communion and participative sharing

in a common religious commitment and spiritual community.³ The focus group explored *koinonia* to jumpstart the conversation, setting a biblical foundation for this idea. The focus group went through a brief study of New Testament passages: 1 Thess 5:11, Gal 6:2, and Heb 10:25.

After setting a biblical foundation for the conversation, the group focused on the church's level of fellowship related to internal ministries and with local churches of different cultures. The resounding response from the entire focus group was a low rating, on a scale from 1-10, grading MHBC's fellowship with different cultures inside and outside of the local churches in the Avondale community. The myriad of churches mirror the diverse cultures, but the cultured do not intentionally fellowship with the others. The whites fellowship with the those of their culture. The Asians fellowship with those of their culture. The Black people fellowship with those of their culture. Paths rarely cross. While there are sprinkles of mixing cultures in MHBC and other local churches segregated worship is strongly evident. MHBC has mastered the art of building the Lord's church for only a small portion of the Lord's children. The amazing reality is MHBC anticipates reaching an eternal multicultural church in heaven while segregating the church here on earth. Worse, because segregated worship has been in place for so long, it is perfectly acceptable in the minds of many.

One point of the discussion focused on the make-up of the internal ministries. The question was posed, "Do in-house ministries cater to the fellowship of those not African American?" Again, the overwhelming response was "no." When asked why, Participant #8 stated, "If it is not broken why fix it?" This response was very disturbing because it assumes an unbiblical church is still right in the eyes of some members. Unfortunately, culturally right ideas

³ "Merriam-Webster's School Dictionary, s.v. "koinonia."

are considered correct, even if not in the Bible. Participant #1 asserted, “MHBC is very territorial when it comes to worship and the majority of the membership embrace an ‘our way or the highway’ mindset.” “We are just different,” said Participant #10. Participant #9 followed, “MHBC is not as sensitive to the spirit of Christ as it appears to be. If so, the same uniting spirit that Jesus the Christ carried the church would carry as well.”

Module 5 was one of the most concerning modules because it appears that some of MHBC deems different as defiant. Furthermore, it was shocking to note all cultures benefited through the outreach arm of the church, yet worship experience are intentionally isolated. Perplexingly, MHBC serves externally those they refuse to worship with internally. At no point in the church’s history has MHBC fellowshiped with other cultural churches in the local community. This is a major barrier. After spotlighting how the Biblical issue addresses this, the focus group shifted attention to the possibility of engaging activities with other local churches of different cultures. Participant #7 suggested community service projects and joint worship experiences. Participant #3 agreed and added the possibility of picnics. Being friendly is not only biblical but vital to building the kingdom of God. Another to be a friendly church is to observe and celebrate different holidays outside of the church. In an earlier module the celebration of cultural holidays inside of the worship experience became a sensitive topic. However, Participant #5 suggested moving the celebration to an external atmosphere, along with joint events to help the community. Participant #8 believed events like the local night out against crime event would be great to join with others, since crime in the local area effects all cultures.

These ideas were all great suggestions. To narrow the focus back on internal fellowship at MHBC the group was asked, “What ministries could be adjusted to make them more welcoming?” Participant #3 led by recommending diversity within the ministries and leadership.

Participant #7 followed up with ministry fellowship outings: fishing, camping, lunches, etc. The most interesting observation, posited by Participant #9 was people veer away from cultures that are unfamiliar. Accordingly, the real question is, “How do we make the African American culture familiar beyond external activities and internal worship experiences?” Participant #3 shouted “literature.” The group agreed adding literature to inform about other cultures may lower the fear of fellowshiping with each other. More knowledge leads to less fear.

While not a lengthy conversation, the disconnect in MHBC’s fellowship methods was evident. The focus group suggested many ways, the church could embrace the biblical fellowship with other cultures both spiritually and beyond the boundaries of the church. The concluding chapter shares these thoughts.

Results of Module 6: Hospitality

After five weeks of intentional gathering the next conversation for focus group was about hospitality. At the onset, it was made clear the conversation was not intended to attack MHBC’s Hospitality Ministry, but to intentionally look at the overall hospitality of the church, so that no one would be offended.

As in every session, the first item on the agenda was prayer. Following prayer was a short recap of the overall objective of the project and a brief review of previous conversations. The prompt for Module 6 was, “In your own words, define hospitality.” Participant #4 stated, “Making people as comfortable as possible in their attempts to worship at MHBC.” While all other definitions were valid and honest, Participant #9 contributed an intellectual definition to add depth to the term, “Hospitality is an atmosphere! This involves creating an atmosphere that conveys not only a welcoming spirit but an appreciative approach for how it is that the individual intends to worship.” The focus group agreed that the latter definition was more fitting.

After personal definitions on the topic of hospitality, the focus group went through a brief exploration of what the Bible says about hospitality. The biblical foundations for this module were John 1:5-8, 13:3; Matt 25:34-46; Eph 6:7, and Heb 13:2. Continuing the conversation, the group discussed, “Should the signage of and in the church be printed in different languages? If so, which languages?” This question made the diverse perspective of our congregation evident, as participants #1, #4, and #8 all championed signage and literature of the church in Spanish as well. All other participants supported the idea of adding Spanish to the literature except Participant #2. They said, “This is America, our country! Hopefully if you decide to come to our church you need to learn how to speak our language. We should only change things after other cultures make a commitment to abide by our rules.” Of course, this sparked a response of disagreement from the entire group. Participant #8 stated, “Many people have no control of where they landed, as some were just born here. MHBC should accommodate those people.” All participants (except participant #2) agreed the African American church is one of the only major entities that has failed to accommodate the language barriers of other cultures. The conversation presented evidence that, at the bare minimum, Spanish should be added to all signage and literature of MHBC, as this is the cultural practice in banks, medical facilities, shopping venues, and even school curriculum. Furthermore, Participant #9 stated that they knew a fair amount of sign language, and when attempted at MHBC, the deaf community appreciated any effort to speak to them in a language they could understand.

After fostering the addition of languages to signage and other literature, the next question was, “Using signs only, how difficult is it to navigate throughout the MHBC facility?” Long tenured members agreed it was not difficult at all. Yet, others quickly added their easy navigation was because of tenure and not signage. Participant #7 gave a personal account of how

signage affected them. Participant #7 also shared there were absolutely no signs on or leading to the business offices, the pastor's office, the fellowship hall, the nonprofit offices, nor the church's conference room. This observation left everyone shocked and speechless, further pressing the point that navigating around the church is not as easy to new members or visiting individuals. Before shifting in the conversation Participant #9 stated that upon visiting the church for the first time, there was no available sign for the Wi-Fi code and access, making it difficult to download the Bible application on the phone or share the experience via social media. These were all great observations that proved that proper signage (language and placement) is an area that needed improvement for MHBC to progress in hospitality.

The focus group then was asked to place themselves into the position of another culture while answering, "If you were of another culture, would you feel comfortable worshipping and/or joining the MHBC family?" Participant #5 stated, "If I were not raised in the Black community, I would not feel comfortable in MHBC at all because I didn't initially see me when I walked in." Participant #10 took a bolder approach suggesting that color is not an issue at MHBC and "Blacks are more friendly and open to other cultures than other cultures are to us. And unless someone walks inside the church with a white hood draped over their face they would be welcomed." It is important to note that majority of the focus group leaned toward the perspective of participant #5. Before shifting to the next question, the subject of the "pastor's heart" was brought up in the conversation. The group agreed the starting point of hospitality was not the church but the parking lot. Furthermore, the heart of hospitality forms from the heart of the pastor and his teaching. While it is every pastor's dream to have the entire church echo the heart of the pastor, unfortunately things do not always go that way. Participant #6 added, "an angel in the pulpit and a devil at the door is never a good marriage." Participants recanted

experiences in which they encountered MHBC greeters and ushers being callous and offensive to those who might not “fit the church-goer profile.” Others supported this comment with personal encounters of similar behavior.

The conversation took a turn towards self-examination. Participant #1 said, “Hospitality starts at home” (home meaning MHBC). The consensus of the group was for MHBC to be hospitable to others, they first must learn to be hospitable to each other. From this point the conversation of hospitality was open and honest. From the comments of all participants, it became evident hospitality is not where it needs to be, because the internal hospitality is lacking. The apparent cause of internal friction is a generational battle between the younger generation and the older generation. In short, MHBC cannot be nice to other cultures because they have not mastered being nice to individuals currently within the church. This friction was attributed to a fear of being replaced.

This warrants attention as core factor regarding the lack of internal hospitality. At this point in the conversation that all participants understood they could not be nice to others because they were not nice to each other. In any sector of life (especially the Black church) while some view Black people as a threat of harm, Blacks (not all) see other cultures within the church as a threat of replacement. The mindset that welcoming new people leads to being replaced provokes inhospitable behavior. The dialogue then explored ideas of possible generational insecurities.

In conclusion, the objective of this conversation was to explore the hospitality. This module explored the personal definitions of hospitality, the biblical construct of hospitality, and the root cause fractured hospitality at MHBC. The focus group gave several ways the church could enhance their overall hospitality to be more accommodating to other cultures.

Results of Module 7: Community Engagement

Jesus Christ provides a phenomenal approach to how believers should deal with the community in Matthew 25:34-40. This text along, with the book of Nehemiah served as the biblical foundation for the conversation in this module. It would be unfortunate for MHBC to never help its diverse community in any way. Jesus tended to spend more time in the community than among religious people. A love for the community is at the core of Jesus' ministry and it should be the core of every church's ministry as well, particularly MHBC.

As with every conversation thus far, the microscope focused on MHBC. The module continued the focus group's assessment of the church's community engagement. Participant #4 rated MHBC's community engagement a five on a scale from 1-10. Participant #2 followed up with a rating of seven. The rationale for this higher rating was the list of community activities MHBC currently conducts. Participant #10 rated the community engagement eight. Every member of the focus group gave their own ratings. Seventy-five percent of the group chose ratings of 8 or higher. Reasons included food drives, bill assistance programs, summer camps, toy giveaways, S.T.E.M. programing, benevolence offerings, charitable donations to health organizations, and adoptions of local schools.

Next the group identified general issues in the Avondale community that negatively impact all cultures. In MHBC's efforts to strengthen relationship with the community, the church must first be aware of the struggles the local community is facing. Participant #4 eagerly expressed one major issue in the local community that negatively impacts all cultures is the lack of grocery store options. Avondale has no establishments to purchase groceries. Crime was Participant #6's response This tied back in the low economics in the area. When people do not feel safe, they do not create businesses or support businesses. If businesses in the Avondale

community disappear due to high crime, jobs and dollars leave the community. Participant #9 stated Avondale has many cultures but nothing in the community to unite the cultures together. There are no unifying athletic facilities, no movie theaters, no art galleries, nor are there any health facilities.

After laying all concerns on the table for consideration, this raised the question, “How could the nonprofit (MHCDOO) work along with the church to address these issues?” The possibility of a charter school was pushed to the forefront. While great to imagine and an even greater idea for the community, the funding for something of that magnitude would be far too uncertain long-term. The local children in the area would not be able to fund the school based solely on tuition. Crime prevents major philanthropists from investing in the Avondale community. Participant #9 suggested, “The nonprofit should diligently work to become the bridge between the ignorance of those in Avondale to people, places and things beyond the rural area. If you expose the younger generation and change their minds, then the probability of changing the parent’s mind becomes slightly higher.” The nonprofit could address building partnerships to expose the youth to a world of hope and possibility beyond the limits of Avondale.

Suggestions were helpful. The group raised obstacles that would prevent progress. Participant #6 placed the blame on the community, believing MHBC has done a great job doing their part. The focus was no longer what MHBC could continue to do for the community, but what the community could do for MHBC. It is vital Christians relinquish this school of thought, as the Christian church is to share its love and resources without always expecting something in return. For the believing church the goal is the reward from the Lord in the life to come. Participant #4 addressed this, stating, “The people in MHBC just do not care about the

community as they should.” This came from the realization a great deal of MHBC’s membership does not live in the Avondale community. “Apathetic” was used to describe the mentality of some members. Developing an interest is vital to community involvement. Lack of member involvement results from the apathetic attitude. When one does not care about the problem, one struggles partnering to fix the problem.

Summary

Achieving the goal of a multicultural church that matches the diverse community must start with a heart for the community and its concerns. Simply having church is not enough to welcome others to a church, there must be works of engagement between Sundays. The following chapter contains the suggestions of the focus group to aid MHBC and other rural African American churches making this transition by diving into their diverse community, without fear, to address its needs.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This project has identified unique perspectives on the problem. In this chapter, one objective is to affirm summations from the focus group conversations. There were several important things presented within the focus group. However, some concerning things were exposed as well. In addition to summarizing the focus group modules, the chief goal is to lay out a plan of action as MHBC embarks on making the transition from a rural African American church to a multicultural church where all cultures can worship. The goal is to make this action plan clear so others will be blessed and empowered to make the transition as MHBC will strive to do.

First, it is evident there is a remnant that will continue to endorse the segregated worship experience. Unfortunately, as a converted believer, negative experiences in life have trumped the biblical mandate for the Lord's church. Historical events cannot be forgiven and forgotten and linger in the minds of African Americans who experienced racism firsthand. As a result, their unhealed wounds will not permit them to fellowship and worship with those of other cultures. While unfortunate, some within the membership of MHBC are committed to bleeding on people who did not cut them. For others willing to attempt the change, the optimism for success is extremely low. They believe the time the transition would take could deter the success of the process. In hindsight, this project was not as exhaustive as it could have been. Though the dialogue was provoking and provocative, in certain modules the depth, content, and length of sessions could have been expanded. Another weakness of this project was the amount of time

allocated to each session. While more content could have been added to each module, there was significant consideration given to the participants personal responsibilities and their time while participating in a focus group for seven full weeks without compensation.

However, much of the focus group is hopeful the church will heed the concerns and action plan laid out in this paper. Moreover, the focus group collectively agreed to participate as leaders of the transition process in their prospective areas within MHBC. There is an atmosphere of hope, joy, and optimism for the majority. The strengths of the project yielded a newfound excitement to give the Lord back his church and conform to the Bible's instructions for the Christian church. There is a level of expectation that was once missing. Another strength of this project was the small group setting. The intimate setting permitted disagreement and bouncing different opinions without judgement or malice. The hope is the focus group's experience with different ideas will permeate the church in its entirety, despite different views within the church. In addition, the spiritual growth and biblical awareness of the membership was clear. Spending time in the Scriptures showed spiritual growth in the preliminary and post surveys.

Plan of Action: Purpose

After spending quality time together concerning the purpose of MHBC, the focus group comprised a plan of action to transition the church. To begin, the leadership of the church will set a vision to intentionally study the purpose of the Christian church through the eyes of Christ. This vision will be in Sunday sermons, midweek Bible studies and small groups. The purpose of the Lord's church must be clear; the Christian church belongs to humanity only by stewardship, but to God by ownership. Because wording matters, the next action item is to add the words "all cultures" to the purpose statement so all cultures will see themselves in the purpose of MHBC and some may be compelled to make MHBC their church home. Moving forward the purpose

statement of the church will read: “Purpose Statement: The Mount Hermon Baptist Church is committed to bringing *all cultures* who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ into fellowship with him and into responsible church membership through evangelism and discipleship.”

When changed, the following action will be to infuse this statement into all MHBC activities, worship experiences, and even portable literature used to evangelize to the lost unbelievers. Banners, posters, screens, graphics will all play a key role promoting the purpose of the church to the church. The last action concerning the purpose of the church will be to conduct a leadership meeting to dismantle every ministry and action of the church that does not line up with the purpose statement. If the transition is going to be successful MHBC must reduce any activity or ministry that distracts from the walking in the path of the statement.

Plan of Action: Biblical Teaching

Module 2 on biblical teaching was slightly sensitive, and through the biblical foundation an understanding formed that the church was not commanded to push the celebration of cultural holidays from the pulpit. The first action item of Module 2 will be to eliminate the observations of all cultural holiday from the worship experience and allow the Bible to rule over culture. Cultural holidays are great but should be celebrated outside of the moment of proclamation. Another action item will be channeling more sermon series and small groups sessions toward Christian love, respect, and understanding others. A major vehicle for transition is diversity of MHBC preaching staff and visiting ministers. People of different cultures feel more comfortable when they see others from their culture infused in the worship experience. This will push MHBC leadership to search for white and Asian preachers willing to work on the staff of a predominately African American church, until the shift takes place.

The last action item pertaining to the biblical teaching will be style of preaching. In African American style of preaching the dominate approach is a climatic conclusion with the rising and falling of one's voice. This conclusion is regularly paired with musical accompaniment. While a tradition, unfortunately it is not comfortable for every culture. This approach to preaching may scare some or deter others due to interpreted animation. A talking-teaching method will fit best. This allows all people to understand more of the content and the style will favor one cultural tradition over another.

Plan of Action: Style of Worship

As stated in chapter 4, the term worship in the context of the paper is for the brief portion of songs in the worship experience prior to the sermon. This portion of the presentation can engage or turn off the listener. Some may arrive late to church with the hopes of not witnessing it. In the Module 3 conversation the focus group expressed their disdain for the manner the experience is conducted and offered a list of action items in hopes of transitioning a rural African American church to a church that all cultures are welcome to worship.

The first Module 3 action item will be to reallocate each Sunday to a unique style of worship. This means the first Sunday may be traditional, second Sunday may be contemporary, third Sunday may have an island flare, etc. This could reinfuse excitement into the worshiper, anticipating new styles each week. Attire will play a significant role in this action item as well. Style is context; the next item in the transition will be the content, song selection. The intention is to engage songs that speak to all. For example, an English song with a Spanish verse will engage those who speak Spanish. It suggests "we see you and you are never left out of our preparation."

Aesthetics are important in a world that says a picture is worth thousands of words. Another action item in the transition will be to diversify the praise team and band. There is nothing more biblically beautiful than a diverse group of people singing praises to the same God in the same place at the same time. No one culture has a hold on talented singers and musicians. Like the diversity of the staff preachers, so many negative opinions toward segregation can be eliminated when world is represented on stage with diverse choirs, ensembles, praise teams and director. Again, people of other cultures find peace and comfort when they see those of their culture infused in the presentation. The final applicable piece to this module will be the addition of liturgical dancers. This was an interesting suggestion to add diversity to the platform in personnel, in style, and in culture through using different. Different flags, different countries, and different colors are vital because people closely identify with colors.

Plan of Action: Evangelism

To evangelize to a dark, lost world is a command throughout the Bible, to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This directive has no cultural barriers, the church should carry the good news to all of humanity. The intention is to convey one must approach evangelism to different people in different ways. In efforts to expand MHBC to a more comfortable place for all cultures different methods must be given critical attention.

The first act from the Module 4 conversation will be increased types of languages on flyers and other presented literature. An English-speaking person will assume a flyer no English is not intended for them. In like manner the reverse is also true. If Asian or Hispanic people see their native tongue printed on flyers and other promotional items, it may make them feel invited. Beyond adding different language to the graphics and promotional items, another transition supporter will be to spend quality time equipping the membership to speak languages of other

cultures. Colors play a major role in this conversation as well. Much of the evangelism done today is done electronically. Color selections are vital because colors can convey intentions and messages before words can explain the true intention and message.

Speaking the languages of diverse cultures is important. Clear communication is the intended goal. To expand MHBC culturally, the church must align with clear methods of communication. Translators, defined terms, and activities that engage clear communication transcending cultural barriers are mandatory to the transition of MHBC.

To be sensitive, the final recommendation for the module will be to put together a research team of in-house members to research what is offensive to other cultures. When evangelizing and inviting people into church, one must be overly mindful of what can be offensive to another culture. While time does not permit the belaboring of this point, there are several things that could be very offensive to a different culture. This must be examined; assumptions can deter other cultures from attending the church.

Plan of Action: Fellowship

Psalm 133:1 calls the fellowshiping of believers “good and pleasant.” However, to ensure a good and pleasant experience it must be intentional. To help MHBC transition to a church that welcomes all cultures, members will be educated on the diverse cultures they are inviting. The more one knows the less one fears. Learning about other cultures and walks of life will help members understand them and the world they come from.

Following the Bible’s advice to be friendly, another action item will be to engage in worship experiences with different churches. The intent is not to take their members, but to learn how others do church. A joint church service with other local Avondale churches (white, Asian, Hispanic, etc.) will give the church an idea of what is normal in their comfort spaces. Joint

church services demonstrate what they like spiritually, and joint community service projects will reveal who they are as people. Joint community service projects are important, they help fix the community where everyone lives and help members make new friends. The final supporting act will be cultural mixes outside of the worship experience. One suggestion was picnics. If there is one commonality amongst all cultures, it is food. Good food will bring anyone together. Quality time with the unfamiliar is the intended goal. Humanity becomes nicer over a plate of food. Creating a safe space where all cultures can come together to celebrate life and each other will be a major draw for MHBC becoming a multicultural congregation.

Plan of Action: Hospitality

The hospitality discussed in this paper is not dealing with the hospitality team of MHBC, but of the overall corporate scope of hospitality. Making this transition is slightly different from the others; the first method towards transition will start in the mind of every MHBC member. The membership must first be open and humble to understand certain practices may need revamping for the betterment of others. To change things externally, the change must first take place internally. Changing the poor signage in the facilities will better navigation. These added signs for better awareness and navigation must be printed in multiple languages. If not, the pretty signs will only help particular people.

Similarly, different flags in the sanctuary will better make all cultures feel at home. There are no cultural hints within the MHBC sanctuary to make different cultures feel at home. The act of placing the flags of different countries in the place of worship is becoming popular in the universal church. When people come into a place, and they can see home by way of their country flag, it makes them feel welcomed and at home. Welcoming the placement of flags in the church will make other cultures feel acknowledged and accepted. When people from different culture

feel the Holy Spirit married with the acknowledgment and acceptance of their culture, they may revisit the experience and one day call it home.

Plan of Action: Community Engagement

The Bible commands the Christian church to explore beyond the walls of the church. To transition MHBC to a multicultural church that matches the diverse community, the approach must first be to explore what the community needs to make it a better place. The first target will be the children of the community. The act of exposing children reared in the Avondale community beyond the walls of the church will potentially increase unity within the Avondale community. Some suggest segregation still exists in the Avondale community because it is all that has ever been taught. Knowing this, exposure of the next generations could deter the segregated churches and open the city to the influx of people. When exposed to how the world works and functions one will quickly discover that the world is a better place when people of all cultures work and worship together.

Partnership between MHBC and the local police agency would work well together. In Chapter 4, the focus group shared crime was a major factor in the downturn of the Avondale community. Knowing this, partnering with the local police to reduce crime could make Avondale a safer place. This is a full circle that will begin with the kids. If the kids are exposed to unity beyond the fur walls of the church segregation will decrease. When segregation is reduced and the community works with the local law enforcement to reduce the crime in the area, more jobs will become available in Avondale. Business owners and philanthropist are leery to engage areas known for crime.

Partnering with local businesses to produce jobs in the community will aid in the transition of the church; most local business owners in Avondale are not African American or

MHBC members. Another action item will be more involvement and consistency in local current affairs. While a great suggestion, it is touchy; one must be careful and prayerful about leading the charge or fighting for causes as a Christian church. The intent is for MHBC to stay close to events in local community and raucously speak truth to the power if needed. Surveying the community to solicit ideas for church to do better in the community will be the final action item.

Areas for Further Study

Beyond the confines of this paper, an interesting factor to study would be the rate of acceptance or resistance of the modules in the MHBC congregation. Additionally, an impactful area of study would be the Christian education component of the church and how Christian education would play a role in the transition. Lastly, it would be interesting to explore the input and impact of the youth and young adult ministry at MHBC. While the current leadership can implement the transition, it will be in the hands of the future generations to maintain the effects of the transition.

Conclusion

Some people have unhealed wounds that need to be addressed. Some have forsaken the commands of the Bible and decided doing life their way should supersede the Biblical command to the Christian church. There are some people who will never change for the better. However, after conducting this research, it is evident there are others who are submissive to the word and will of God. There are others who are optimistic, humble, and ready to change things for the betterment of MHBC. Beyond the module content prayer, the leading of the Holy Spirit and relationship focused discipleship must be central to this process to render a successful outcome. We are hopeful that over time, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the participation of the

membership, MHBC will one day soon become a place of worship where all cultures are welcome to come to fellowship with God and His people.

APPENDIX A: PROJECT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Date: June 2021

Dear MHBC Member,

I am a student in the Department of Divinity Studies at the Liberty University conducting research under the supervision of Professor Seth Polk on the topic of transitioning MHBC to a multicultural church where all culture can come to worship as God intended. I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about your experience and views on this topic. I plan to conduct this research with a hand selected focus group over a 7-week experience meeting once a week. Your involvement in this project is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. If you agree to participate, this experience will be thought provoking. However, you may decline answering any questions you feel you do not wish to answer. All information you provide will be considered confidential and will be grouped with responses from other participants within the focus group. Furthermore, you will not be identified by name in any thesis, report or publication resulting from this study. The data collected will be kept for a period time.

For all other questions, or if you would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please feel free to contact Darold Ingram with the email address listed below.

Thank you in advance for your interest in this project.

Yours sincerely,

Darold Ingram

Daingram2@liberty.edu

APPENDIX B: MHBC CONSENT FORM

Darold Ingram's Doctor of Ministry Project

Project Title:

A Strategy to Transition a Traditional African American Church in Rural Louisiana to a Multicultural Church in which People of All Ethnicities are Welcome to Worship

School Enrolled:

Liberty University

Student Researcher:

Darold Ingram

Start Date:

Upon IRB Approval

I, _____ have been asked to participate in a research study that will investigate Transitioning a Traditional African American Church in Rural Louisiana to a Multicultural Church.

In participating in this study, I, _____ agree to meet Darold Ingram, 7 consecutive weeks on Sunday evenings for a period of 2 hours per session.

I understand that:

- a) The possible risks of this procedure include engaging in conversation beyond my racial context.
- b) The possible benefits of this study to me are social, cultural, and spiritual benefits.
- c) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Darold Ingram, and he will be available to answer questions at any time throughout this 7-week period.

d) I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the student researcher may stop the study at any time. I also understand that no information which identifies me will be released without my separate consent, and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

Participant (printed name): _____

Student Researcher (signature): _____

APPENDIX C: PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE

About You	Definitely UNTRUE	Hardly true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Definitely true	Unsure
Using the scale at the top of the columns, indicate how true you think each statement is for yourself. <i>Please mark only one circle in each row.</i>						
1. The Bible is my primary rule and guide for life.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
2. I read the Bible based upon my social construct.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
3. Through hearing God's Word, I often confront my sin and experience God's forgiving grace.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
4. I often engage in conversations with those outside of my race.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
5. The Bible gives me hope and strength for my daily life.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
6. I am open to worshipping with others outside of my race.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
7. I think I have a deep and thorough knowledge of the Bible.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
8. I make a habit of giving significant financial support for international ministry.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
9. I regularly engage in activities that positively affect the broader community.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
10. I intentionally build relationships with non-Christians.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
11. I regularly pray for Christian ministries around the world.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
12. I speak multiple languages.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
13. I often pray for specific people who do not know Jesus Christ.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
14. Involvement in some kind of community ministry always helps me grow more spiritually mature.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉

15. In the past year, I have given time to a local community effort to assist people in need.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
16. I feel participation in small groups deepens our relationships with others and God.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
17. I am growing in my sense of belonging in my congregation.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
18. Building relationships with others of different background (racial, social, economic) makes me a stronger Christian.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
19. I connect with MHBC on social media.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
20. I trust that I will be cared for by people in my church when I am hurting.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
21. I think the worship at MHBC is tailored to one race.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
22. I truly lived out God’s command to “love my neighbor.”	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉
23. I believe I can and do love people of my church with whom I might deeply disagree on some things.	<input type="radio"/> O ₁	<input type="radio"/> O ₂	<input type="radio"/> O ₃	<input type="radio"/> O ₄	<input type="radio"/> O ₅	<input type="radio"/> O ₉

About You						
Using the scale at the top of the columns, indicate how true you think each statement is for yourself. <i>Please mark only one circle in each row.</i>	Definitely UNTRUE	Hardly true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Definitely true	Unsure
1. The Bible is my primary rule and guide for life.					✓	
2. I read the Bible based upon my social construct.	✓					
3. Through hearing God’s Word, I often confront my sin and experience God’s forgiving grace.					✓	
4. I often engage in conversations with those outside of my race.				✓		

5.	The Bible gives me hope and strength for my daily life.					✓	
6.	I am open to worshipping with others outside of my race.					✓	
7.	I think I have a deep and thorough knowledge of the Bible.					✓	
8.	I make a habit of giving significant financial support for international ministry.					✓	
9.	I regularly engage in activities that positively affect the broader community.					✓	
10.	I intentionally build relationships with non-Christians.					✓	
11.	I regularly pray for Christian ministries around the world.					✓	
12.	I speak multiple languages.		✓				
13.	I often pray for specific people who do not know Jesus Christ.					✓	
14.	Involvement in some kind of community ministry always helps me grow more spiritually mature.					✓	
15.	In the past year, I have given time to a local community effort to assist people in need.					✓	
16.	I feel participation in small groups deepens our relationships with others and God.					✓	
17.	I am growing in my sense of belonging in my congregation.					✓	
18.	Building relationships with others of different background (racial, social, economic) makes me a stronger Christian.					✓	
19.	I connect with MHBC on social media.					✓	
20.	I trust that I will be cared for by people in my church when I am hurting.					✓	
21.	I think the worship at MHBC is tailored to one race.					✓	
22.	I truly lived out God's command to "love my neighbor."					✓	

23. I believe I can and do love people of my church with whom I might deeply disagree on some things.					✓	
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Post Survey Results (*All answers resemble the focus group's majority*)

APPENDIX D: MODULE GUIDE

A Strategy to Transition a Traditional African American Church to a Multicultural

Church Where All People are Welcome to Worship

7 Week Course: Week/Module 1: Purpose

Student Facilitator: Darold Ingram

“It isn’t our job to create the purpose of the church but to discover it.” -Rick Warren

Objective 1: Biblical Foundation-

- What does it mean to be the church?
- Where does the Scripture each about the purpose of the church?
 - Matthew 5:13-16
 - 1 John 1:5-7
 - Ephesians 4:12
 - Matthew 16:18

Objective 2: MHBC Examination/Dialogue-

- Is MHBC purpose driven or tradition driven?
- Why are certain things done at MHBC?
- Are our activities rooted in the biblical purpose of the church?
- Can you recite the purpose statement of the church?
- Are all cultures included inside of the purpose statement?

Objective 3: Suggested Application-

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Week/Module 1 Questionnaire:

Do you have a better understanding of the biblical purpose of the church? If so, what did you learn?

How likely are you to share the purpose statement of the church with others?

What could have made this module better?

What is the biggest hurdle for MHBC concerning walking in purpose?

Were different cultural perspectives represented in the dialogue?

A Strategy to Transition a Traditional African American Church to a Multicultural Church Where All People are Welcome to Worship

7 Week Course: Week/Module 2: Biblical Teaching

Student Facilitator: Darold Ingram

“When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.”-Acts 19:17

Objective 1: Biblical Foundation-

- What does it mean to have a multicultural hermeneutic?
- Examples of multicultural biblical models:
 - Gen 9
 - John
 - Romans 1:16
 - Acts 8:26-40
 - Acts 10

Objective 2: Styles of Preaching Dialogue-

- Do aesthetics of the preaching moment matter?
- How would you describe the preaching style at MHBC?

- Would you change the preaching style? If so, how?
- Does the style of preaching help or hurt the content of the sermon?
- Can a style of preaching offend a culture? If so, how?

Objective 3: Preaching Staff & Visiting Preachers

- Should there be diversity of culture on the preaching staff?
- Should there be diversity of cultures and gender concerning visiting preachers?

Suggested Application:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Week/Module 2 Questionnaire:

Do you have a better understanding of the multicultural biblical hermeneutic? If so, what did you learn?

How open are you to different styles of preaching?

What could have made this module better?

What is the biggest hurdle for MHBC concerning the biblical teaching aspect moving forward?

Were all cultures perspectives represented in the dialogue?

A Strategy to Transition a Traditional African American Church to a Multicultural

Church Where All People are Welcome to Worship

7 Week Course: Week/Module 3: Styles of Worship

Student Facilitator: Darold Ingram

“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!” -Psalm 95:6

Objective 1: Biblical Foundation-

- Are there different styles of worship?
- Where does the Scriptures teach about different perspectives of worship?

- 1 Chronicles 16
- John 4
- 1 Corinthians 14:26

Objective 2: MHBC Examination/Dialogue-

- Is MHBC operating within a biblical model of worship?
- Is MHBC corporate worship conducive for all cultures?
- Does the attire and/or length of worship hinder the experience? If so, how can we change it?
- How can MHBC make worship multicultural?
- Should each Sunday include different cultures?

Objective 3: Suggested Application-

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Week/Module 3 Questionnaire:

Do you have a better understanding of the biblical model for worship? If so, what did you learn?

How likely are you to engage in a style of worship that isn't your preference knowing the biblical model?

What could have made this module better?

What is the biggest hurdle for MHBC concerning styles of worship?

Were all cultures perspectives represented in the dialogue?

A Strategy to Transition a Traditional African American Church to a Multicultural Church Where All People are Welcome to Worship

7 Week Course: Week/Module 4: Evangelism

Student Facilitator: Darold Ingram

“As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” 2 Timothy 4:5

Objective 1: Biblical Foundation-

- What does it mean to evangelize?
- Where does the Scripture teach about the importance of evangelizing different cultures?
 - Matthew 28:19-20
 - 1 Corinthians 9:22
 - Acts 1:8; 8
 - 2 Corinthians 5:20

Objective 2: MHBC Examination/Dialogue-

- What is the believer’s role and responsibility in multicultural evangelism?
- Does MHBC have a culture of evangelism to all people?
- Does MHBC have ministries that serve to all cultures? If not, why?

Objective 3: Evangelism Through Technology

- Through your cultural eyes, what does MHBC’s graphics and website say without saying?
- Should church marketing have multiple cultures with different languages?
- How can church marketing become offensive?
- How would you grade MHBC’s evangelism as a church?

Suggested Application-

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Week/Module 4 Questionnaire:

Do you have a better understanding of the biblical multicultural marriage between the church and evangelism? If so, what did you learn?

Are you willing to share Christ with someone across cultural lines?

What could have made this module better?

What is the biggest hurdle for MHBC concerning cross-cultural evangelism?

Were all cultures perspectives represented in the dialogue?

A Strategy to Transition a Traditional African American Church to a Multicultural Church Where All People are Welcome to Worship

7 Week Course: Week/Module 5: Fellowship

Student Facilitator: Darold Ingram

“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another”-Proverbs 27:17

Objective 1: Biblical Foundation-

- What is *Koinonia*?
- Where does the Scripture teach about the fellowship of believers?
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:11
 - Galatians 6:2
 - Hebrews 10:25
 - Nehemiah (*Overview*)

Objective 2: MHBC Examination/Dialogue-

- How well does MHBC fellowship with other local churches across cultural lines?
- Is MHBC embracing segregation?
- Do in-house ministries cater to the fellowship of those not African American?
- How often should MHBC embrace the mixing of other local churches in worship?

Objective 3: Cultural Holiday Observances-

- What holidays can the church celebrate of different cultures? What's going too far?
- Should non-religious cultural holidays be celebrated amongst the church?

Suggested Application-

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Week/Module 5 Questionnaire:

Do you have a better understanding of the biblical idea of Koinonia? If so, what did you learn?

What have learned about other cultures as a result of this conversation?

What could have made this module better?

What is the biggest hurdle for MHBC concerning ecumenical fellowships?

Were all cultures perspectives represented in the dialogue?

A Strategy to Transition a Traditional African American Church to a Multicultural Church Where All People are Welcome to Worship

7 Week Course: Week/Module 6: Hospitality

Student Facilitator: Darold Ingram

“Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” -1 Peter 4:9

Objective 1: Biblical Foundation-

- What is hospitality?
- Where does the Scripture teach about Christian hospitality?
 - John 13
 - 3 John 1:5-8
 - Matthew 25:34-46
 - Ephesians 6:7
 - Hebrews 13:2

- What is offensive to your culture?

Objective 2: MHBC Facilities-

- Are the MHBC facilities welcoming to your culture? If not, what could change?
- Are the MHBC facilities clean?
- How can we improve the signage within the facility to help visitors better navigate?
- Should we add flags of different cultures to make our guest feel at home and welcomed?

- Should signage be printed in different languages? If so, which languages?

Objective 3: Greeters

- What are the pros and cons of having a diverse greeting team?

Suggested Application-

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Week/Module 6 Questionnaire:

Do you have a better understanding of the biblical idea of hospitality? If so, what did you learn?

How likely are you to join a multicultural greeting team?

What could have made this module better?

What is the biggest hurdle for MHBC concerning hospitality?

Were all cultures perspectives represented in the dialogue?

A Strategy to Transition a Traditional African American Church to a Multicultural Church Where All People are Welcome to Worship

7 Week Course: Week/Module 7: Community Engagement

Student Facilitator: Darold Ingram

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” -Galatians 6:2

Objective 1: Biblical Foundation-

- Nehemiah (*overview*)
- Community Engagement through a Christo-centric prims.
- Matthew 25 (*overview*)

Objective 2: Community Issues-

- What are some general issues in the Avondale community that negatively impact all cultures?
- What are some culturally specific community issues that the church needs to address?
- How can MHBC work with its nonprofit arm to address these issues?

Objective 3: Community Partnerships

- What community partners can we partner with being a religious organization?

Suggested Application-

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Week/Module 7 Questionnaire:

Do you have a better understanding of the biblical purpose in community partnerships? If so, what did you learn?

Are you willing to be an ambassador for our church with organizations you identify with?

What could have made this module better?

What is the biggest hurdle for MHBC concerning community partnerships?

Were all cultures perspectives represented in the dialogue?

APPENDIX E: IRB EXEMPTION

May 6, 2021

Darold Ingram
Seth Polk

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-875 A Strategy to Transition a Traditional African American Church to a Multicultural Church Where All People are Welcome to Worship

Dear Darold Ingram and Seth Polk,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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