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BETHEL UNIVERSITY
BETHEL SEMINARY ST. PAUL

UNITY IN DIVERSITY: AN INTENTIONAL PLAN TO MOVE FROM INCLUSION
TO BELONGING TO BECOMING

A THESIS PROJECT PROPOSAL
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE
IN BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT

BY
BRIAN R. MOWREY
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

MAY 2018

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis project was to develop an intentional plan to embrace and celebrate unity in diversity at Walnut Hill Community Church. The church enjoyed diversity in race, ethnicity, age and ability but had no plan to embrace and celebrate the diversity present within the congregation. The purpose of this project was to present recommendations to the leadership of Walnut Hill that would guide the church into a new season of unity in diversity, attract more diversity into the church and more effectively impact an increasingly divided world by uniquely living out the vision of Jesus Christ to “be one” (John 17:11).

A catalytic biblical vision for unity in diversity was discovered through the words of Jesus in John 17. The way to unity in diversity was presented by studying the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. The leadership principles necessary to lead toward greater unity in diversity were outlined by concentrating on the biblical leaders who obeyed the radical call to embrace the Gentile community in the Book of Acts. A comprehensive study of related literature revealed common barriers to unity in diversity. This review was also done to determine the most beneficial initiatives and principles to implement in a plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. Interviews, surveys and focus groups were utilized to aid the researcher in the development of an intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill.

Eight key findings emerged from the data collected, which led the researcher to several practical recommendations that fostered greater unity in diversity at Walnut Hill.

The intent of this thesis project was to move the church from embracing inclusion to belonging and then to becoming. Including all people groups in the life of the church is not unity in diversity. Having people groups feel like they belong is better but does not define a church that fully embraces and celebrates unity in diversity. The recommendations moved Walnut Hill from being a church that included and welcomed people from all groups to a church that became community together. Unity in diversity only happens when a congregation desires to become family together. For a church to enjoy this kind of unity takes intentionality. This research project led to practical recommendations for an intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill.

CHAPTER ONE: AN INTENTIONAL PLAN FOR UNITY IN DIVERSITY.

Statement of the Problem

This project addressed the growing need for a strategic ministry plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill Community Church.¹ There was no intentional plan to celebrate and embrace the gift of variety and difference among age, gender, race, ethnicity and physical ability. In response to the absence of an intentional plan, the researcher engaged in a five-step comprehensive study that resulted in a strategic ministry plan for unity in diversity². First, the researcher discovered biblical principles for unity in diversity. These principles were revealed through the life of Jesus, the establishment of the early church and the leaders who brought unity in diversity between the Jewish and Gentile people. Second, the researcher gained a comprehensive understanding of the literature related to unity in diversity. By consulting relevant experts and scholars, the researcher learned the qualities of a successful plan for unity in diversity and the necessary steps for implementation. Third, the researcher collected data through personal interviews and surveys to understand the felt needs and demographics of Walnut Hill. Fourth, the researcher learned from three strategic churches that have excelled in unity in diversity. Finally, with the help of the church's Diversity Advisory Team, the researcher developed

¹ Walnut Hill Community Church will be referred to as Walnut Hill through the remainder of the thesis.

² For the purposes of this project the word "diversity" means difference, and "unity in diversity" means the ability to come together as people strengthened by the gift of variety and difference. Diversity is used within this project to refer to the coming together of people from different races, ethnicities, ages, physical abilities, gender and socio-economic statuses.

recommendations for Walnut Hill that will intentionally embrace and champion unity in diversity.

Delimitations of the Problem

The research was limited to churches that are growing in diversity because of an intentional plan for unity in diversity. Furthermore, the research was limited to providing recommendations for Walnut Hill. Although the principles of the project could be relevant for other ministry and organizational contexts, the researcher focused solely on providing a ministry plan for Walnut Hill. Finally, the field research was limited to Walnut Hill and three churches that have excelled in executing an intentional plan for diversity in their ministry contexts.

Assumptions

The first assumption is that the Bible is true and is God's revealed heart for His people. The second assumption is that God created all people and every person is equally valued by Him and in need of Him. The third assumption is that God's design for His church is best practiced in unity through diversity. The fourth assumption is that a church focused on the evangelization of its community must reflect the greater community in which it exists. The fifth assumption is that the church misses out on the wonderful experience of unity when divisions and fractures exist in the body of Christ. The sixth assumption is that diversity refers to a wide variety of people representing different races, ethnicities, ages, gender and physical ability.

Subproblems

The first subproblem was to discover a catalytic biblical vision by revealing the heart of Jesus for unity as found in John 17.

The second subproblem was to understand the way of Jesus toward unity in diversity as seen in Luke's Gospel regarding the most vulnerable and modeled by the early church in Acts 2. This also entailed looking at the leadership necessary for unity in diversity modeled by the biblical characters responsible for the movement of the Gentiles into the family of God.

The third subproblem was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the literature related to equipping local churches to take practical and intentional steps into greater unity in diversity.

The fourth subproblem was to take a census of Walnut Hill to gain a clear picture of its diverse composition, connect with and learn from three churches that have a strong vision for unity in diversity and have implemented a plan for that vision, and interview 50 people representing the diverse makeup of Walnut Hill to better understand the current barriers prohibiting greater unity in the body.

The fifth subproblem was to work with the church's Diversity Advisory Team to create a practical and intentional plan for Walnut Hill to move the congregation from an environment of inclusion to belonging for all members.

Setting of the Project

Walnut Hill began in the summer of 1981 when a small group of people felt led to establish an evangelical church in the Greater Danbury, Connecticut area. The group members cast a vision that still permeates the congregation. They dreamed of a church committed to relevant, Bible-based preaching and teaching, caring fellowship, quality ministry for children and youth, and worldwide impact through cross-cultural missions.

The church, initially known as Grace Community Church, held its first service on Sunday, February 7, 1982, at the Ramada Inn in Danbury, Connecticut. For years, the church met in local schools. The property on which the first Walnut Hill campus was built was purchased in 1988. The building was completed and the first service was held on Easter Sunday in 1996. The name of the church was changed to Walnut Hill.

Between 2010 and 2012, additional campuses were launched to allow more growth numerically. The Waterbury, Valley and New Milford campuses each have a campus pastor who shepherds the community. For unity in vision and mission, the campuses receive video messages recorded at the Bethel campus services 50 percent of the time. When a video is not used, the campus pastor or another Walnut Hill pastor preaches. Each of the campuses is within a 30-minute drive of the original campus in Bethel. The vision is to launch new campuses in areas where there is not a strong evangelical Christian presence in the community. This study was done for Walnut Hill, which includes all four campuses.

Walnut Hill is a non-denominational, evangelical church. The church has a Board of Elders. The Elders are elected by church members and are responsible for providing spiritual leadership and oversight. Walnut Hill is led by a team of three pastors, Brian Mowrey, Adam DePasquale and Craig Mowrey, who serve in partnership to oversee and advance key areas in the life of the church. Each of the campuses has a campus pastor who shepherds the people at the campus. There is also a team of pastors responsible for specific areas of ministry, including children, youth, adults, care, worship and the arts, prayer, and evangelism. Additionally, directors support and guide the staff to keep the mission at the center of all that is done. The vision of the church is “To Ignite a passion

for Jesus in Connecticut and New England and around the World.” The vision is done by seeking God, reaching out, caring for one another and serving together.

The congregation is predominantly white but has become more racially diverse over the past ten years. Walnut Hill has a very committed group of Brazilian brothers and sisters who have left their ethnically specific congregations to come to Walnut Hill because of their children’s desire to attend a more diverse church. In addition, there has been a rise in membership representing friends from Asian descent, as well as both Black Americans and Africans. Another contributor to the increased diversity at Walnut Hill is the strength of the special needs ministry. This ministry is for children and youth but also aims to serve the parents and families of the participants. The church grew in diversity in the broadest sense of the word. There was an increase in diversity in terms of race, age, gender, socioeconomics and physical ability. The research from this project produced an accurate picture of Walnut Hill’s diversity. Through an all-church census, the researcher gained a better understanding of the diversity represented. The church’s proximity to New York City has always allowed the church to reach people from many different backgrounds. With an increasingly diverse congregation, the researcher’s desired outcome was to establish an intentional plan for unity in diversity.

Importance of the Project

The Importance of the Project to the Researcher

For the researcher, this project was important for his personal family, the mission of the church and his personal calling. First, the content of this project was very close to home for the researcher because of the diversity within his own biological family. One desired outcome for this project was for greater unity in the researcher’s personal family.

The researcher believed that greater unity in diversity represented in his own family would bring him great joy and benefit the kingdom of God.

Second, this study was important to the researcher because of the missional aspect of unity in diversity. The researcher believes that Walnut Hill has a wonderful opportunity to be set apart and glorify Jesus through unity in diversity by discovering what it means to enjoy the oneness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. While the world is becoming more fractured, a unified church could become more relevant to the world in which it lives. Walnut Hill has the opportunity to lead through unity in diversity.

Finally, for the researcher, possibly the most important reason for stepping into this project was the divine call on his life to do so. At the start of his doctoral journey, the researcher had every intention to study the church's response to tragedy, yet the Lord turned his heart to focus on unity in diversity. In 2012, the researcher went through the unimaginable with his congregation as they were impacted greatly by the tragic school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Several families connected to Walnut Hill were impacted by the murder of their children on that day. Many Walnut Hill members had children who survived in the school. Others were first responders, school bus drivers, grandparents, aunts and uncles. For the researcher, his unique role in the Sandy Hook tragedy could have been a more logical basis for a project pursuing how the church responds when tragedy strikes; however, the Lord placed a calling on the researcher for Walnut Hill to experience and enjoy greater unity together. This shift in concentration was a surprise to the researcher, but the Lord clearly called him to look forward to what God has for Walnut Hill instead of looking back at the tragedy they lived through. When tragedy like Sandy Hook strikes, fractures become more evident in the community. It

became clear to the researcher that the benefits of a project focused on unity in diversity would support the ongoing ministry to those suffering through tragedy. This project became a critical part of the journey toward healing and restoration for a community that is traveling through the unimaginable. Instead of focusing on the tragedy, the Lord drew the researcher's attention to a topic that has become a part of the healing journey.

The Importance of the Project to the Ministry Context

This project was important to the ministry of Walnut Hill because through unity in diversity the congregation will more fully experience the joy of the Lord. Jesus told a parable about not burying one's talents (Matt. 25:14-30). Jesus spoke of three workers, one of whom buries the talent he was given. This worker was rebuked by the master because he did not invest and use the gift that was given to him. The researcher believed the Lord was making Walnut Hill a diverse community and this gift of diversity was not to be buried. The two other workers invest the talents they were given, and the master responded, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21 ESV).³ The researcher hoped that through investing in the gift of diversity at Walnut Hill the church would enter more fully into the joy of the Lord together. Through entering more fully into the joy of the Lord the people of Walnut Hill will experience a greater love for one another. This will be evidenced by greater fellowship among different people groups, an

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, (Colorado Springs, CO: International Bible Society, 1984).

increased number of individuals representing minority groups⁴, and a transformation within the leadership and ministry culture at Walnut Hill.

The problem the researcher addressed was that Walnut Hill had no intentional plan for diversity. This project was vitally important to the immediate ministry context because it has provided a vision for unity at Walnut Hill and an intentional ministry plan for unity in diversity at the church. When the researcher interviewed to become one of the lead pastors at Walnut Hill, he was asked a question he will never forget. The church hosted five open gatherings for congregants to come and ask any questions of the candidates. In one of these sessions, a man who represented one of the minority groups in the church asked, “What is your plan for the growing diversity in this church?” Recognizing that the new leadership team was composed of three middle-aged white males, the congregant wanted some assurance that the church leadership not only had a vision but a plan for unity in diversity. Sadly, the researcher did not have a good answer. The man pulled the researcher aside after the meeting and said, “Brian, the Lord is giving us a gift. Let’s not bury it.” From that moment, the researcher set his eyes on answering that question. This project has given the church an intentional plan for diversity at Walnut Hill that will foster a culture of belonging for all people groups and grow the population of minority groups such as special needs families, elderly congregants and ethnic minorities at the church.

⁴ The term “minority groups” in this project refers to persons of color, persons living with disability or special needs and persons over the age of 75.

The Importance of the Project to the Church at Large

The goal of this project in relation to the greater context of the church at large was focused primarily on two avenues. The first was to provide an intentional plan for local churches to celebrate greater unity in diversity. The researcher is very pleased because this project has produced an intentional plan to greater unity that will benefit the ministry context at Walnut Hill and could have impact for churches in a similar context. The second was to equip the researcher as a coach and encourager to other ministry leaders seeking to develop and implement plans for unity in diversity. The researcher found that many churches value unity in diversity but few have an intentional plan for unity in diversity. A desired outcome for this project was for the researcher to become qualified to equip others to build greater unity in diversity within their ministries and organizations.

Research Methodology

The project was qualitative in nature and followed the case study strategy outlined by John Creswell in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*.⁵ The researcher utilized personal interviews and questionnaires to capture the felt needs of various minority groups within the Walnut Hill congregation including older congregants, those dealing with addictions, special needs families and ethnic minorities. Surveys were conducted to determine the demographics of the church. Lastly, scholarly biblical and leadership resources were consulted to bring greater understanding in the area of unity in diversity.

The first step engaged biblical scholars who were experts in the study of John's Gospel, specifically related to Jesus' prayer in John 17. Through the study of these

⁵ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013).

scholars and the exegesis of the researcher, a catalytic biblical vision based on the heart of Jesus for unity was proposed for Walnut Hill.

In the second step, the researcher engaged the scholarly writing of those most familiar with Luke's Gospel. This was done to determine how a unified church meets the needs of the most vulnerable. The researcher studied Acts 2 to determine the characteristics that bonded the early church in unity. Also in the Book of Acts, the researcher identified the leadership principles used by people like Peter and Paul, who were integral in bringing unity between Jews and Gentiles, males and females, slaves and those who were free in the early church (Galatians 3:28).

The third step reviewed the relevant literature. This study revealed valuable lessons learned from secular organizations that have implemented an intentional plan for diversity. The frequent barriers that prohibit communities from moving into greater unity were discovered. Characteristics common in communities that enjoy God-honoring unity in diversity were revealed. The necessary leadership principles for greater unity in diversity and the practical steps required to realize greater unity in diversity in the church were identified.

The fourth step in the research focused on surveys and interviews. The researcher first took a census of the Walnut Hill membership to determine who they are in terms of age, race, ethnicity, disability, gender and educational background. Next, the researcher interviewed 50 members of the congregation. These interviews focused primarily on the current culture of unity at Walnut Hill as viewed by the interviewees to reveal areas of strength and weakness. This group was representative of the diversity within the Walnut Hill family including age, race, ethnicity, gender and physical ability. The insights from

the interviewees provided recommendations for the intentional plan for unity in diversity. Finally, the researcher interviewed three leaders from churches that have experienced success in their ministry plans for unity. These interviews focused on the tangible ministry plans the church leaders implemented and the resulting strengths and weaknesses.

The fifth step was to analyze the data gathered from the four previous steps. The church's Diversity Advisory Team was called together to advise the lead pastors of Walnut Hill. The team consisted of ten people who were diverse in age, ethnicity, gender and physical ability. This team was instrumental in the development and implementation of the intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill.

Summary

The researcher's desired outcome for this project was to reveal a God-inspired and Spirit-anointed plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. The Apostle Paul said, "Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). In other words, all people are different but the Spirit of Jesus bonds them together. The researcher believed that an effective life-giving plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill must keep the Spirit of God at the center. The reader should engage the words of this project and encounter the Spirit of God who vividly and powerfully was at the heart of its orchestration.

CHAPTER TWO: A CATALYTIC BIBLICAL VISION FOR UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Introduction

God takes delight in diversity. In fact, it was His idea. From the beginning to the end of Scripture, God's heart for diversity shines through. On the third day of the creation story, God separated land from the waters and filled the earth with plants and vegetation of all kinds. God's heart for diversity was clearly heard when He said, "Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came" (Gen. 1:11). On the fourth day, God created distinct seasons that complement one another (Gen. 1:14). On the fifth day, God said, "Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind" (Gen. 1:20). On the sixth day, God created the animals of the earth and concluded His plan to populate the earth by creating humankind. God created woman, realizing that Adam was incomplete without a complementary helpmate (Gen. 2:18-25). He made a garden filled with many kinds of trees and placed the man and woman in the garden and called it Eden. The first place of paradise where humans would start their journey was filled with beautiful diversity. Once creation was set in place in all its diversity, the Lord saw that it was good. On the seventh day, God rested. With unmeasurable variety, the Lord's creation worked in unity to bring Him glory.

The Lord's purpose for unity in diversity is not temporary but will last into eternity. Not only does the Bible begin with God's revealed heart for unity in diversity

but it ends by describing once again the beauty of unity in diversity that will be enjoyed forever in paradise. Writing about the vision of heaven in the Book of Revelation, Curtiss DeYoung stated, “This message of the oneness of humanity and God’s universal love for all people finds its fitting conclusion in the Book of Revelation. The author of Revelation writes about a vision of ‘a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages’ (7:9).”¹ From the very start to the very end of Scripture, God’s desire for unity in diversity is vividly portrayed. God’s choice is diversity and His call to His people is to unity within diversity. Through the marriage of unity in diversity, God’s heart is best displayed.

The person who most completely demonstrates and embodies a heart for unity in diversity is Jesus Christ. God’s passion and plan for unity in diversity are best seen through the life of His Son. In this chapter the researcher will make a case for the importance of unity by proving that unity in diversity is Jesus’ heart for His people (The Heart of Jesus for Unity). The researcher will then focus on how unity in diversity was central in the way Jesus lived (The Way of Jesus to Greater Unity). Finally, the researcher will propose ten essential leadership principles every leader must embrace and live out to see greater unity in diversity with those they serve (The Leadership Principles Necessary for Unity).

The Heart of Jesus for Unity

The prayer of Jesus in John 17 revealed the hope of Jesus for His disciples. In this prayer from Jesus to the Father, the reader has the privilege of knowing those things for

¹ Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Coming Together in the 21st Century: The Bible's Message in an Age of Diversity* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2009), Kindle Locations 190-191.

which Jesus' heart beats. Jesus' heart is revealed when He said, "I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you" (John 17:20). Jesus could have prayed for many things but praying for unity is what rose to the surface. This is not an ordinary unity but a divine unity experienced in the Holy Trinity among Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus desired this divine unity for His disciples. He prayed that they would live in strong relationship with God and one another in the beauty of their differences.

Unity Is God's Best for His Disciples

Unity was important to Jesus because He wanted what was best for His disciples. Jesus first prayed for Himself (John 17:1-8) and asked the Father to bring Him into glory. Jesus then turned to pray for those He was leaving behind. Knowing they would be left in a broken and dangerous world, He prayed for their protection.² The core of this passage came in verse 11, "now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are." As Jesus prepared to leave the earth, He pleaded with His Father to protect His disciples. Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg added, "The disciples were called by the power of God, and now Jesus asks God to keep them from wandering away. Only the power of God at work in them makes it possible for them to follow Jesus, obey his commands, and fulfill his mission."³ Jesus' prayer demonstrated that His disciples were valuable to Him. Each of them was a treasure to Jesus; therefore, He prayed for their

² Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), Kindle Locations 9138-9139.

³ Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg, *Exalting Jesus in John: Christ Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), Kindle Location 7211-7213.

protection so that they might experience what was best for them. God’s best for His disciples was that they would be united, protected and empowered.

United

In verse 11, the reason for this protection is clear: “so that they will be united just as we are.” Jesus wanted them to be protected so that they would experience a quality of relationship only understood among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Edward W. Klink commented, “The disciples by their faith in Christ are being taken into the fellowship and relational unity of the Father and the Son.”⁴ When Jesus spoke about unity, He invited others to come into the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Theologian Gary Burge remarked, “Jesus here envisages a profound spiritual intimacy that changes human life. It is a unity encompassing the Father with the Son, the disciples with them both, and the disciples in union with one another (John 14:10; 15:4).”⁵ Jesus prayed that the disciples would be protected so that they would be united with God and one another. Unity was important because Jesus wanted the best for His disciples and for them to live in unity with God and one another.

Protected

Jesus was just days away from departing the earth and leaving His disciples behind to continue His work; therefore, He brought a heartfelt request to God the Father—a prayer of protection. Of anyone who had lived on earth, Jesus knew best that

⁴ Edward W. Klink, *John: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), Kindle Locations 19654-19655.

⁵ Gary M. Burge, *John: The NIV Application Commentary Book 4* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 435.

protection would be needed. While on earth, Jesus was tempted by the evil one (Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). He was ridiculed by the crowds before His death (Mark 15:32). Just hours from this prayer, Jesus would be spit on (Matt. 26:67) and put to death (Matt. 27:52-28:20; Mark 15:33-16:8; Luke 23:44-24:12; John 19:29-20:18). Jesus knew that the world in which He was leaving the disciples was a dangerous and broken one. Therefore, He prayed, not to remove them from the world but instead to protect them from the evil one in the world.⁶

Jesus did not pray that His disciples would be exempt from harm. He told the disciples that they would lose their lives because of their relationship with Him. He prayed that the disciples' connection with God amid trials and suffering would remain strong. Knowing that trials and suffering would be a part of life, Jesus prayed that the disciples' experience of the Holy Trinity in their lives would be unwavering, despite the ploys of the evil one (John 16).

Jesus said, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15). Jesus prayed against the true enemy, the evil one. Jesus revealed the mission of the evil one: "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10a). Jesus wanted His disciples to be safe from the enticing work of the evil one. David Pawson described the personal work of the evil one well: "Evil is not something floating around; it is someone."⁷ The enemy is not a race or ethnicity. The enemy is not a new generation, a political party or a gender. The enemy is the evil one. Jesus set His eyes on praying against the work of humankind's true enemy.

⁶ Köstenberger, *John*, Kindle Location 9311.

⁷ David Pawson, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John: Unlocking the New Testament* (Kennington, Ashford: Anchor Recordings, 2012), Kindle Location 5149.

Disunity happens when enemies are created out of things, ideas or people and not the true enemy. In His prayer, Jesus prayed for the disciples' protection from the real threat—the evil one.

Empowered

Jesus wanted the disciples to be united with God and one another and to be protected from the evil one so that they might enjoy unity. Jesus also prayed in John 17 that they might be empowered by the name of God. Jesus prayed for protection and prescribed how this protection could be granted—that is, by the power of God's name (John 17:11). If believers are fighting not against flesh and blood but against the evil one in this world, then they are only as powerful as the name they carry. Like great armies and knights bearing the emblem of their king as they forge into battle, Jesus prayed that the disciples would bear the name of God as their great emblem of power and protection.

When Jesus asked that the disciples be protected by the power of the name of God, He asked God Himself to keep them safe by His very nature. Warren Wiersbe said, "In the Bible, 'name' refers to 'nature,' because names so often were given to reveal something special about the nature of the person bearing the name."⁸ When Jesus prayed for the protection of His disciples by the power of God's name, He called on the nature of God to protect them. Jesus did not call on a signature; He called on God the person to protect them. Edward W. Klink commented,

Since the concept of a "name" in the ancient world was not merely a label but referred to the character of a person, Jesus speaks of all that "Holy Father" means, not simply to the uttering of the name (cf. v. 6). Thus, Jesus asks the Father by His very nature to be their protection and to be their preservation, which was first

⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Gospels: Be Loyal, Be Diligent, Be Compassionate, Be Courageous, Be Alive, and Be Transformed: The BE Series Bundle* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2015), Kindle Locations 14858-14859.

applied to the Son (protecting and preserving him) and has now been revealed by His own person and work.⁹

Jesus powerfully prayed that the disciples would be protected not just through the articulation of a name but by the one whom the name represents. Jesus called on God Himself to be present with His people, much like He was present with Jesus as He walked the earth. Through His presence, Jesus prayed that the disciples would discover everything they needed for their protection in God alone. Warren W. Wiersbe said,

The Old Testament Jew knew His God as “Jehovah,” the great I AM (Exod. 3:11-14). Jesus took this sacred name “I AM” and made it meaningful to His disciples: “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35); “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12); “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11); etc. In other words, Jesus revealed the Father’s gracious name by showing His disciples that He was everything they needed.¹⁰

When Jesus prayed for the disciples’ protection under the name of God, He prayed that the disciples would discover everything they needed in God.

Unity Sets His Disciples Apart

Unity is important to Jesus because He wanted His disciples to be set apart. God’s original intention for the chosen people of Israel was to set them apart so that the rest of the world would see something different in them and be changed as a result.¹¹ The writer of Deuteronomy said to the people Israel, “You have been set apart as holy to the Lord your God, and He has chosen you from all the nations of the earth to be His own special treasure” (Deut. 14:2). In the prayer of Jesus in John 17, Jesus prayed that the disciples would be sanctified by the truth—that is, that they would be set apart for the glory of

⁹ Klink, *John*, Kindle Locations 19648-19652.

¹⁰ Wiersbe, *The Gospels*, Kindle Locations 14851-14854.

¹¹ Köstenberger, *John*, Kindle Locations 9347.

God. This is a call to be completely submitted to the rule and reign of Jesus. Jesus' heart is for His disciples to be set apart because of their holiness. According to Gary M. Burge,

To be holy, then, is not in the first instance a description of perfection (though this is included). It refers to a life that is so aligned with God that it reflects God's passions completely (for good, against evil). Such a person can be considered "sanctified," holy, attached to God's purposes and presence.¹²

Jesus' prayer in John 17 revealed four truths about being set apart for Him. These truths represent His desire for the disciples' unity to be distinct from anything on earth.

Filled with Joy

To be set apart for Jesus required being filled with joy. In His prayer, Jesus said, "Now I am coming to you. I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy" (John 17:13). According to Klink,

In the Gospel the fulfillment of joy is a common theme and is always the result of a life participating in God through Christ. Here Christ prays that the disciples would receive in their very persons the joy of Christ that can only come from God by the Spirit.¹³

Jesus prayed for the disciples to be sanctified and set apart by completely surrendering to Him, which results in a joy-filled life, not necessarily a pain-free or easy life. Being filled with the joy of the Lord separates the believer from the highest happiness this world can offer. This is accomplished through the oneness that Jesus prayed for in John 17.

¹² Burge, *John*, 434.

¹³ Klink, *John*, Kindle Locations 19700-19702.

Citizens of Heaven

The second component of being set apart is that believers receive a transfer of citizenship. In His prayer, Jesus said, “I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world” (John 17:14). In this passage, Jesus affirmed that His disciples do not belong to this world. Followers of Jesus are citizens of heaven and residents of earth.

This transfer of citizenship is important because it marks every believer as a child of God destined for a new home that is being prepared for them by Jesus Himself. Not only are believers awaiting a new home together, but they also enjoy the first fruits of that kingdom today. Disciples of Jesus experience unity together because they live out the characteristics of the kingdom of heaven and not the kingdom of this world. Jesus taught His disciples all about the kingdom of heaven using parables. Each of these parables taught the disciples what it meant to live as citizens of heaven under the rule and reign of Jesus Christ. The disciples discovered unity under this rule and reign.

Sent into the World

Believers are united to be sent out into the world. Jesus wanted the disciples to be one in their mission. Jesus prayed, “Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world” (John 17:18). He did not pray for the disciples to be set apart for no reason at all, but instead that believers would be set apart to fulfill a mission. Klink concluded that Jesus prayed for His disciples to be set apart so that they would be anointed for a sacred mission: “The verb ‘sanctify’ (ἀγιάζω) can mean ‘to separate, make holy,’ but in this context refers to the act of consecrating or dedicating a person for

a holy task.”¹⁴ Jesus prayed that the disciples would be set apart for a great work—that is, their “holy task” to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Being set apart for this mission brought them together in unity.

Jesus paired unity and mission together as essential partners in the life of the body of Christ. According to Jerry Pillay,

Edinburgh 1910 (World Missionary Conference) suggested, without spelling it out, that authentic unity could not be had without authentic mission, without an open window toward the world. A WMC meeting in Switzerland recognized that it was inconceivable to divorce the obligation of the church to take the gospel to the whole world from its obligation to draw all Christ’s people together; both were viewed as essential to the being of the church and the fulfilment of its function as the body of Christ.¹⁵

This conviction from the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference remains relevant today. Unity and mission go together. Believers are united through mission and are united for a mission.

Lastly, critical to the discussion on unity and mission is the ability to recognize that unity is empowered by God to impact the world. Pillay concluded,

Our identity is in Christ. Perhaps we are too focused on what we are supposed to do rather than on what we are called to be. We are called to be a unity. Our unity is centered on what Christ has called us to be, for him, in the world. The church, then, is challenged not so much to provide a unity but to be a unity in a world divided by color, creed, race, culture, and other factors.¹⁶

Jesus prayed this prayer of sanctification (setting apart) because He wanted the disciples to live in such great unity that the world would be drawn to Him. He prayed that the

¹⁴ Klink, *John*, Kindle Locations 19745-19747.

¹⁵ Jerry Pillay, “A Mission of Unity and a Unity of Mission: A Look at the Work of the Church Unity Commission.” *International Review of Mission* 104, no. 2 (November 2015): 409. Accessed July 25, 2017.

¹⁶ Pillay, “A Mission of Unity and a Unity of Mission,” 412.

disciples' unity would directly impact their community. Therefore, unity is not only for believers but for those they impact as well. Jesus wanted unity to be missional, expressing the love of God and drawing others to Him.

Made Holy

The fourth component of being set apart is that believers are made holy. At the conclusion of this section of the prayer, Jesus said, “And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth” (John 17:19). Jesus wanted the disciples to be completely aligned with the Father’s will and purpose. Burge concluded,

Jesus prays that his disciples might be “sanctified” (Gk. *hagiazō*) in the truth (17:17). This Greek word refers to something made holy, but the means to achieving this holiness is through separation. God is God by virtue of his difference, his transcendence, his otherness with respect to all creation. Anything (a mountain, a temple shovel, a priestly garment, a people) that belongs to him or serves his purposes should consider itself “holy” and set apart from common use. To be holy, then, is not in the first instance a description of perfection (though this is included). It refers to a life that is so aligned with God that it reflects God’s passions completely (for good, against evil).¹⁷

Within Jesus’ desire for His disciples to be united was for them to be holy. Unity was important to Jesus because He longed to have His disciples aligned with the will and purpose of God completely. In pursuing holiness, Jesus knew that the disciples would separate themselves from the characteristics evident in the world and would reveal the characteristics of the kingdom of heaven.

¹⁷ Burge, *John*, 433-434.

Unity Is Missional

Jesus' heart for unity applied to those listening in on His prayer and to all future generations as well. Based on the desire of Jesus in this prayer, the researcher identified four indicators of a church that is unified in its mission to reach others for Jesus.

They Think beyond Themselves

The first indicator of a church unified for others is that its people think beyond themselves. Jesus prayed, "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message" (John 17:20). The congregants of a church united for others pray for those who do not yet believe. Jesus came into the world to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Until His last breath, He was inviting and rescuing sinners into Paradise, including a criminal on the cross beside Him (Luke 23:43). As followers of Jesus empowered by His Spirit, this must be the heart cry of all believers. Jesus prayed that the disciples' message would cause others to believe. Through a common commitment to share the Gospel message, the church grows in unity.

They Are Committed to Healing Fractures

In a church united for others, its people are committed to healing the fractures that cause division in the body of Christ. Jesus said, "I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me" (John 17:21). Jesus wanted His children to experience the same oneness He and the Father enjoyed. According to Kostenberger, "Jesus' concern for His followers' unity is His greatest burden as His earthly mission draws to a close, and it pervades this entire section. Their unity, in turn, is to be rooted in Jesus' own unity with the Father. Together with love, unity constitutes a vital prerequisite

for their mission.”¹⁸ Jesus openly prayed to the Father about His burdened heart for the church’s unity. The church must embrace this burden as well. Knowing the heart of Jesus for unity should cause believers to actively avoid anything that disrupts the unity that Jesus longed to see them enjoy. A church unified for others makes it a priority to heal the fractures in its midst.

They Radiate with the Glory of God

People radiate with the glory of God in a church unified for others. Jesus prayed, “I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one” (John 17:22). In the Bible, glory is understood as beauty, majesty and splendor.¹⁹ King David was determined to make the temple that Solomon built “a house of fame and glory” (1 Chron. 22:5). When glory is applied to people, it consists of wealth, power, portion and even an inherent majesty or dignity of character. When applied to Yahweh, glory is God revealed.²⁰ The glory of God is not just the presence of God but the presence of God revealed in a special way. Moses saw the glory of God as He passed by him (Exod. 33:18-23). Isaiah experienced the glory of God when the Lord encountered him (Isa. 6). The glory of God is both powerful and perfect.²¹ It is powerful because the presence of God can do anything. It is perfect because when God reveals Himself in a special way to His people, what is revealed is completely good and right.

¹⁸ Köstenberger, *John*, Kindle Locations 9375-9378.

¹⁹ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1991), Kindle Location 12084.

²⁰ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Kindle Location 12084.

²¹ David Hocking, “The Attributes of God: The Glory of God,” *Blue Letter Bible Institute*, accessed May 31, 2017, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/hocking_david/attributes/attributes16.cfm.

Jesus said, “I have given them the glory you gave me” (John 17:22). The “them” in this passage referred to every believer past and present.²² Therefore, according to the words of Jesus, every believer has been given the glory of God. This means all believers should demonstrate the power of God and the perfection of God through the work of the Spirit within them. Jesus made clear the reason for this: “so that they may be one as we are one” (John 17:22). Every Christ-follower has been blessed with the presence of God through the Holy Spirit, who manifests the glory of God.

They Attract Others to Jesus

Jesus asked the Father for His disciples to “experience such perfect unity that the world would know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me” (John 17:23). Jesus wanted the church to experience perfect unity. This is the kind of unity the Trinity models perfectly. Through this unity, Jesus wanted unbelievers to be drawn to the reality that He was sent by the Father and was the way to freedom and salvation. A united church attracts others to Jesus. Marianne Meye Thompson shared,

The disciples’ unity with one another and with the Father and the Son is intended to bring the world to know that the Father sent Jesus: that is its purpose, though not always its result. When faith is born, it will be faith that the Father sent the Son, and that the Son’s mission exemplifies the unity of the Father and Son and their love for the world. The disciples participate in Jesus’ mission, embodying God’s love in order to bring life to the world, regardless of the response.²³

Regretfully, for many unbelievers, this is not the perception of the church today. Carrie Amos, president of The Jericho Partnership in Danbury, Connecticut, stressed the importance of church unity for its evangelistic mission: “Sadly, many people reject

²² Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Kindle Location 12084.

²³ Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: The New Testament Library Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 356.

Christianity because of Christians who don't resemble the Jesus they respect."²⁴ The church must work at breaking down this perception by pursuing unity. When people around the world see a living example of unity through the church, they will be more prone to seek the God who unites them.

Unity Expresses Love

Through unity, Jesus' disciples knew the love of God. Jesus shared His desire for all present and future disciples to be filled with the love of God.

Jesus prayed, "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them" (John 17:25-26). Being united to Jesus draws the believer into an encounter with the love of God. Jesus made a promise to continue the work of revealing God the Father to those who believe. According to Klink, this knowledge is so divine and special that it invites the believer to participate in the community of the Trinity:

To know God is to participate in His love, and to receive His love is to share in His person. The love that motivates the Christian life, rules the life of the church, and inspires its ministry in the world is the essential inward love of the Godhead, the love with which the Father eternally loves the Son.²⁵

In this prayer for unity, Jesus prayed for His disciples to enjoy the community of the Godhead. Believers are invited to find their oneness in the fellowship of God. In this section of Jesus' prayer, the reader is impacted by the role of God's love in discovering

²⁴ Carrie Amos, "Father, unite us for others," *Walnut Hill*, February 19, 2017, <http://www.walnuthillcc.org/sermons/father-unite-us-others/>.

²⁵ Klink, *John*, Kindle Locations 19871-19873.

greater unity in the church. Outside of fellowship with Jesus, the love of God is not fully revealed. When there is an absence of God's love, the unity Jesus prayed for cannot be experienced. Jesus invited believers to discover unity through experiencing the love of the Father. According to Klink,

For through Christ, the church has been united to the relational “in-one-ness” of the Father and the Son. The unity of the church is therefore entirely symptomatic of its participation in God; it is not its own innate unity. The unity depicted here is not a unity that stems from just “being with one another,” nor is it a call to organize and form a united group for friendly and effective co-working. The point here rather is a unity or “in-one-ness” that is established in the unity controlled by, defined by, and shared by the unity of the Father and the Son.²⁶

D. A. Carson contributed,

The crucial point is that this text does not simply make these followers the objects of God's love (as in v. 23), but promises that they will be so transformed, as God is continually made known to them, that God's own love for His Son will become their love. The love with which they learn to love is nothing less than the love amongst the persons of the Godhead.²⁷

Jesus' heart for unity stemmed from His experience as one of the persons of the Trinity.

He perfectly knew the Father's love. He wanted His disciples to know that same love.

The Way of Jesus to Greater Unity in Diversity

Luke's account of Jesus' life vividly revealed that unity was central in the ministry of Jesus. Six characteristics of Jesus' ministry became the foundation for advancing unity in diversity. The early church modeled these foundational characteristics in Acts 2:42-47.

²⁶ Klink, *John*, Kindle Locations 19931-19935.

²⁷ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Kindle Locations 12150-12153.

Six Characteristics of Jesus' Ministry from the Gospel of Luke

Jesus' ministry showed that the way toward oneness happens through love, compassion, humility, empowerment, sacrifice and solitude.

Love

Jesus demonstrated love to the most vulnerable and unlikely in the community. Over an evening meal, the religious elite were confused by the actions of a woman who anointed Jesus' feet with her tears and expensive perfume (Luke 7:36-50). Jesus explained that she had experienced the forgiveness of sins, had been set free and now was responding to the love she was shown with her own outpouring of love. Jesus told the table guests that her loving acts proved that she had experienced the great love of the Father. According to Mark L. Strauss,

The people of Jesus' day would have assumed that the religious-minded Pharisees had the greatest love for God. Yet Jesus here praises not a pious Pharisee but a notorious sinner for her great love.²⁸

This unwanted party guest became the prototype of those whom Jesus encountered and saved. Jesus was not concerned with outward appearance and reputation. He was interested in the inward attitude. This woman showed love to Jesus because she had experienced the love of Jesus firsthand. Jesus loved all people regardless of their background or condition. He was concerned with their heart not their skin color, language or position in society. Through His love, Jesus built a diverse body of believers from every background, race, age and position in life.

²⁸ Mark L. Strauss, *Luke: Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), Kindle Locations 2792-2796.

Compassion

Jesus' compassion compelled Him to cross barriers and bring unity in diversity. The societal norms could not explain why an esteemed Jewish rabbi would minister to a poor blind beggar, yet Jesus stopped and healed the man because His compassion compelled Him to cross cultural barriers (Luke 18:35-43). Jesus raised the widow's son because "His heart went out to her" (Luke 7:11-17). Out of compassion, He looked up at Zacchaeus the tax collector in the tree because He wanted to meet with him in his home (Luke 19:1-9). To His death, Jesus had compassion on people, as evidenced in His welcoming of the criminal on the cross into paradise with Him (Luke 23:39-43).

When an expert in the law asked Jesus "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). Jesus told the story of the most unlikely, a Samaritan, who cared for the bruised and battered traveler. Strauss pointed out that authentic Christian living was found through compassion demonstrated in love: "This famous parable of Jesus teaches that authentic spiritual life is defined not by ethnic or national heritage, but by love for God and for others."²⁹ Jesus told those gathered to "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37b). This remains the call today. With greater compassion comes greater unity in diversity because authentic compassion never discriminates.

Humility

The way of Jesus to greater unity with God and one another is through a posture of humility. Jesus encountered a group of people who were confident in their own righteousness (Luke 18). They looked down on everyone else and were full of pride.

²⁹ Strauss, *Luke*, Kindle Locations 3559-3560.

Jesus told this group a story about two men. The first thanked God because he was not like other people but was more righteous in his behavior. The second man, who was unable to look up to heaven, prayed, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13).

James Edwards concluded,

The tax collector knows his situation to be much different. Without merits to stand on, he must stand humbly before God; without merits to speak for him, he must plead to God; without merits to be rewarded, his only option is to plead for God’s mercy. The Pharisee stands before God in self-congratulation, the tax collector stands before God in prayer.³⁰

Jesus honored the second man because he came before the Lord in a posture of humility. Jesus said that he would be “exalted” because of his humility (Luke 18:14). From this story, two valuable lessons about unity in diversity are learned.

First, the way to greater unity with God is through an attitude of humility. God likes to bless the person who comes in humility rather than pride. In the two prayers found in this story, two hearts are represented. The first comes to congratulate himself, while the second comes knowing he needs forgiveness and mercy. Of this second man, Darrell Bock wrote, “He comes to God desiring only to improve his relationship to God.”³¹ An attitude of humility has the right motives. For this humble man, his motive was to strengthen his bond with the Lord.

Second, the way to unity with one another is through an attitude of humility. The second man saw his own sin while the first saw the weaknesses of others. Out of pride, the first man compared his life to the life of others. This was his way of determining the

³⁰ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), Kindle Locations 15151-15154.

³¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 462.

value of his own righteousness. Through comparing his life with the lives of others, the first man was segregating and dividing people into categories and groupings. His pride led him to view people's differences as weaknesses. This made him feel confident in his own false righteousness. Bock described the negative effects of pride and the unifying characteristics of humility:

Pride preaches merit; humility pleads for compassion. Pride negotiates as an equal; humility approaches in need. Pride separates by putting down others; humility identifies with others, recognizing we all have the same need. Pride destroys through its alienating self-service; humility opens doors with its power to sympathize with the struggle we share. Pride turns up its nose; humility offers an open and lifted-up hand.³²

Pride leads to segregation and division but humility becomes the foundation for unity.

Jesus teaches this group that through a posture of humility a person is positioned to hear from God, be transformed by God and discover greater unity with God and others.

Empowerment

To empower others means to give them the authority and power to accomplish something. Jesus often empowered people, which led to great unity with God and one another. Through the empowerment of Jesus, the disciples progressively realized that Jesus was the Messiah. From the shore, Jesus called to the disciples and told them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. The disciples had been fishing all night with nothing to show for it. After following Jesus' instructions, they caught so many fish their nets could hardly contain the load. At this, Peter fell at the feet of Jesus, and they all committed to follow Him (Luke 5:1-11). Through the empowerment of Jesus, the disciples were called together in unity to follow Him.

³² Bock, *Luke*, 464.

Jesus empowered the disciples through His teachings. Failing to put Jesus' teachings into practice would be like a builder who built without a strong foundation (Luke 6:46-49). The teachings of Jesus would empower them to remain united with God and one another even when the storms of life would knock them down. Through the empowerment of Jesus' teaching, the disciples would have a strong foundation to stand on together.

As the twelve apostles were sent out empowered by Jesus, they healed many and proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand (Luke 9:1-6). Later, when the 72 disciples were sent out, they came back enthused by what they accomplished together, all because they were empowered by Jesus (Luke 10:1-24). Jesus would even empower a man who was once filled with demons. He was so overwhelmed by demons that he was given the name Legion. After Jesus cast the demons out of the man, He empowered him to go and tell what the Lord had done. Legion went from being full of demons to full of the Spirit. He was transformed from being against God to being the chief evangelist in his town, all because of the empowerment of Jesus (Luke 8:38-39).³³ Through the empowerment of Jesus, believers are sent out in unity to impact His kingdom.

Sacrifice

Jesus always told His disciples about the cost related to following Him. Through Jesus' own death, He modeled the kind of life His disciples should live—that is, a life completely surrendered to the will of the Father. Jesus called His disciples to take up their crosses and follow Him (Luke 9:21-27). He repeatedly spoke of the cost of being a

³³ Strauss, *Luke*, Kindle Locations 2991-3044.

disciple (Luke 9:57-62, 14:25-35). Jesus modeled to the disciples that the way to unity with God and with one another was a life lived in service to the Lord. A rich ruler came to Jesus and asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” In the end, Jesus answered by telling him he must give everything up to follow Jesus (Luke 18:18-30). Jesus was teaching the rich ruler that the Lord wanted his whole life surrendered to Him. Jesus lived a life fully submitted to the work of the Lord. This was the life that Jesus invited His disciples into, a life fully submitted and surrendered to the Lord.³⁴ Through a fully surrendered life, a believer experiences unity with God. The rich ruler had countless possessions that stood in the way of being fully united with God. Jesus’ council to him was to set them all aside to gain the blessing of the Lord. This would take sacrificing all that he had for all that he could gain.

Sacrifice leads a believer into unity with God and with others. A Christian is to serve and sacrifice for others. Jesus commanded His disciples, “Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:12-13). Through this kind of sacrifice, which is the way of Jesus, believers will discover greater unity together.

Solitude

Jesus often retreated to solitary places. He would seek solitude from the distractions of the world to encounter His Father in heaven. In Luke’s Gospel, whenever Jesus went off to solitary places to meet with the Father extraordinary ministry followed. Jesus spent time in solitude and then engaged in powerful healing ministry (Luke 5:16).

³⁴ Strauss, *Luke*, Kindle Location 5008.

After meeting with the Lord in solitude, Jesus called the twelve disciples and designated them as apostles (Luke 6:12). After Jesus was in solitude, He fed the 5,000, which was more likely closer to 10,000 including women and children (Luke 9:10-12). When Jesus prayed and met with the Lord, the transfiguration occurred (Luke 9:28). Finally, Jesus spent time in solitude on the Mount of Olives before His death (Luke 22:39-46).

Throughout His ministry, Jesus encouraged people to wholeheartedly seek the Lord. Mary was honored for sitting at Jesus' feet while her sister Martha kept herself busy with the house chores. When Martha came to Jesus disappointed, He said to her, "You are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42). Time with the Lord has eternal value, which is what Mary discovered and why it could not be taken from her.

Through times of solitude, people become united with Jesus. The "First 20" is an initiative at Walnut Hill that encourages the entire church to take the first 20 minutes of the day in solitude with Jesus. Through the First 20, a female congregant from Walnut Hill testified that she met Jesus for the first time after 40 years of trying to earn her relationship with God. Through this practice, Lauren became united with Jesus. It was not through her good works or through her tithe; it was because she had finally made time for Jesus to meet her. When a person intentionally takes time in solitude, Jesus meets her and her unity with Him is strengthened.

Through solitude believers become united with one another. This seems like a contradiction. How can you become more unified with others through spending time alone? When believers meet with Jesus individually, their hearts will be aligned

corporately. According to Richard Foster, “The fruit of solitude is increased sensitivity and compassion for others. There comes a new freedom to be with people. There is new attentiveness to their needs, new responsiveness to their hurts.”³⁵ When people spend intentional time with Jesus through solitude, they gain the heart of Jesus for others. This is a key component to discovering greater unity in diversity.

Unity in the Early Church

As in the life of Jesus, the life of the early church revealed characteristics critically important to unity in diversity. The church experienced unity in diversity because of the filling of the Spirit, their devotion to spiritual growth, their regular worship and their commitment to the continuation of Jesus’ mission through the church.

Filling

After Jesus rose from the dead, He spent 40 days with His disciples before His ascension into heaven. During this time, He spoke to them and taught them about the kingdom of God. One day while they were eating together, Jesus gave them a critical command. He said, “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4b-5). On the day of Pentecost, the gift of the Spirit would be given, which would fulfill the prophetic word given to the prophet Joel about the outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-32). Through the Spirit the early church experienced unity in diversity. Without the Spirit the church would be dead, but with the Spirit the church was a vibrant, active, and powerful body. John Stott noted,

³⁵ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1978), 108.

Without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be inconceivable, even impossible. There can be no life without the life-giver, no understanding without the Spirit of truth, no fellowship without the unity of the Spirit, no Christlikeness of character apart from his fruit, and no effective witness without his power. As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the Spirit is dead.³⁶

The gift of the Spirit was so important in the context of unity in diversity that Jesus instructed the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until it was received.

It was necessary to wait for the Spirit because the Spirit would unify a diverse group of people. Theologian Ajith Fernando comments on the importance of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit during a major festival celebration,

The fulfillment of Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit appropriately takes place during a Jewish harvest festival, Pentecost. It was one of the three Jewish pilgrimage festivals, when individuals were to appear before the Lord with gifts and offerings (Ex. 23:14-17); it celebrated the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest. It is appropriate that the event that was going to propel the Gospel to the ends of the earth took place at a time when people from the ends of the earth were in Jerusalem.³⁷

The Lord called the known world together to receive the gift of His Spirit. By the Spirit, the Lord would unite people from every tribe and every nation. Tony Merida contributed,

So, what was God teaching the church with this marvelous sign? The obvious point is that the gospel is for the nations. Thus, the church must spread the gospel to every people, tribe, and to those of every language, for that is God's redemptive plan (Rev 5: 9-10). God's ultimate community—the citizenry of heaven—consists of a transnational, transtribal, transracial, and translinguistic people.³⁸

It was also necessary to wait for the Spirit because the Spirit would unify believers by giving them a diversity of gifts. The Apostle Paul taught about the gifts of

³⁶ John Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Bible Speaks Today Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), Kindle Locations 953-955.

³⁷ Ajith Fernando, *Acts: The NIV Application Commentary Book 5* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 38-39.

³⁸ Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts: Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), Kindle Locations 900-904.

the Spirit in his first letter to the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 12). In this teaching, Paul communicated that the Spirit gives people different gifts. These gifts are to be used together to build the kingdom of God. His analogy of being the body of Christ is particularly helpful. Paul described the different gifts as different parts of the body and concluded that each part is required and necessary. In the letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul taught the people that the gifts were given to build up the church and bring believers into greater unity. When speaking about the gifts Paul said, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-13). Jesus wanted the believers to wait for the Spirit so that they would be unified together through the diversity of gifts.

Devotion

The people of the early church devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship with one another, to remembering the work and sacrifice of Jesus through breaking bread together, and to prayer (Acts 2:42). According to Fernando,

“Devoting” (*proskartereo*) is the same word as is used in connection with the persistent devotion of the disciples to prayer in 1:14. This word occurs six times in Acts 2. The word is used often with the idea of “persisting obstinately in” something—a meaning that is appropriate here.³⁹

The newly formed church chose to pursue these four foundational elements of being in community together, which bonded them together. Any community seeking greater unity ought to follow the model from the early church, devoting themselves to the

³⁹ Fernando, *Acts*, 72-73.

Word of God, fellowshiping with one another, remembering the work and sacrifice of Jesus, and praying together. The story is told of a woman who ran up to the great violinist Fritz Kreisler after one of his concerts and said, “I’d give my life to play as beautifully as you.” Kreisler replied, “I did.”⁴⁰ The level of devotion the early church demonstrated to Jesus and to one another was instrumental in their unity. Their unity was not discovered accidentally. It was achieved through intentional devotion to the things of God.

The Teaching of the Apostles

The truth of God, as taught by the apostles, was instrumental in unifying the new community of believers. The apostles had firsthand accounts of the stories and teaching of Jesus. Therefore, they were the most qualified teachers in the early church. Paul instructed the church to listen to the apostles’ teaching. Paul believed that through this teaching the early church would learn, mature and live out their new lives in Jesus. Through the teaching of the apostles, the early church found unity in their beliefs, their calling and their mission to the world.

The Fellowship of Believers

Members of the early church were devoted to meeting together in community. They experienced an intimacy in sisterhood and brotherhood that was truly unique from any other community. Fernando commented on this unique type of fellowship:

The word “koinonia,” which Luke uses for “fellowship,” is a favorite word of Paul’s, though this is the only time it appears in Luke’s writings. Its basic idea is sharing, but it is used also to denote intimacy and fellowship in general. It is used for “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:14) and for our participation in

⁴⁰ “Sermon Illustrations,” *Sermonillustrations.Com*, last modified 2017, accessed May 26, 2017, <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/d/dedication.htm>.

the blood and body of Christ when we partake of the cup and the bread at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:16).⁴¹

Through this unique and blessed fellowship, the early church cared for one another, met the needs of one another and encouraged one another in the things of the Lord. According to Eckhard Schnabel,

Luke explains that the unity of the believers expressed itself in practical ways: the believers shared their possessions. The statement “they held all things in common” (εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινά) can mean that the believers sold everything they owned and pooled the proceeds. Or it can mean that they remained owners of their property while being willing to use their possessions for the common good. In view of the details given in 2:45 and 4:32-5:11, the second meaning is preferable.⁴²

Such strong fellowship was experienced that the community made all their individual possessions available for the benefit of the group. Clearly, their hearts were tuned to the health of the community over their own selfish desires. Unity in diversity was experienced because everyone was treated as equal participants in the family of God.

The Breaking of Bread

There is dispute over whether Acts 2:42 is speaking about general table fellowship or the Lord's Supper. Some scholars argue that the breaking of bread in this passage refers to having meals together, while others believe that the language used points to the community remembering the death and resurrection of Jesus through the Lord's Supper. Fernando argues for the position of the Lord's Supper:

There are at least twelve references to the breaking of bread in the New Testament. Note also that the other three features mentioned in 2:42—teaching,

⁴¹ Fernando, *Acts*, 73.

⁴² Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Kindle Locations 5042-5047.

fellowship, and prayer—are spiritual activities, which suggests that this fourth one—the breaking of bread—is also a spiritual activity (i.e., the Lord’s Supper).⁴³

Bock sees it differently and concludes that the original language lends itself to a more general view of table fellowship:

The verb κλάω (klaō, break) appears in Acts 2:46; 20:7, 11; and 27:35. In 2:46, the reference seems to be used broadly of meals, suggesting a broad use here as well, although 20:7 appears to refer to the table on the first day of the week. What makes the choice hard to decide is that the Lord’s table was part of a larger meal in the earliest church. Most of the references in this context seem broad, which would suggest a broad reference here.⁴⁴

The emphasis remains not on the type of meal the believers had but on the result of the fellowship that took place around the table. The regular practice of gathering around the table for a meal led to greater unity.

Prayer

Jesus taught His disciples how to pray (Matt. 6:9-13). Now they were meeting with Jesus by the Spirit through the gift of prayer. This was no longer a ritual of faith but the avenue to relationship with the one they loved. Jesus Himself taught them how to connect with the Lord through prayer. Fernando explained,

The great contribution of Jesus to the Christian understanding of prayer was His intimacy with God, whom He called “Father” (Mark 14:36). He taught His disciples also to share this intimacy, and even the Gentile Christians used the characteristic Aramaic word that He used, “Abba,” when addressing God (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). This new understanding of intimacy with God would have been actualized in their experience through the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.⁴⁵

⁴³ Fernando, *Acts*, 74.

⁴⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), Kindle Locations 4095-4100.

⁴⁵ Fernando, *Acts*, 75.

After the believers were filled with the Spirit, they continually met with the Spirit through praying together. The practice of prayer became the lifeline to connecting with God together. Prayer drew them into unity with God and with one another.

Worship

When God is the focus, unity in diversity is the result. The people of the Acts 2 church gathered together to praise the Lord for all the good things He was accomplishing in and through them. With such strong unity present, the community gathered regularly for powerful times of praise. Fernando explained, “When God’s people come together and enjoy fellowship, ‘praising God’ is the natural result (v. 47a). True fellowship focuses on God and helps people to remember the good things He has done, which, in turn, causes praise.”⁴⁶ God’s presence was clearly felt and His mighty hand was seen through the miracles among them that caused a great sense of awe in the community (Acts 2:43). With this explosion of God’s presence and power, the church could not help but praise Him. God’s presence and power drew a diverse group of people together to corporately praise the one who united them. God was the focus and unity was the result.

When people gather to worship together, what they worship forms them. Scott Aniol contributed,

How a church worships week in and week out forms the people—it molds their behavior by shaping their inclinations through habitual practices, because the shape of the liturgy transmits its values. Like that path through the forest, when people travel along the liturgy that we have provided for them, they will inevitably be shaped by the values and beliefs worn into it. It is in Christian liturgy that a Christian’s heart, as Lewis said, is “organized by trained habits into

⁴⁶ Fernando, *Acts*, 76.

stable sentiments,” where a Christian’s inclinations are disciplined and trained, and where the negative effects of worldly liturgies may be counteracted.⁴⁷

Corporate worship became a unifying practice. As the early church gathered together for teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and worship, their hearts were formed together in unity.

Mission

The early church united around a shared mission. According to Mitzi J. Budde,

The mission of the church is the way in which it responds to the call to make that unity visible: in our lives and our words, in our actions and our worship, the ways in which we live together faithfully in shared witness to that ultimate reality that is our true unity in Christ.⁴⁸

When the church unites around a mission, it draws people together and becomes visible to others. “All the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.

They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need” (Acts 2:44-45). The early churches unity became visible to others as they shared material things and met the needs of the poor.

The Leadership Principles Necessary for Unity in Diversity

The ministry of Jesus paved the way for the Gospel to spread to the Gentiles.

Jesus predicted and proclaimed this new way forward when He said, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16). God empowered His people

⁴⁷ Scott Aniol, “Practice Makes Perfect: Corporate Worship and the Formation of Spiritual Virtue.” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 10, no. 1 (March 2017): 93-104. Accessed July 26, 2017.

⁴⁸ Mitzi J. Budde, “The Marks as SignPosts of the Journey to Unity in Mission” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 45, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 218-226. Accessed July 26, 2017.

in this mission. Leaders need to step into the calling of God and lead people into greater unity in diversity. By focusing on the key leaders who were used by God to move the Gospel into the Gentile community, the researcher discovered ten important leadership principles that must be embraced by leaders desiring to see greater unity in diversity within the communities they lead.

Unity Leaders Pray

Regarding the importance of prayer, Richard Foster said, “Prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life. Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father.”⁴⁹ Leaders who desire greater unity in diversity must have a strong connection with the Lord through prayer. The movement of the Gospel into the Gentile community was a major shift that would change the world forever. Even those who walked closest with Jesus on earth struggled with the concept of Gentile Christians and the establishment of a new way forward marked by the openness of the Gospel to all people regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and physical ability. Peter himself was hard at work sharing the message of Jesus with the Jews when the Lord called him through prayer to extend the invitation of the Gospel to the Gentiles. This was not a movement that would happen without a clear call from God. It would not have happened naturally. God had to move supernaturally to shake the leaders into action. According to Fernando,

Peter, the one to whom the keys of the kingdom were given (Matt. 16:19), is again chosen to open another important door for the Gospel—as he did with the Jews on the day of Pentecost and with the Samaritans a short while later. We find him in Joppa, where he will disregard his prejudices, obey God by traveling to Caesarea,

⁴⁹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 33.

and open the door for Gentiles to respond to the Gospel—the very thing that Jonah resisted in the same city (Jon. 1:3).⁵⁰

God used Peter to open the door of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Peter was a man who sought God. God met him powerfully in prayer.

Just prior to Peter’s vision, the Lord encountered another man named Cornelius. Living in Caesarea, a place that had more Gentiles than Jews, Cornelius was a God-fearing man who met the Lord through prayer.⁵¹ According to Fernando, “Luke gives two features about the piety of Cornelius: his generosity to the needy and his regular prayer.”⁵² Peter and Cornelius were in prayer when the Lord gave them a vision that would change the world. For God to move powerfully through a leader, that leader must be a person of prayer. Fernando added,

The revolutionary message to Peter came while he was engaged in private prayer (v. 9). God spoke to Cornelius also when he was in prayer (v. 30). This conforms to a pattern found in both of Luke’s volumes: God used prayer time as an occasion to lead people to new avenues of ministry. This is perhaps to be expected. God, who wishes two-way communication with his children, will find our times of prayer, when we are attuned to Him, as suitable occasions to break through to us.⁵³

When leaders turn to prayer, the Lord meets them and gives them great vision. Tony Merida contributed,

Notice that Peter, like Cornelius, was praying when he received his vision. I’m not suggesting that something dramatic like this will happen every time we pray, but I do think it indicates that those who humbly seek the Lord in unhindered and unhurried prayer experience great blessing.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Fernando, *Acts*, 271-272.

⁵¹ Fernando, *Acts*, 269.

⁵² Fernando, *Acts*, 271.

⁵³ Fernando, *Acts*, 276.

⁵⁴ Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts*, Kindle Locations 3466-3468.

If greater unity in diversity is desired, leaders must seek the Lord through prayer and allow Him to break through with His vision and heart for His people.

Unity Leaders Are Led by the Spirit

The Spirit of God called Peter to meet the men who had come to his home from Cornelius' house. "While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them'" (Acts 10:19-20). What happened next models an important principle for leadership. "Peter went" (Acts 10:21). With Peter's heart submitted to the leading of the Spirit, the Lord chose to work powerfully in and through him. Through this submission to the Spirit, the Lord introduced the Gospel message to the Gentiles. In a similar way, leaders today must submit to the work of the Spirit in their lives to see the powerful work of God among them.

Unity Leaders Befriend Others

Peter made the day-long trip to the home of Cornelius. He "entered the house" of Cornelius (Acts 10:25). It would have been unlikely for a Jew to open his home and demonstrate hospitality to a visiting Gentile.⁵⁵ Now Peter entered the home of Cornelius, which would have been an even further expression of the move of God in Peter's life because it was beyond uncustomary for a Jew to enter the home of a Gentile. Peter was displaying great leadership when he entered the home of Cornelius. He was communicating God's heart by actively placing himself in a new situation. His presence in the home of Cornelius marked and endorsed the truth of God's vision that all people

⁵⁵ I. Howard Marshal, *Acts: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Madison, WI: InterVarsity Press, 1980), Kindle Location 3104.

regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and physical ability are equal in His sight. Willie James Jennings added,

Peter and Cornelius should not be together. The disciples who came with Peter should not be in the same room with Cornelius's family and close friends, his household, but there they are together. The cultural codes and social rules and theology that normally apply are being suspended in this encounter, and no one knows what will happen next.⁵⁶

Peter models what it means to be a unity leader by not allowing ethnic, social or religious differences to stop him from befriending others. Good leaders model what they want their followers to mirror. For leaders to advance unity within their communities, they must leave homes and meet people where they are. Like Peter, good leaders risk being uncomfortable to break down divisional walls.

Unity Leaders Share the Gospel

Cornelius invited his family and friends to hear from Peter upon his arrival. In this moment, Peter could have shared anything with the group because they were eagerly waiting to hear from him. However, there is only one thing that needed to be communicated, so Peter shared the Gospel message with them. Peter realized that the Gospel did not show partiality but was for everyone. Howard Marshall commented,

Peter expresses his realization that God will accept anybody of any race who reverences Him and lives righteously. God is no respecter of persons. The word which is used here is found for the first time in the New Testament and is a translation of the Hebrew phrase “to lift (someone’s) face,” which meant “to show favor” and hence “to show favoritism”. God does not have favorites. This means that, on the one hand, evil-doers cannot hope that he will show partiality to them at the judgment and, on the other hand, that no man need fear that God will not receive him out of partiality. Christians must display the same spirit.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Willie James Jennings, *Acts: Belief - A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 109.

⁵⁷ Marshall, *Acts*, Kindle Locations 3154-3161.

Leaders who desire to see greater unity will share the Gospel message, which calls all people into the love of God. The Gospel is the great equalizer. It calls sinners to repentance and the forgiven into the great love of God together. After Peter communicated the Gospel, Cornelius' family and friends were filled with the Spirit. Through the filling of the Spirit, the house was unified. As the Apostle Paul said, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

Unity Leaders Earn Trust

Leaders who desire to see greater unity within the community that they lead should be prepared to patiently earn trust. The Apostle Paul earned the trust of the churches he led by faithfully serving with them. Paul's letters revealed Paul's intimate knowledge of and love for the people to whom he wrote. He wanted the best for them and was a trusted friend. In the first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote, "My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you" (1 Cor. 1:11). Paul remained connected to his friends even as he traveled. These connections allowed him to know the difficulties and struggles each church faced. His close connection to the churches earned him the right to speak into their lives, even from a distance. Another reason why Paul earned trust with the churches was because he spent time with them. Paul and Barnabas spent "considerable time" in Iconium (Acts 14:3). In Lystra and Derby, Paul remained in the city for a day, even after being stoned nearly to death (Acts 14:20). They stayed "a long time" in Antioch (Acts 14:28). Paul and Silas spent at least three weeks in Thessalonica and then over a year and a half in Corinth (Acts 17-18). The church in Ephesus asked Paul to stay longer but he declined (Acts

18:20). He would later return and spend three months with them (Acts 19:8). Paul was loyal to the churches. He spent time with them and, therefore, became a trusted friend.

In 1981, Robert Levering and Milton Moskowitz were commissioned by a New York editor to travel the country to discover the best organizations to work for and to present the common qualities these organizations shared. After the research was done, Levering and Moskowitz published their work, “The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America.” The researchers realized an important truth about each of these companies. Each of them was characterized by a culture of trust. They went on to discover that the best companies to work for had an extremely high level of trust between employer and employee. And the opposite was true as well. The worst companies to work for had low levels of trust between employer and employee. At the end of the study, Levering and Moskowitz summarized, “Simply put, a great place to work is one where you trust the people you work for, have pride in what you do, and enjoy the people you work with.”⁵⁸ Great leaders are trusted by those who follow them. If Christian leaders are going to foster greater unity among those they lead, they must gain their trust.

Unity Leaders Speak with Authority

The voice is a powerful tool that can be used positively or negatively for the kingdom of God. James likens the tongue to a mighty ship rudder that can turn the grandest of ships (James 3:1-18). Many of the apostles used their voices to influence the movement of the Gospel into the Gentile community. Peter spoke with authority to the apostles and elders of the churches, validating the ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 15:6-11).

⁵⁸ Bob Lee, *Trust Rules: How the World's Best Managers Create Great Places to Work* (Dublin, Ireland: The Trust Lab, 2017), 6.

Because of Peter's speech, the Council of Jerusalem decided to stand with and encourage the new Gentile believers, even though many of the Pharisees were pressuring them to demand the Gentiles to follow every aspect of the Old Testament law. Similarly, leaders today can powerfully use their voices to influence people into greater unity.

Unity Leaders Encourage

In the ups and downs of life, leaders need to maintain unity through a voice of encouragement. Paul was a prisoner sailing to Italy to stand trial before Caesar (Acts 27). On this journey, the captain ordered that the ship go out to sea prematurely. Paul had warned the captain that the seas would not be kind. Yet, the captain did not listen. As predicted, great storms came through making it impossible for the ship to travel safely. When all had lost hope, Paul used his voice to encourage them.

But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, "Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you." So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me (Acts 27:22-25).

As the story progresses, Paul encouraged the travelers again with God's plan to deliver them. He thanked God and gave them food to eat. "Then everyone was encouraged" (Acts 27:36). In the most difficult of times, Paul used his voice to encourage the people. Many of the men were threatening to leave the ship but because of Paul's strong words they remained on the ship and God fulfilled His promise to Paul by saving each of their lives. Although most situations in a leader's journey will not be nearly as challenging, words of encouragement can powerfully keep people aligned in unity together.

Unity Leaders Know When to Stay and When to Go

In Corinth, Paul began to share the message of Jesus to the Jews, but they opposed Paul to the point of becoming aggressive and abusive. Paul then “left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God” (Acts 18:7). Just next door, Paul encountered the amazing favor of God. The entire household believed and were baptized. After that, Paul had a fruitful ministry in Corinth for more than a year and a half (Acts 18:11). This may not have happened if Paul continued in the unfruitful work with the Jews. Later in Ephesus, Paul again spoke in the synagogue without a positive result. He left the synagogue and moved to the lecture hall where the Lord blessed the preaching of the Word powerfully (Acts 19:1-12). Like Paul, unity leaders learn when unity is not a possibility and move on. In these two situations, Paul discovered that unity would not be possible. Therefore, he moved to a group of people who had ears to hear and eyes to see the goodness of the Lord. Good leaders know when to stay and when to go. When the hearts of the people are not open to the Gospel, harmony and unity, it is best for the leader to leave and find new ground.

Unity Leaders Are Courageous

It must have taken great courage for Paul to re-enter Lystra after being nearly stoned to death (Acts 14:20). Great courage was needed to travel through turbulent waters, being shipwrecked three times (2 Cor. 11:25). It took great courage to stand up and speak to the crowd as Paul was arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1-29). Paul was a courageous leader. This is the kind of leader God is looking for—a leader ready to surrender all to Him. Paul did not move foolishly. Instead, he moved with courage. A courageous person dares to believe the Lord and listens to Him when He calls. Paul

needed courage to pioneer a new way forward. He was called to bring the Gospel message to the Gentiles. This would not be a popular mission for him, but he chose to act with courage. This leadership principle is relevant today. It will take courage to be a leader who commits to unity in diversity. Like Paul, unity leaders today must dare to believe the Lord and listen to Him as they lead toward greater unity in diversity.

Unity Leaders Are Christ-Like

Finally, leaders who desire to see unity in diversity will live Christ-like lives.

According to John MacArthur,

The perfect model of true leadership, of course, is the Great Shepherd, Christ Himself. If that does not make you feel the least bit unworthy, you have missed the whole point. With Paul, we ought to say, “Who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor. 2:16). We already know the answer: “Our sufficiency is from God” (3:5).⁵⁹

In Galatians 5, Paul presented two contrasting lists. The first list included the results of living according to the sinful nature:

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

The second list forecasts the results of living in our new nature, guided by the Holy Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-23). Leaders who choose to be filled by and follow the Holy Spirit experience the fruit of the Spirit. Living out this kind of life is the best way to lead people into greater unity.

⁵⁹ John F. MacArthur, *Called to Lead: 26 Leadership Lessons from the Life of the Apostle Paul* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 178.

Summary

Jesus' prayer in John 17 revealed His desire for unity. He prayed that the believers' unity would remain protected, set them apart as the people of God, powerfully draw others into the kingdom of God and above all be carried out in love. In Luke's Gospel, the way of Jesus to unity is revealed through His ministry characterized by love, compassion, humility, empowerment, sacrifice and solitude. These characteristics were also seen in the members of the early church through additional qualities that led them to be a unified church, such as the filling of the Spirit, their devotion to growth, their regular worship and their commitment to the continuation of Jesus' mission through the church. Unity in diversity was at the very heart of Jesus, was demonstrated by the way Jesus lived and should be modeled through the practices of today's leaders by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER THREE: UNITY IN DIVERSITY THROUGH INTENTIONALITY

Wendy K. Walters identified the advantage of living a life directed by intentional choices in her book *Intentionality*. The alternative is making continuous casual choices that cause a person to go off course. Walters stressed the danger of casual choices: “A string of casual decisions can take you off course inch by careless inch until the flow of your time, energy, and resources is directed in a completely different direction from where you want to go.”¹ Being intentional allows a person to purposefully choose to neglect things that would become negative distractions, as well as purposefully choose things that would positively point him or her in the right direction. Walters concludes the only possible way for a person to fulfill his or her God-given mission and vision is through consistently pursuing the value of intentionality: “Intentionality is not a once and done deal. It is a constant companion of the successful and a consistent supervisor of those who achieve their destiny.”²

The value of unity in diversity will only take root within the church when a commitment to intentionality is embraced. According to George Yancey,

Multiracial churches do not just spring up. They are the result of intentional efforts on the part of church leaders and members to create or maintain an integrated congregation. This effort represents another important principle in the

¹ Wendy K. Walters, *Intentionality: Live on Purpose!* (Keller, TX: Palm Tree Publications, 2012), 36.

² Walters, *Intentionality*, 44.

construction and maintenance of multiracial congregations: Such churches are the result of intentional work. This principle can be labeled intentionality.³

There is a call on church leaders to pursue unity in diversity; however, most have not implemented an intentional plan. This literature review concentrated on learning from secular organizations that have implemented intentional plans for unity in diversity, the common barriers to unity in diversity, the characteristics of communities that enjoy God-honoring unity in diversity, the role of leaders in influencing greater unity in diversity, and the practical steps required for organizations to achieve greater unity in diversity.

Learning from Secular Organizations

Many secular organizations have implemented intentional plans for diversity. In many ways, secular organizations are far ahead of the church. Therefore, the church can learn from organizations and businesses that have celebrated and embraced diversity. In his thesis, “Empowering Congregations to Celebrate Diversity,” Stephen Gibson argued that the experience of secular organizations can benefit the local church: “Identifying the best means by which an organization, regardless of its stated mission, can pursue unity among its diverse people will provide transferable principles useful in a large church’s attempts to become diverse.”⁴ From the researcher’s study, four pillars are present in organizations where diversity is embraced and celebrated: leadership, development, communication and innovation. Starting with strong leadership, organizations that have

³ George Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), Kindle Locations 1089-1091.

⁴ Stephen Gibson, “Empowering Congregations to Move from Simple Hospitality to Celebration of Ethnic Diversity within Their Churches” (DMin Thesis Project Report, Bethel Seminary, 2016), 58.

done well in embracing diversity develop and educate their people, communicate a catalytic vision for diversity, and encourage innovation throughout the organization.

Leadership

When leaders commit to embrace and celebrate diversity, the organization benefits. “In a 2015 McKinsey and Company study, researchers found that companies that were racially and ethnically diverse and gender-diverse were 35 percent and 15 percent more likely, respectively, to outperform those that did not make such a commitment.”⁵ Diversity within the leadership of an organization contributes to the overall success of an organization. Studies also show that when organizations lack diversity in leadership, minority groups within that organization suffer. A study conducted by the *Center for Talent Innovation* revealed that “without diverse leadership, women are 20 percent less likely than straight white men to win endorsement for their ideas; people of color are 24 percent less likely; and LGBTs are 21 percent less likely.”⁶ When an organization lacks diversity within its leadership, the perspectives, ideas and feedback of minorities⁷ are often overlooked.

Research also indicates that organizations that have embraced diversity have great leaders who champion the value of diversity throughout the organization. According to Gibson, “It is crucial to the success of a company’s holistic embrace of diversity to have

⁵ Kali Wilder, “40 Best Companies for Diversity,” *Black Enterprise* 46, no. 2 (2015): 61, accessed September 18, 2017.

⁶ Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Melinda Marshall, and Laura Sherbin. “How Diversity Can Drive Innovation,” *Harvard Business Review* 91, no. 12 (2013): 30, accessed September 16, 2017, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

⁷ The term “minorities” refers to any group within Walnut Hill that does not represent the majority white population.

leadership that champions it both verbally and in personal practice.”⁸ The role of the leader is to communicate the vision and live out the value of diversity. From 2001 to 2006, Steve Reinemund was the chief executive officer of PepsiCo. In this era of PepsiCo’s history, the organization made giant steps in embracing and celebrating diversity. Reinemund often spoke at universities on the topic of creating and championing diversity in the workplace. At one such engagement, Reinemund was asked if he would pursue greater diversity within PepsiCo if it were not good for business. He stumbled on the question, leaving the audience unsatisfied with his answer. Eventually, Reinemund came to this conclusion: “It finally occurred to me that I had spent three years talking about the business case for diversity—‘the head’—while never speaking about ‘the heart.’”⁹ To promote the value of diversity within an organization, the leadership must live a life passionately convinced that diversity is best no matter the outcome. In developing an intentional plan for unity in diversity, success starts with the leaders.

Development

Organizations that embrace and celebrate diversity provide consistent training and development opportunities for their staff and key stakeholders. According to a study by the *Human Resource Development Group*, diversity education and development has a positive impact on key areas of the organization such as “HR impacts (employee performance, discretionary behavior), operational impacts (customer service, quality),

⁸ Gibson, “Empowering Congregations to Move from Simple Hospitality to Celebration of Ethnic Diversity within Their Churches” 62.

⁹ David A. Thomas and Stephanie J. Creary, “Meeting the Diversity Challenge at PepsiCo: The Steve Reinemund Era,” *Harvard Business School* (August 17, 2009): 8, accessed September 18, 2017, Harvard Business.

and financial impacts (return on investments, profitability).”¹⁰ Intentional diversity education and development produce overwhelmingly positive outcomes. According to the study, “A significant number of studies reported learning outcomes such as enhanced employee knowledge and awareness of diversity issues, enhanced diversity behaviors and skills to handle diversity issues, and changed attitudes toward diversity.”¹¹ The church must learn from the experiences of secular organizations and implement an intentional plan for diversity education and development.

Communication

Unified communication is vital to an organization’s ability to embrace unity in diversity. A strong and clear vision for unity in diversity must be communicated frequently and consistently. James Olson suggested that a successful plan for unity in diversity moves people out of their siloed groups into a newly forged unified family. He stressed the importance of a strong vision in this process: “Congregations will only be willing to be forged in this way when they are captured by kingdom culture vision.”¹² A well-communicated vision for unity in diversity inspires an organization to live out the reality of that vision.

¹⁰ Hussain Alhejji, Thomas Garavan, Ronan Carbery, Fergal O’Brien, and David McGuire, “Diversity Training Programme Outcomes: A Systematic Review,” *Human Resource Development Quarterly* vol. 27, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 139, accessed September 19, 2017.

¹¹ Alhejji, Garavan, Carbery, O’Brien, and McGuire, “Diversity Training Programme Outcomes: A Systematic Review” 140-141.

¹² James Olson, “Becoming an Intercultural Church” (DMin thesis project report, Bethel Seminary, 2010), 126, accessed July 2017, Bethel Seminary Library.

Innovation

Organizations that embrace and celebrate diversity thrive in innovation.

Innovation refers to an organization's ability to successfully generate and implement new ideas. Jorge Barba defined innovation as "the future delivered." Stephen Shapiro described innovation as "staying relevant."¹³ Innovation is an essential part of an organization's success. The *Center for Talent Innovation* conducted a study in 2013 to determine whether diversity fuels greater innovation. In this study, 1,800 business professionals were surveyed, 40 case studies were done, and a multitude of interviews were conducted. After analyzing the data, the team concluded that there are two kinds of diversity. Inherent diversity refers to the traits a person is born with, including gender, ethnicity, race and disability. Acquired diversity refers to traits that a person can gain from experience. Acquired diversity can include a person's experience working in a new culture or significant time spent serving alongside people who have different inherent traits. The results of this study showed that a company or organization whose leadership team exhibited at least three inherent and three acquired diversity traits consistently outperformed other companies and organizations. They called these leadership teams "two-dimensional diversity teams." The research concluded that two-dimensional teams are highly innovative:

By correlating diversity in leadership with market outcomes as reported by respondents, we learned that companies with 2-D diversity out-innovate and out-perform others. Employees at these companies are 45 percent likelier to report

¹³ Nick Skillicorn, "What is innovation? 15 innovation experts give us their definition," *Idea to Value*, March 18, 2016, accessed September 18, 2017, <https://www.ideatovalue.com/inno/nickskillicorn/2016/03/innovation-15-experts-share-innovation-definition/>.

that their firm's market share grew over the previous year and 70 percent likelier to report that the firm captured a new market.¹⁴

In another study, Max Nathan and Neil Lee surveyed 7,600 London businesses to understand if there is a positive and beneficial link between diversity and innovation:

We found evidence of a small but significant diversity bonus across innovation, market orientation, and entrepreneurship. The diversity of the management team has a small but robust link to the development and implementation of major new products. Migrant-run firms are more likely to introduce major process innovations.¹⁵

These relevant studies showed that embracing diversity leads to greater innovation.

Through the gift of diversity, multiple perspectives emerge and new ideas are introduced and implemented.

The Barriers to Unity in Diversity

Barriers must be acknowledged by the evangelical church and then addressed for unity in diversity to thrive. A church that is unaware of these barriers will fail to achieve greater unity in diversity. Overcoming such barriers must be an instrumental part of any unity in diversity plan.

Barrier One: Failing to Understand

The first barrier to overcome is failing to understand. In his book *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Reinhold Niebuhr argued that people care more deeply for and look after people they understand and neglect the needs of those they do not understand.¹⁶

¹⁴ Hewlett, Marshall, and Sherbin, "How Diversity Can Drive Innovation" 30.

¹⁵ Max Nathan and Neil Lee, "Cultural Diversity, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship: Firm-level Evidence from London," *Economic Geography* 89, no. 4 (2013): 367-394, accessed September 18, 2017, Google Scholar.

¹⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), Kindle Locations 239-241.

Niebuhr identified two main problems. First, inequality is maintained. Power remains with the powerful, and riches stay with the rich, and the result is continued segregation. Second, through this way of living, empathy is impossible and apathy becomes the inevitable product. Niebuhr argues that when groups firmly establish and isolate themselves from one another understanding anyone outside the group in which a person more naturally associates becomes impossible. Without understanding, unity in diversity is impossible.

Multiple layers of understanding are important as congregations seek greater unity in diversity. First, as noted by Barbara R. Reid in her thesis “Embracing Racial Diversity in Worship with Intentionality,” there is a need for local congregations to understand the biblical basis for unity in diversity.¹⁷ Having a solid biblical understanding leads to greater efforts for unity in diversity. The church must understand and embrace the Bible’s firm position on unity in diversity. Second, believers must seek to understand the cultural differences that exist among differing groups. Donna M. Dempewolf defines a truly multicultural, multiethnic, multigenerational, multiracial community as “one that goes deeper into exploring differences as a means to foster greater understanding and unity.”¹⁸ The church must seek to understand the different social behaviors and norms that exist in the community if it desires to reach its neighborhoods and cities for Jesus and enjoy unity in diversity. According to Charles R. Foster,

The task is not easy. “Culture hides much more than it reveals,” anthropologist Edward T. Hall reminded us decades ago, “and strangely enough what it hides, it

¹⁷ Barbara R. Reid, “Embracing Racial Diversity in Worship with Intentionality at First Baptist Church, Dubuque, Iowa” (Doctor of Worship Studies thesis, The Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies, 2007), 6.

¹⁸ Donna M. Dempewolf, “The Spirit of Unity amidst Diversity: Practices of Intercultural Ministry and Relational Community” (DMin thesis project report, Wesley Theological Seminary, 2013), 78.

hides most effectively from its own participants.” Encounters with something different or unfamiliar bring to consciousness that taken-for-granted embeddedness of our own cultural perspectives, values, and practices.¹⁹

The task will not be easy; however, through an intentional commitment to embrace diversity, the church can celebrate and maximize the beauty of multiple perspectives and practices for the glory of God.

Barrier Two: Fear

In his book *Embracing Diversity*, Charles R. Foster captures the debilitating effects of fear on the body of Christ. When a group welcomes new members into the fellowship the often-felt emotion is fear. Foster acknowledges that fear affects all parties involved. The majority fear losing their own culture and heritage and the power they have inherited. For the minority group, Foster said, “People who have long experienced minority status may fear losing the clarity of their racial and cultural identity that has sustained and supported them through generations of oppression.”²⁰ Fear often sets in when a person or a group loses control. Pursuing greater unity in diversity will entail a journey where each group sacrifices complete control in exchange for oneness. This commitment to oneness should be made between people of different ages, ethnicities, genders, socioeconomic statuses and physical abilities. Thomas W. Goodhue reflected on the real fears that minority groups experience when stepping into greater unity with others:

As groups which have been marked by ethnic-exclusivity, language barriers, poverty, or isolation from others become more prosperous and more integrated

¹⁹ Charles R. Foster, *Embracing Diversity: Leadership in Multicultural Congregations* (Herndon, VA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 14.

²⁰ Foster, *Embracing Diversity*, 19.

into the dominant culture, they often begin to feel embarrassed about clinging to customs which others find peculiar.²¹

Minority groups fear the loss of culture when pursuing unity within a majority group. Often the minority group believes the culture of the majority will drown the things they love and cherish. As the church works toward greater unity in diversity, the barrier of fear must be overcome.

Barrier Three: Confession

In *America's Original Sin*, Jim Wallis argued for the importance of confessing racial sins:

We can get to a better place only if we go to that morally deeper place. There will be no superficial or merely political overcoming of our racial sins. It will take a spiritual and moral transformation as well. Sin must be named, exposed and understood before it can be repented of.²²

Paramount to unity in diversity thriving within the church is the ability to acknowledge the sins that cause division. Wallis said this is not the job of one race but of all people to humbly and honestly confess the sins that continue to act as barriers to unity. According to Wayne Gordon,

We have to own up to the fact that African Americans and other ethnic minorities in our country are mistreated far more often than most of us care to admit. Along with this, we must acknowledge that not all the problems minority groups face are the result of white racism and that some have been too quick to cite racism as the sole cause of their struggles, thus avoiding or downplaying the role of personal responsibility.²³

²¹ Thomas W. Goodhue, "Do we have to lose our uniqueness when we merge?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22, no. 1 (1985): 127-130, accessed September 19, 2017. Capitalize journal article title

²² Jim Wallis, *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2016), Kindle Locations 1085-1087.

²³ Wayne Gordon, *Do All Lives Matter? The Issues We Can No Longer Ignore and the Solutions We All Long For* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 8.

In the body of Christ, all people must confess the sins that contribute to disunity.

Confession must happen for many sins, including the sin of isolating those with disabilities and special needs, the sin of a lack of compassion and care to the elderly, and the sin of long-lasting hurt and pain caused between people of different races. Richard Twiss concluded,

I believe the greatest challenge facing Native peoples is the unresolved anger, distrust, hatred and bitterness in our hearts toward Euro-Americans, based on centuries of injustice and oppression. I don't just mean the type of oppression committed by sinful nonbelievers; specifically, I'm addressing the injustice and rejection that have taken place within the family of God, the redeemed community of the Lord Jesus Christ, between Anglo and Native brethren. This is something the Word of God and the Holy Spirit call us to repent of and to correct. That means a fullness of repentance and restitution.²⁴

For unity in diversity to thrive, sin must die.

Barrier Four: Isolation

The fourth barrier to overcome is isolation. Emerson and Smith wrote a chapter called, "From Separate Pews to Separate Churches." In this chapter, the authors discussed how the American church had become segregated and isolated because of differences. Through an encapsulation of American history from the 1700s to the late 1900s, Emerson and Smith targeted the underlying issue of America's efforts to free people from injustice without freeing people into the family of God. Emerson and Smith said,

Freedom has come to be freedom from—freedom from oppression, freedom from discrimination, and freedom from each other. In sum, through the long, arduous struggle, where religion aided racial change, it has been unidirectional: like America itself, it has occasionally helped to free people, but has been unable to bring them together or overcome racialization. The abolitionist movement worked to end slavery and free slaves, not to unite Americans in a common community. Likewise, the Civil Rights movement worked to gain rights and freedoms.

²⁴ Richard Twiss, *One Church Many Tribes: Following Jesus the Way God Made You* (Minneapolis, MN: Baker Publishing Group, 2000), 66.

Although it used the rhetoric of togetherness in its efforts, it was, to the consternation of many, unsuccessful in its realization.²⁵

A new direction must be set. This new direction will no longer be defined by a freedom from but a freedom into. Freedom entails both deliverance and entrance. People are set free when they experience deliverance from something that has caused captivity. Freedom also includes entering a new reality. A major barrier to unity in diversity is that the majority culture has not welcomed the minority culture into a new emerging culture together. The church can walk the path less traveled by pursuing unity in diversity. The goal for unity in diversity must include a vision to overcome isolation and welcome all people into the family of God.

Another form of isolation that has been a consistent barrier to unity in diversity is the isolation of speech. The default of the American church has been to avoid speaking about the difficult topic of race and disunity. In *The Rise of the Diversity Expert*, Gerardo Marti and Michael Emerson added:

So even in multiracial congregations—especially but not exclusively those led by white pastors—the present-day realities of race, addressing issues of racial inequities, or even talking about possible racial conflicts that might arise in the church were off limits, deemed unimportant to the true work of the church or too potentially explosive.²⁶

When a church leader is silent on the issues that divide the people of God, minority groups feel forgotten, unimportant and devalued. According to Emerson and Marti, when church leaders address the issues that divide, the majority group often becomes

²⁵ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 48-49.

²⁶ Michael Emerson and Gerardo Marti, “The Rise of the Diversity Expert.” *The New Evangelical Social Engagement*, ed. Brian Steensland and Philip Goff (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 190.

uncomfortable and retreats. Speaking about unity in diversity humbly and honestly is like walking through a minefield. Any leader desiring to see greater unity in diversity needs to decide on what language to use, how to say it and when to say it.

Barrier Five: Complete Agreement

The fifth barrier to overcome is the hope to achieve complete agreement. The goal of unity in diversity is not complete agreement. It is unity in Jesus. In his book, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*, Roger Olson said, “Part of the process of Christian maturation is recognizing legitimate diversity and even disagreement within larger unity and agreement.”²⁷ Olson discussed the differences among denominational doctrinal positions and argued that, despite their many differences, there is common ground. Complete agreement is not the goal of the Christian faith. The common pursuit is Jesus Christ.

Barrier Six: Self

A major cause of division is selfishness. Out of selfishness people compare themselves to others and the result is disunity. If humanity could align itself to the greatest commandments to love God and love others (Matt. 22:36-40), unity in diversity would be the natural outpouring. Marjorie J. Cooper, Chris Pullig and Charles Dickens conducted a study in 2016 on the effects of narcissism on church ministers. In this study, the team analyzed 488 surveys taken by Protestant ministers. The ministers were presented with ten ethical situations and then asked how they would respond. From this study, the team discovered that selfishness blinds the eyes of leaders to any perspective but their own. In reference to selfish leaders, the study said, “Because they lack empathy

²⁷ Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity & Diversity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 12.

and are often self-absorbed, they tend to be poor listeners and struggle to envision perspectives other than their own.”²⁸ When seeking to embrace greater unity in diversity, the idol of self must be crucified.

When the church acknowledges these barriers and makes a commitment to address them, it will experience greater unity in diversity.

The Common Characteristics of Unity in Diversity

Communities that adopt an intentional plan for unity in diversity share common characteristics. Four works have been consulted in this research. In *One Body, One Spirit*, George Yancey shared seven key principles that often become the fabric of a healthy multiracial church. His work is restricted to multiracial congregations. The seven principles are inclusive worship, diverse leadership, an overarching goal, intentionality, personal skills, location, and adaptability. The seven principles are not a strategic program to build a multiracial church but are characteristics often found in a church that celebrates unity in diversity. According to Yancey,

Multiracial churches are not developed in a cookie-cutter factory. They differ in many ways. Yet my research indicates that successful multiracial ministries clearly share certain principles that contribute to their success. How they implement those principles vary with each church as they adapt their ministry for a given situation.²⁹

These seven principles are found in most multiracial and diverse churches; however, they emerge differently based on the context of the ministry. Throughout his work, Yancey

²⁸ Marjorie J. Cooper, Chris J Pullig, and Charles W Dickens, “Effects of Narcissism and Religiosity on Church Ministers with Respect to Ethical Judgment, Confidence, and Forgiveness,” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 44, no. 1 (2016): 42-54, accessed September 19, 2017.

²⁹ Yancey, *One Body One Spirit*, Kindle Locations 640-641.

encouraged ministries to be themselves. Imitating another ministry is not the answer.

Yancey contributed,

It is more useful for church leaders to find ways of executing these principles that are consistent with the character of their congregation. I can only clarify what these principles are. It is the task of church leaders to decide if and how they can execute these principles in keeping with the traditions, theology and customs of their congregation.³⁰

Yancey said if a congregation can embrace all seven principles, it will become more diverse and successfully maintain the value of being a diverse church. Although it is possible to become a diverse church when following just a few of the principles, Yancey concluded that embracing all seven will lead to the greatest experience of health as a diverse church.

In *Racially Diverse Congregations: Organizational Identity and the Accommodation of Differences*,³¹ Kevin D. Dougherty and Kimberly R. Huyser presented several characteristics commonly seen in diverse churches. The first is that churches in urban areas are most able to attract a diverse community. They concluded that diversity within the walls of a church is dependent on the diversity outside its walls. The weakness of Dougherty and Huyser's work is that it predominantly focuses on diversity in terms of race and ethnicity. From the researcher's perspective, this in no way should prohibit a church in a more homogenous community from the pursuit of unity in diversity. The goal of embracing and celebrating unity in diversity is not restricted to race and ethnicity. Unity in diversity can be embraced by celebrating the gifting of males and females and

³⁰ Yancey, *One Body One Spirit*, Kindle Locations 678-680.

³¹ Kevin D. Dougherty and Kimberly R. Huyser, "Racially Diverse Congregations: Organizational Identity and the Accommodation of Differences," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 1 (2008): 25, accessed July 15, 2017.

young and old as well as by encouraging the involvement of those with special needs. Secondly, tradition plays a significant role in attracting diverse congregations. Christian traditions that focus on justice and the needs of the most vulnerable tend to reach across racial and cultural lines. Dougherty and Huyser's research indicated that denominational traditions that focused on issues of race early in history led to more diverse churches today. According to Dougherty and Huyser, a third characteristic found in diverse churches is a commitment to worship rituals that not only incorporate styles and genres from multiple cultures but also collectively transcend above any single group. The fourth characteristic is diversity within the leadership. Churches that maintain healthy unity in diversity share leadership across race and culture. The fifth characteristic in this study is churches that enjoy unity in diversity boldly confront their segregated histories. According to Dougherty and Huyser, "In order to bridge racial and ethnic boundaries, being multiracial has to become a part of a congregation's identity."³² When answering the question "Who are we?" a congregation that embraces unity in diversity includes this value as a part of its identity. Dougherty and Huyser said, "The stronger the sense of 'we' becomes in a group, the less salient personal differences seem."³³

The third study is Nora Ellen Groce's work, *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language*. This study focused on the unique experience of the early inhabitants of Martha's Vineyard. The island of Martha's Vineyard was settled in 1644. By the mid-1800s, the island was known for its whaling and excellent fishing. Most New Englanders today will know of Martha's Vineyard because of the extraordinary vacation homes and

³² Dougherty and Huyser, "Racially Diverse Congregations," 25.

³³ Dougherty and Huyser, "Racially Diverse Congregations," 25.

upper-class restaurants and shopping. A fascinating thing about the island, according to Groce, is not its fine dining or famous beaches. A phenomenon occurred on the island that even caught the attention of Professor Alexander Graham Bell, who spent countless hours on the island researching the deafness present on the island. Bell discovered that the island had the highest concentration of deafness in all New England. On Martha's Vineyard in the nineteenth century, there was one deaf person for every 155. The rest of the country saw one deaf person for every 5,728.³⁴ The community on Martha's Vineyard did not allow the deaf to become isolated. Instead, interviews with past islanders clearly indicated that the deaf in the community were helpful and fully functional participants in society. One dialogue that Groce had with a 90-year-old islander who could still remember this time from her childhood is particularly helpful:

Perhaps the best description of the status of deaf individuals on the Vineyard was given to me by an island woman in her eighties, when I asked about those who were handicapped by deafness when she was a girl. "Oh," she said emphatically, "those people weren't handicapped. They were just deaf."³⁵

How did this community make sure that the deaf were not isolated? Groce discovered the secret to their success from Gale, a man who grew up on the island:

I had already spent a good part of the afternoon copying down various genealogies before I thought to ask Gale what the hearing people in town had thought of the deaf people. "Oh," he said, "they didn't think anything about them, they were just like everyone else." "But how did people communicate with them—by writing everything down?" "No," said Gale, surprised that I should ask such an obvious question. "You see, everyone here spoke sign language."³⁶

³⁴ Nora Ellen Groce, *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Island* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 3.

³⁵ Groce, *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language*, 5.

³⁶ Groce, *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language*, 2.

From this study, two significant characteristics of communities that embrace unity in diversity emerged: They see one another as valuable and are willing to adjust to meet the needs of all its members. Groce noted, “The most important lesson to be learned from Martha’s Vineyard is that disabled people can be full and useful members of a community if the community makes an effort to include them. The society must be willing to change slightly to adapt to all.”³⁷

The fourth book is John Perkins, *Dream with Me*. Important to this study is Perkin’s chapter entitled, “The Church of the Future.” Perkins’ main conclusion was that the church committed to unity in diversity will exude the fruit of the Spirit:

I want to see the church marked by something bigger than division, bigger than racism, bigotry, and hatred. The church has recently started talking a lot more about the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. I hope that as we have these conversations, we will also start growing in the Spirit and bearing the fruit that comes along with that.³⁸

A church that intentionally embraces unity in diversity is compelled to live like Jesus, ministering to the weak and strong. According to Perkins, other characteristics common to churches that enjoy unity in diversity are they know how to be small and they have a deep understanding of the Gospel. Perkins calls the church to get small. Discipleship happens in small groups that commit to travel together. He said,

When we meet in smaller groups, we start to empathize with people more, to make their needs our own. We begin to love more fully and want the same things for the other members of our community that we want for our own lives and our own families.³⁹

³⁷ Groce, *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language*, 108.

³⁸ John Perkins, *Dream with Me: Race, Love, and the Struggle We Must Win* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books Publishing, 2017), 189.

³⁹ Perkins, *Dream with Me*, 195.

Through the small group, people can move from inclusion to belonging and to becoming a part of the body of Christ together. Vulnerability, transparency, honesty and other hallmarks of the small group foster strength and make unity in diversity a reality. Finally, Perkins advocated for a deep understanding of the Gospel when he said, “The fullness and adequacy of the Gospel is a message of togetherness and love across ethnic barriers. Churches that understand the fullness of the Gospel and the greatness of God will serve people best.”⁴⁰ A common characteristic of a church that embraces unity in diversity is its full understanding of the Gospel’s call to love God and love others. From these four books, the researcher discovered several common characteristics that become a part of the fabric of any community that embraces and celebrates unity in diversity.

The Leadership Principles Needed for Unity in Diversity

Many biblical leadership principles are reflected in the principles suggested by leading experts in the field of unity in diversity.

Unity Leaders Pray

In an interview with author and speaker R.T. Kendall, the researcher asked how leaders can best lead a congregation into greater unity in diversity.⁴¹ Without hesitation, Kendall spoke about the significance of prayer. Kendall urged the researcher to spend the first few moments of each day asking for the Lord’s guidance and the last moments of the day thanking the Lord for His provision. When Christian leaders turn their attention to the Lord early in the morning, they will be more equipped, anointed and prepared to lead.

⁴⁰ Perkins, *Dream With Me*, 196-197.

⁴¹ R.T. Kendall, interviewed by author, Connecticut, October 20, 2012.

Sean Allen Lee conducted a study in 2016 on the role of prayer in leadership.⁴² Lee discovered that most of the leaders he interviewed did not regularly spend time in prayer each morning. He was shocked that only 50 percent of the leaders he surveyed recognized and agreed that the church faced a spiritual battle more than a physical battle. The project produced an eight-week course dedicated to educating leaders on the importance of prayer in the life of the church. After hosting the course, the leaders who attended made a commitment to prioritize times of prayer into their daily lives. The avenue of prayer is God's chosen way to connect with Him. When leaders turn their attention to the Lord early in the morning, they are more prone to make significant kingdom impact each day. In October 2017, the Walnut Hill leadership team challenged congregants to spend the first 20 minutes of their day with Jesus through intentional prayer. Over 500 congregants took the challenge. After a 20-day challenge, the researcher heard countless stories of how God encountered, called and transformed people through their intentional time each day. For the researcher, this proved the necessity of dedicated prayer in a leader's life. Through prayer, the Lord aligns His people to His will, calls them to His purposes and empowers them for His glory.

Unity Leaders Are Led by the Spirit

To be an influencer for unity in diversity, a leader must be led by the Spirit. The story of Peter and Cornelius is a great example of leaders who were led by the Spirit to make a difference across racial and ethnic boundaries. Charles R. Foster identified the

⁴² Sean Allen Lee, "Equipping a Select Group of Leaders of Holly Grove Baptist Church, Spring Hope, North Carolina, to Pray in Preparation for Church Revitalization" (DMin thesis project report, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 83-92, accessed September 20, 2017, ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis.

leadership traits necessary to see greater unity in diversity.⁴³ Each of the traits is bonded closely to the work of the Holy Spirit in a leader's life. First, "transformative leadership" refers to the ever-changing environment caused by multiple cultures coming together. A leader is required to know how to lead through continual change. According to Foster, "Primary attention is not given to maintaining the status quo of any one group but to the nurture of change in the congregation for the sake of a new relationship among racially and culturally diverse groups and ultimately with God."⁴⁴ Foster said this type of transformation is only possible through the power of the Spirit. Secondly, "anticipatory leadership" refers to the ability to "see a situation from the future rather than from the past."⁴⁵ Anticipatory leaders are driven by the vision of a better tomorrow and lead their people in the hope of that new day together. A close walk with the Spirit is necessary when leading people into God's hope for tomorrow.

Unity Leaders Befriend Others

In *Talking about Cultural Diversity in Your Church*, Michael V. Angrosino outlined six essential leadership principles every unity leader must possess.⁴⁶ Within this list, three principles revolved around the importance of befriending others. First, Angrosino argued that leaders need to get to know the culture of others. A significant part of befriending others is understanding and learning about their culture. Angrosino also discussed the benefit of being aware of the power inequities and histories of past and

⁴³ Foster, *Embracing Diversity*, 117.

⁴⁴ Foster, *Embracing Diversity*, 117.

⁴⁵ Foster, *Embracing Diversity*, 119-120.

⁴⁶ Michael V. Angrosino, *Talking About Cultural Diversity in Your Church: Gifts and Challenges* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2001), 51.

present discrimination. Knowing the hurts and pains of the past is an important aspect of befriending others. In addition, Angrosino commented, “All participants in the cultural diversity dialogue must develop intercultural competence.”⁴⁷ Education and development are necessary for the process of befriending others. Through education and development, parties seeking to befriend one another will have a high level of intercultural competence as they enter newly formed friendships. Developing an intentional plan for unity in diversity in the church must include intentionality around equipping congregants to befriend those who are different from themselves.

Unity Leaders Share the Gospel

Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Chai Kim set out to discover whether it is more beneficial for congregations to be multiracial than uniraical.⁴⁸ Their research included 2,500 telephone interviews with people throughout the United States representing diverse backgrounds, analyzing the results of an extensive survey with participation from over 500 congregations, and comparing field notes from on-site visits to several of those congregations. The results led the researchers to argue that the best way for people to discover unity together is through a shared faith. Christian leaders desiring to see greater unity in diversity must commit to sharing the Gospel message as the common ground for people of faith to find unity. Through a common faith in Jesus, unity in diversity can be achieved.

⁴⁷ Angrosino, *Talking About Cultural Diversity in Your Church*, 51.

⁴⁸ Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 4.

Unity Leaders Earn Trust

Returning to Foster's work, the final leadership trait that he identified was relational leadership.⁴⁹ Relational leaders seek to provide an opportunity for people to participate in community together for the goal of loving each other more deeply. Relational leaders understand that a white man could never fully understand what it is like to be a black man; however, through a close relationship with one another, each can work to suspend his own culture to temporarily take on the culture of the other. This can be achieved through avenues where relationships are safely and transparently built and grown. Trust is earned through relationships. When trust is earned, unity is the result. An intentional plan for unity in diversity must be embedded in building relationships.

Unity Leaders Speak with Authority

David A. Thomas and Robin J. Ely stressed the importance of speaking and communicating a vision with authority and passion in their journal article, "Making Differences Matter." As one of their eight leadership principles, Thomas and Ely stated, "The organization must have a well-articulated and widely understood mission."⁵⁰ Influential leaders must use their voices to communicate a powerful vision for unity in diversity. Stephen Gibson discovered several leadership best practices by studying how non-church organizations have successfully celebrated diversity. His conclusion was that the church could adopt several of the best practices already learned and practiced by non-church organizations. According to Gibson, "Leadership must cast a vision across the

⁴⁹ Foster, *Embracing Diversity*, 119-120.

⁵⁰ David A. Thomas and Robin J. Ely, "Making Differences Matter: A New Paradigm for Managing Diversity," *Harvard Business Review* 74, no. 5 (1996): 3, accessed September 16, 2017.

organization for becoming diverse,” and, “Leadership must become continual champions for the cause of diversity.”⁵¹ Leaders who embrace and celebrate diversity use their voices to inspire and cast vision across the organization.

Unity Leaders Encourage Others

Several of Thomas and Ely’s eight leadership principles focused on the value of encouraging others. First, they argued for the need to “encourage a variety of opinion and insight.”⁵² Good unity leaders encourage others to use their unique gifting and perspectives. Second, they acknowledged the importance of encouragement in showing workers they are valued. Finally, Thomas and Ely urged organizations to develop a culture that encourages personal development. Through personal development across the organization, employees and workers have opportunities to grow in their areas of responsibility and gifting. Thomas and Ely proposed that leaders should no longer think about diversity in terms of “identity group representation.” In this old way of thinking, leaders would base success on whether they had racial, national, gender and class representation throughout their organization. In this new paradigm, Thomas and Ely said, “Diversity should be understood as the varied perspectives and approaches to work that members of different identity groups bring.”⁵³ Through this new way of thinking, leaders must actively promote and encourage the perspectives and approaches of each member of their organizations.

⁵¹ Stephen Gibson, “Empowering Congregations to Move from Simple Hospitality to Celebration of Ethnic Diversity Within Their Churches” 61.

⁵² Thomas and Ely, “Making Differences Matter: A New Paradigm for Managing Diversity,” 3.

⁵³ Thomas and Ely, “Making Differences Matter: A New Paradigm for Managing Diversity,” 3.

Unity Leaders Know When to Stay and When to Go

When leading toward greater unity in diversity, leaders need to know how to determine what initiatives to invest in and what initiative to leave behind (when to stay and when to go). In his article, “Stop the Insanity of Failing Projects,” Rick A. Morris presented the hard truth about failure: “There is one startling statistic that plagues project management today: Industry figures still list that between 60 percent and 82 percent of projects fail.”⁵⁴ Good leaders know when to give up on a project and when to increase investment. Morris discussed the reasons projects succeed. His research suggested that projects succeed because leadership believes in the projects, invests in the projects and is willing to allow other initiatives to fail for the benefit of the projects. When implementing a plan for unity in diversity, good leaders will learn how to navigate through success and failure.

Unity Leaders Are Courageous

According to Michael V. Angrosino, “Personal commitment is crucial.”⁵⁵ Leaders who are not “all in” for unity in diversity will fall short. The Apostle Peter demonstrated courage when he traveled to Cornelius’ home. In doing this, he bridged gaps that had been present for centuries to see God do something new. Leading toward unity in diversity is not for the faint-hearted. It takes courage and commitment to stand for the marginalized. Leaders who fight this battle will need to pay close attention to the words of the Lord to His servant Joshua, “Be strong and courageous” (Josh. 1:9).

⁵⁴ Rick A. Morris, “Stop the Insanity of Failing Projects.” *Industrial Management* 50, no. 6 (November 2008): 20, accessed September 20, 2017.

⁵⁵ Angrosino, *Talking About Cultural Diversity in Your Church*, 51.

Unity Leaders Are Christ-Like

Jesus came as the Servant King. He came to serve and not be served (Matt. 20:28). Besides the cross, the most vivid example of this in Scripture is when Jesus picked up a towel and washed His disciples' feet. This is the kind of leadership that should be embraced by church leaders today. Christ-like leadership is modeled by serving others in love. In his doctoral work, Justin Irving set out to answer the question, "Is there a relationship between servant leadership and team effectiveness?"⁵⁶ Irving discovered that servant leadership has positive outcomes for team effectiveness and results in greater job satisfaction for those working for leaders who embrace servant leadership. An intentional plan for unity in diversity must call leaders to practice servant leadership. Through servant leadership, teams will more effectively work together and be drawn into greater unity.

The Practical Steps to Greater Unity in Diversity

The goal of this project is to propose an intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. Several experts have outlined important steps to greater unity in diversity.

Barbara R. Reid—Education

Barbara R. Reid advocated for the necessary role of education in her doctoral work "Embracing Racial Diversity in Worship with Intentionality at First Baptist Church, Dubuque, Iowa." Reid argued that the best first step toward greater unity in diversity is educating communities on the biblical vision and the practical tools needed to celebrate unity in diversity. Reid brought together 14 key leaders from her church over a two-

⁵⁶ Justin Irving, "Servant Leadership and the Effectiveness of Teams" (PhD dissertation, Regent University, March 2005), 74-76, accessed September 21, 2017, ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis.

month season for training. The training concentrated on two areas. The first revolved around the biblical support for unity in diversity and the second equipped the leaders to know how to be positive contributors in the movement to greater unity in diversity. Reid discovered that education is necessary for leaders and congregants to build awareness and develop practical tools for the journey. Reid also discovered that education is not an event. For the goal of unity in diversity, it must become a continual objective.⁵⁷ Reid's study compelled the researcher to include an educational and development arm to his proposed plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill.

Michael O. Emerson and George Yancey—A Common Goal

Another helpful resource is Michael O. Emerson and George Yancey's book, *Transcending Racial Barriers: Toward a Mutual Obligations Approach*. In this work, Emerson and Yancey outlined three key components of a community intentionally planning for unity in diversity. Although focused on racial barriers the researcher believes these key components are relevant to the broader definition of diversity used in the context of this project. First, the community creates a common core that unites people, such as a shared goal. A practical step toward unity in diversity is discovering a common vision. Second, the community promotes freedom for groups to express and celebrate their differences. Each group is encouraged to bring their differences to the table, instead of checking them at the door. Practically creating places and spaces for people to express and celebrate their differences is a healthy way to encourage unity in diversity. Third, a community that intentionally pursues unity in diversity develops true

⁵⁷ Reid, "Embracing Racial Diversity in Worship with Intentionality," 120.

respect for one another.⁵⁸ Respect for one another must be shown practically to the community through those who lead them, such as the pastors of the church.

James Olson—Hospitality, Spirituality and Missionality

In his thesis paper, “Becoming an InterCultural Church,” James Olson proposed three specific practices that must be embraced to become a church unified in diversity: hospitality, spirituality and missionality. Through hospitality, a stranger becomes a friend. Olson suggested that hospitality is important because it builds healthy relationships. “The ultimate goal of the practice of hospitality is establishing relationship. When genuine relationships are established, trust is developed. Trust is essential for creating intercultural community by enabling dialogue and empowering vital participation in the new kingdom culture.”⁵⁹ Hospitality opens the door to greater unity and diversity and must be a part of any practical plan. For Olson, an emphasis on spirituality becomes the second layer to a strong foundation for any church desiring to see greater unity in diversity. When a church “actively engages the manifest presence of God through worship,”⁶⁰ greater unity in diversity is discovered. Olson advocated that a church desiring greater unity in diversity must live to tell others about Jesus. Through this mutual and common mission, the family of God is drawn together into a unique and powerful unity.

⁵⁸ Emerson and Yancey, *Transcending Racial Barriers: Toward a Mutual Obligation Approach* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 90.

⁵⁹ Olson, “Building an InterCultural Church,” 130.

⁶⁰ Olson, “Building an InterCultural Church,” 130.

Donna Dempewolf–Seven Practices

In her thesis paper, “The Spirit of Unity amidst Diversity,” Donna Dempewolf outlined the seven most common and effective practices embodied by the multicultural churches she interviewed: intercultural relationships and competence, inclusive worship, inviting images, diverse leadership, community engagement, perseverance and patience, and the movement of the Spirit.⁶¹ Dempewolf stressed the need for strong relationships that bridge cultures, abilities, age and gender. Through these relationships, barriers to unity are broken down. She also proposed the importance of using music and images that represent not just the majority but the minority groups as well. Alongside these areas, strong components of a strategic plan for unity in diversity are diversity within the leadership, a mission to meet the needs of the local community, a commitment to persevere in the goal of unity together, and a common openness to the work of the Spirit. Through engagement of these seven practices, the churches interviewed by Dempewolf enjoyed a progressing unity in diversity.

Brenda Salter and J. Derek McNeil–Reconciliation

Brenda McNeil stressed the important work of reconciliation in her work, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness, and Justice*. According to McNeil, “Reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance, and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God’s original intention for all creation to flourish.”⁶² Salter and McNeil

⁶¹ Dempewolf, “The Spirit of Unity Amidst Diversity,” 113.

⁶² Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), Kindle Locations 197-198.

acknowledged the history of division and strongly argued that unity in diversity is dependent on a community's ability to work through forgiveness and repentance. In this study, Salter and McNeil provided a practical roadmap for individuals and communities to use as they work through the process of reconciliation. Reconciliation must be a critical step in the plan for greater unity in diversity.

Summary

The literature review laid the foundation for the researcher's intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. This was achieved by learning from secular organizations, understanding the common barriers to unity, noting the characteristics of communities and organizations that model diversity, discovering necessary leadership principles, and revealing the practical steps toward greater unity in diversity.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE APPROACH TO DISCOVERING AN INTENTIONAL PLAN FOR UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Introduction

This project addressed the growing need within Walnut Hill for a strategic ministry plan designed to support its value for unity in diversity. Several goals were achieved. A catalytic biblical vision was discovered based on Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17. An understanding of Jesus' encouragement of unity in diversity was developed based on Luke's Gospel regarding the most vulnerable, the model of the early church in Acts 2 and the leadership shown by the biblical characters responsible for bringing Gentiles into the family of God. A comprehensive understanding of the literature related to equipping local churches was gained for Walnut Hill to take practical and intentional steps toward greater unity in diversity. A census of Walnut Hill was taken to gain a clear picture of its diverse composition. Connections were made with three churches that have a strong vision for unity in diversity and have implemented a plan for that vision. Interviews were conducted with 50 people who represent the diverse makeup of Walnut Hill to better understand the current barriers prohibiting greater unity in the body and to seek collective wisdom on an intentional plan for more unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. A Diversity Advisory Team was formed to create a practical and intentional plan for Walnut Hill to move the congregation from an environment of inclusion to belonging to becoming for all members.

The research was conducted in response to the concern of the researcher and the Elder Board of Walnut Hill regarding the absence of a ministry-wide plan for unity in diversity. With little experience in this field of work, the researcher followed a systematic process to gain understanding and insight. According to Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis, “Research is a systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting information—data—in order to increase our understanding of a phenomenon about which we are interested or concerned.”¹ In this chapter, the researcher will explain in detail the approach that was followed to best reach his goal of proposing an intentional ministry plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill.

Research Design

The research in this study was qualitative as opposed to quantitative in nature. As defined by John W. Creswell, “Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.”² The researcher began the study with the assumption that Walnut Hill did not have a plan for unity in diversity. Therefore, a research framework was designed to gain greater understanding and correct this problem. The study was informed by hearing from biblical scholars, leaders who have implemented plans for unity in diversity and members representing minority groups at Walnut Hill. The goal of quantitative research is to reveal facts and patterns within a field of study by relying on measurable data. The goal of

¹ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (New York, NY: Pearson Publication, 2013), 2.

² John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018), 8.

qualitative research is to reveal potential ideas, plans or hypothesis that can later be analyzed through quantitative research. Creswell acknowledges what every qualitative research study should include: “The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change.”³ A qualitative approach was best suited for this study because it allowed the researcher to gain greater understanding through the voices of participants, describe and interpret the problems that exist, and ultimately lead to a plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill.

Within the qualitative discipline, the researcher chose a case study method for this project. Creswell defines the case study method:

Case study research is defined as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes.⁴

The case study method was perfect for this project because the researcher was exploring a real problem within a bounded system. The researcher determined a case study approach by following Creswell’s guidance: “A case study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases.”⁵ The researcher chose Walnut Hill as the bounded system that would be the main concentration of the study. The goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of unity

³ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 8.

⁴ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 96-97.

⁵ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 100.

in diversity at Walnut Hill through various kinds of resources, resulting in a proposed plan for greater unity in diversity. The researcher then studied three other cases (churches) to provide helpful comparisons. These cases were chosen because each had implemented plans for unity in diversity.

According to Robert K. Yin, “Whatever the field of interest, the distinctive need for case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena.”⁶ The leadership at Walnut Hill wanted to understand the complex topic of unity in diversity and implement a plan to celebrate and embrace unity in diversity. To gain a better understanding, the following questions were considered: What are the barriers to unity in diversity at Walnut Hill? What are the leadership principles necessary to lead a community to celebrate and champion unity in diversity? What practical steps are needed to move into greater unity in diversity at Walnut Hill? These questions needed to be answered through qualitative case study research. The data for this case study came primarily from personal interviews, questionnaires, surveys, observational field notes, and scholarly biblical and leadership resources.

Data Collection

The researcher chose six streams of data collection for this project. They were determined based on the need to propose an intentional ministry plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill.

⁶ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 4.

Scripture

The first data stream was the study of Scripture. In this step, the researcher chose to study Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17. The researcher then argued that the way Jesus lived on earth reflected His desire for unity in diversity. The researcher examined the Gospel of Luke and marked the significant characteristics of Jesus' ministry that promoted unity in diversity. Acts 2 was also studied to determine the common characteristics of unity in diversity in the life of the early church. Next, the project concentrated on scriptural leadership principles necessary to lead a community into greater unity in diversity. This was done by focusing on the leaders God used to advance the Gospel into the Gentile community. The story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 was examined. The life of Paul as he lived out his call to the Gentile community was studied. The biblical and theological study revealed a catalytic biblical vision for unity in diversity for Walnut Hill.

Research and Literature

According to Leedy and Ormrod, "Simply put, the more you know about investigations and perspectives related to your topic, the more effectively you can address your own research problem."⁷ The literature review for this project was valuable to the researcher because it resulted in new ideas, perspectives and approaches.⁸ Another benefit to the literature review was its value in presenting methods for overcoming the barriers and challenges the researcher faced in developing and implementing an intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. The researcher set out to answer five

⁷ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 51.

⁸ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 51.

questions in the literature review to help develop an intentional ministry plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill: What can be learned from secular organizations that have implemented an intentional plan for diversity? What are the common barriers to unity in diversity that an intentional plan will need to address? What are the principles and characteristics common among communities that enjoy God-honoring unity in diversity? What is the role of leadership in influencing a community toward greater unity in diversity? According to experts in the field, what are the practical steps required for organizations, including churches, to realize greater unity in diversity? The researcher utilized academic journals, dissertations, scholarly biblical commentaries and books written by experts with recognized experience in the field of unity in diversity.

Interviews

The researcher conducted interviews with representatives from Walnut Hill and pastors who have implemented intentional plans for unity in diversity in the churches they lead. According to Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, “Interviews with a purpose, an outline, and a recording system will give good information. They should be interesting as well. For in-depth information on opinions and attitudes, interviews are superior to surveys.”⁹ The interviews conducted provided the researcher with invaluable information in the pursuit to propose and develop a plan for unity in diversity.

Interviews in the qualitative research model are conducted to understand the meaning of a person’s experience and to reveal a person’s perspective.¹⁰ This is what

⁹ Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, *Your Guide to Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), Kindle Locations 3318-3320.

¹⁰ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 163.

Creswell calls a person's "lived world."¹¹ Following the direction of Leedy and Ormrod, the researcher prepared questions in advance, kept in mind the cultural perspectives of each interviewee and interviewed a group reflective of the diversity at Walnut Hill. The researcher also ensured a comfortable interview setting and location, secured necessary permissions, honored each interviewee, focused on the actual rather than the hypothetical, never spoke for the participant, and recorded the interview for accurate analysis.¹² The researcher interviewed 50 individuals from Walnut Hill in the spring of 2017. This set of interviewees represented the diversity at Walnut Hill with regard to race, ethnicity, age, gender, physical ability and marital status. The researcher conducted most of the interviews but received help from Walnut Hill's Diversity Advisory Team with the interviews where the researcher's presence would have influenced the results in an unhelpful way. Each recorded interview averaged around one hour. Notes were taken, collated and analyzed.

The project also included data gathering from three churches that have implemented an intentional plan for unity in diversity. Where possible, the researcher conducted interviews with the lead pastor or associate pastor of the church and utilized documents provided by the church or discovered through the church's online resources. The interviews were conducted in the summer of 2017.

Surveys and Demographics

Although quantitative in nature, the researcher believed it would be important to survey the congregation to generally understand the current picture of diversity at Walnut

¹¹ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 163.

¹² Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 154.

Hill. Vyhmeister proposed, “A well-prepared questionnaire can obtain data that describes reality.”¹³ The researcher’s goal in conducting the survey was to describe the current reality of unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. In June 2017, the researcher conducted a survey during the weekend services at Walnut Hill. With the help of the Diversity Advisory Team, the researcher decided to use the 2010 United States Census Survey questions on race and ethnicity for the 2017 Walnut Hill survey. From this data, the researcher could get a general picture of the diversity at Walnut Hill. Beyond demographic questions the researcher asked each participant: “How connected do you feel into the Walnut Hill family?” With this question, the researcher gained an understanding of the sense of belonging that each distinctive group has in the life of the church. The survey was given out in June 2017. Significant time was given in the services for people to fill it out. There was also a link available for people to take the survey online. In addition, the researcher did a demographic study to understand the diversity represented in the towns where Walnut Hill members lived. These results were compared with the Walnut Hill survey results: (Appendix A).

The researcher also conducted a smaller scale survey of 50 people from the congregation. This survey was used to gain data on the topics of serving and honor as they relate to unity in diversity. The 50 were chosen because they represent the diversity at Walnut Hill and each serve in the life of the church at least once a month. The researcher also gained data from a twelve-person focus group. The group represented the diversity of Walnut Hill in terms of race, age and gender. The focus group met on one

¹³ Vyhmeister, *Your Guide to Quality Research Papers*, Kindle Locations 3231-3232.

occasion for a three-hour meeting. During this meeting the researcher conducted several experiments with the group to determine the strength of the research findings.

Historical Documents

The historical documents from Walnut Hill that proved valuable to the researcher were its March 2009 multicultural mission statement, October 2009 proposal for multiethnic ministry at Walnut Hill, August 2010 multiethnic survey taken of the Walnut Hill congregation, 2014 all-church survey, 2015 all-church survey and 2016 all-church congregational brainstorming results called “Dream With Us.” In 2009 and 2010, there was a concentration on casting vision for a multiethnic, multicultural ministry at Walnut Hill. Considerable attention and many resources were given to this task including the hiring of staff; however, the results were not lasting. Through these historical documents, the researcher could learn from the strengths and weaknesses of past initiatives and plans. According to Leedy and Ormrod, “The task of the historical researcher is not merely to describe what events happened but to present a factually supported rationale to suggest how and why they may have happened.”¹⁴ The above mentioned historical documents were utilized to help the researcher understand how Walnut Hill pursued unity in diversity in the past, what effects these efforts made and why the achievements never went as far as the church hoped.

Diversity Advisory Team

Robert Yin encourages the use of teams in the case study research process, indicating that the need to collect large amounts of data in a timely manner within a

¹⁴ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 170.

single case warrants the use of multiple researchers.¹⁵ Walnut Hill's Diversity Advisory Team was called together in May 2016 to advise the lead pastors' team on issues of diversity and support the lead pastors' team through new initiatives to advance the goal of unity in diversity at the church. Walnut Hill is led by a team of three lead pastors. Each is between the ages of 38-42, grew up in the church together and is a white male. The team helped the researcher conduct interviews and pilot potential ministry initiatives.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used to collect the necessary data enabled the researcher to measure and analyze the data sufficiently. According to Leedy and Ormrod, "Measurement is limiting the data of any phenomenon—substantial or insubstantial—so that those data may be interpreted and, ultimately, compared to a particular qualitative or quantitative standard."¹⁶ The researcher limited the data by focusing on unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. Trusted instrumentation was used to interpret and analyze the data and develop an intentional plan for unity in diversity.

Interview Instrumentation

The researcher interviewed 50 congregants from Walnut Hill. The group of interviewees represented a reflection of the diversity in the church. The researcher used a standard set of questions to form the basis of each interview. Where appropriate, the interviewer asked additional questions. According to Leedy and Ormrod,

Novice researchers often have greater success when they prepare a few questions in advance and make sure that all of the questions are addressed at some point

¹⁵ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 79.

¹⁶ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 81.

during the interview. These questions should, of course, be related to the research questions and overall research problem.¹⁷

Heeding the advice of Leedy and Ormrod, the researcher used five questions as the basis for each interview: (Appendix B). In a similar way, the researcher used a consistent set of questions when interviewing other church leaders who have implemented an intentional plan for unity in diversity: (Appendix C). These questions became the instrument that held each interview in line with the researcher's main objective of developing an intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill.

Survey Instrumentation

The survey results presented a clear picture of the diversity represented at Walnut Hill and showed the connectivity level of each people group. The researcher wanted to know how diverse Walnut Hill was and how well each group felt connected into the Walnut Hill family. The researcher examined several diversity surveys used by large organizations and other churches to develop an original survey for Walnut Hill. In the end, the team discussed what the survey would look like and felt the easiest and most non-confrontational way forward was to use a questionnaire that already existed. The 2010 United States Census questionnaire allowed the researcher an easy way to explain where the questions came from regarding race and ethnicity. The questions from the census on race and ethnicity were used verbatim on the 2017 Walnut Hill survey. The survey included 13 questions and was given to all people attending the services on June 4, 2017. A link to the survey was emailed to the congregation in case anyone had missed the opportunity to be involved. In total, 733 individuals participated in the survey. The

¹⁷ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 154.

surveys completed in the services were handed in to the usher team, concealed in offering bags and given to the researcher. The researcher then had a volunteer team enter the data into an online survey instrument called *SurveyMonkey*. Through this tool, the researcher could analyze the data and produce important charts and measurements. The researcher also used *Survey Monkey* for the select 50-person survey: (Appendix D). This survey was delivered to the subjects via email. The results were analyzed through the *SurveyMonkey* website.

Demographic Instrumentation

It was important to the researcher to know the demographics of the towns and cities where Walnut Hill congregants lived. This enabled the researcher to compare the percentages and statistics of the towns to the congregation. This also gave the researcher an understanding of potential opportunities that are being missed. For example, the researcher discovered the demographic of people with which the church is not connecting. The researcher used an online instrument called *Neighborhood Scout* to pull the demographic data of every town represented by Walnut Hill congregants. *Neighborhood Scout* gave the researcher access to age, race, ethnicity, household composition and income demographics for each town.

Subjects

The subjects who participated in the study represented the diverse makeup of Walnut Hill.

How were the subjects chosen?

The subjects were chosen by the researcher in collaboration with Walnut Hill's Strategic Leadership Team and Diversity Advisory Team. The researcher looked for

subjects who demonstrated a commitment to the church and desired to see greater unity in diversity at the church. The researcher also chose the subjects based on their race, ethnicity, special needs and overall physical ability to contribute to the conversation of unity in diversity. The researcher desired to have a diverse group of interviewees to represent the diversity reflected in the congregation.

Who are the subjects?

The interviewees represented singles, married couples, families with special needs, experts in the special needs community, men, women, high school youth, grandparents, multiple races and ethnicities, multiracial families, and members of Walnut Hill's majority population. The detailed tables below give a snapshot of the participants.

Table 4.1 Interviewee Age

16-25	10
26-40	10
41-55	18
56-75	12

Table 4.2 Interviewee Disability and Special Needs

Disabled	2
Parents of a Special Needs Child	4
Special Needs Expert	2

Table 4.3 Interviewee Race

African	4
African American	14
Brazilian	4
Chinese	6
Spanish	4
Puerto Rican	3
Haitian	1
Indian	3
Caucasian	11

Why were the subjects chosen?

The subjects chosen helped in the researcher's objective to develop an intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. The subjects were asked to speak with vulnerability about how racism, segregation and division live within the walls of Walnut Hill. They were also asked to aid the researcher in the development of an intentional plan for unity in diversity moving forward. Subjects were chosen because the researcher and the Diversity Advisory Team believed they would be positive contributors to the overall objective of the project.

Data Analysis

In *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, Creswell introduced a model for analyzing data called “the data analysis spiral.”¹⁸ The researcher followed this model closely in analyzing the data for this project.

Managing and Organizing Data

The first step in the data analysis process was to manage and organize the data. Creswell encouraged researchers to develop a plan for organizing their data early in the research process.¹⁹ In this case, the researcher utilized a Dropbox folder (online tool) to securely hold and organize files. Interviews were filed under the interviewee’s name. Files included audio from the interview, a long version of notes from the interview and a more concise version of the notes indicating key insights. Throughout the three-month period of interviews, a synopsis document in an Excel spreadsheet of the overall findings was created that enabled the researcher to compare insights from the interviews based on the five questions asked in each interview. All survey data was collected and analyzed through an online program called *SurveyMonkey*. The demographic data relating to the general town populations was collected using an online tool called *Neighborhood Scout*.

Determining Emergent Ideas

The researcher sifted through the data to identify the key emerging ideas. Significant time was spent analyzing the data from each interview to glean the key insights necessary for developing an intentional plan for unity in diversity. After the

¹⁸ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 185.

¹⁹ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 185.

interview was conducted and recorded, the researcher listened to each interview and extensive notes were taken. The notes were scanned and reviewed. A second abbreviated set of notes pointed out the key insights from the interview.

Describing and Classifying Data into Themes

According to Creswell, “Here, researchers build detailed descriptions, apply codes, develop themes or dimensions, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature.”²⁰ In this part of the data collection process, the researcher described in detail what was seen.²¹ Describing and classifying data in qualitative research refers to the work of taking apart the information gathered and categorizing it into key themes that will become the major conclusions and outcomes of the researcher’s project. For the researcher, this part of the data analysis process became a collaborative effort. Once the interviews were condensed into their abbreviated form, the researcher invited members of the Diversity Advisory Team to study the data and suggest the themes and categories that consistently emerged. Through analysis and conversation with members of the team, the researcher confidently proposed the key themes that emerged from the five data streams.

Developing and Assessing Interpretations

The interpretation of the major themes discovered was an important aspect of the qualitative research process. Through the analysis of the data, key themes emerged and the meaning behind these themes were interpreted by the researcher. According to

²⁰ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 189.

²¹ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 189.

Creswell, “Interpretation involves making sense of the data.”²² For the researcher, this involved bringing the findings of the research before the Diversity Advisory Team. The researcher relied on the collective wisdom of this team to propose an intentional plan for unity in diversity that reflected the learnings of this research project. In the interpretation stage of data analysis, the major question was, “What does this mean for Walnut Hill Community Church moving forward?” From the answers to this question, the researcher proposed an intentional plan for unity in diversity.

Representing and Presenting Data

The researcher’s goal of developing an intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill was captured in a professional and purposeful presentation within this step of the data analysis process. The presentation will be given to the leadership of the church, including the Elder Board, staff teams and key volunteers. A shortened version will be shown to the congregation through a Sunday morning sermon on unity in diversity. Developing a clear presentation on the project’s outcomes enables the researcher to raise awareness and exposure to the topic. The presentation provides an avenue to help others visualize and understand the results of the project. According to Robert Yin,

For many nonspecialists, exposure to a cogent and compelling single-case study can raise awareness, provide insight, or even suggest solutions to a given situation. Such a case study may be enhanced by simple but appealing nontextual materials, such as vignettes, pictures, and graphics. All this information can help others to understand a phenomenon when a dense or abstract array of statistics—no matter how compelling to a research audience—cannot do the trick.²³

²² Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 194.

²³ Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 182.

The presentation from this project represents the outcomes of the study, communicates a clear vision for unity in diversity, educates the listeners with a common language, and enables the church to embrace and participate in the call to greater unity in diversity.

Researcher Positionality

According to Kathryn Her, “Essentially, your positionality as a researcher means asking the question, ‘Who am I in relation to my participants and my setting?’”²⁴ The answer to this question is that the researcher is one of the lead pastors at Walnut Hill. He is a white male in his late 30s living without any disabilities. As an insider, the researcher acknowledges that this position may have influenced the data that was gathered. The researcher did everything possible to approach the project as a learner and advise and encourage each participant to speak freely. In several cases, others were invited to conduct the interviews if the researcher’s position and presence could influence the data.

Summary

This research project followed the qualitative research model. The case study primarily focused on the ministry of Walnut Hill. The researcher utilized a strategic plan for data gathering and data analysis. From six streams of data, the researcher developed an intentional plan for unity in diversity. The collected data was organized, managed, scanned and surveyed to reveal the overarching themes. Finally, the data was interpreted by the researcher into a presentable and implementable plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill.

²⁴ Kathryn Herr and Gary L. Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2015), 37.

CHAPTER 5: EIGHT ESSENTIAL UNITY IN DIVERSITY FINDINGS

The key findings contributed to the project's main objective to develop and implement an intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. The researcher collected data from interviews, surveys and historical documents. The first step was to interview 50 congregants from Walnut Hill to better understand the perspectives of the minority groups within the church. The researcher also interviewed three church leaders outside of Walnut Hill who have successfully implemented an intentional plan for unity in diversity within their ministry context to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of their efforts. The researcher conducted multiple church surveys to capture specific demographics and perceptions present within Walnut Hill. Through research analysis, eight key findings emerged from the data. Finally, the researcher utilized a twelve-person focus group to interact with the major findings for further clarity and understanding.

Walnut Hill Has Become a Diverse Church

Data collected through church surveys and a review of historical documents confirmed that Walnut Hill has increased in diversity over the past 20 years. Although the congregation became more diverse, nothing else was changing to demonstrate a value and sense of belonging to the evolving congregants. An intentional plan for unity in diversity was needed that focused on celebrating the diversity that emerged in the congregation. To better understand the potential for even more growth in diversity at Walnut Hill, the researcher also analyzed the area's demographics. In his book *One Body, One Spirit*, George Yancey shared seven principles for building multiracial churches.

These principles were developed from a six-year research project led by George Yancey and Michael Emerson sponsored by the Lily Endowment, Inc. One of the principles suggested by Yancey for building a multiracial church was related to location.¹ The study confirmed that a church located in a diverse community has greater potential for diverse attendance than a church located in a community lacking diversity. An intentional plan for diversity must consider the demographics of the church and the community in which the church is located to most effectively meet the needs of the church's specific ministry context. In this first finding the researcher discovered that Walnut Hill has increased in diversity and has the potential to continue the growth because of the diverse communities the church serves.

Diversity at Walnut Hill Has Increased

Through the analysis of surveys, historical documents and conversations with Walnut Hill members, the researcher found that Walnut Hill has increased in diversity since its inception 35 years ago. The researcher proved this fact based on historical documents from the church and surveys of the congregation taken over the years. The most helpful data came from documents and surveys done in 1994, 2010 and 2017. From this data, the researcher discovered considerable growth in diversity at Walnut Hill and determined the demographic makeup of the congregation in the year the research was conducted (2017).

¹ George Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Books, 2003), 67-69.

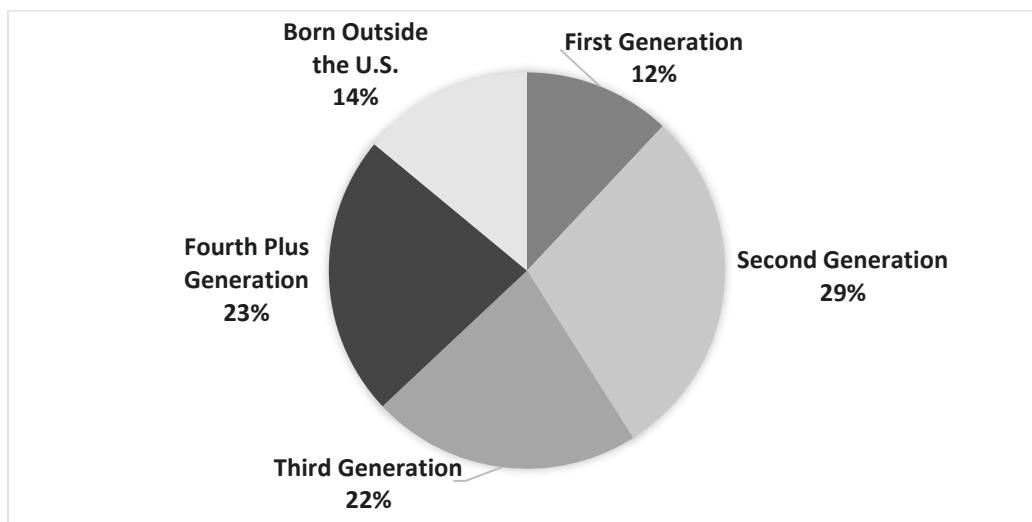
Walnut Hill in 1994

According to a 1994 membership directory, the church included 550 people. Of the 550 people, 380 had pictures in the directory. Utilizing the pictures, the researcher determined that of the 380 people who had their picture taken just nine were not white. The researcher spoke to Gene² and Sarah who were among the two percent of non-white members at the time. Gene was born in Malaysia and Sarah was born in Hong Kong. Reflecting on their early years at Walnut Hill, Sarah said, “The church was not diverse at all.” Her family represented five of the nine people who were not white. Through conversations with three longtime members of Walnut Hill, the researcher found the church had eight people with special needs or long-term disabilities. Through analyzing the church directory, the interviewees believed the median age of the congregation was 45 years old.

Walnut Hill in 2010

A survey was conducted of the Walnut Hill congregation in 2010. On the weekend of the survey, 1,140 people attended the services and 591 surveys were filled out, representing 52 percent of the congregation in attendance. The survey was created to reveal the church’s ethnic diversity. Table 5.1. illustrates the percentages of people who were born outside the United States as well as the percentages of first, second, third and fourth plus generation Americans.

² Participants names have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

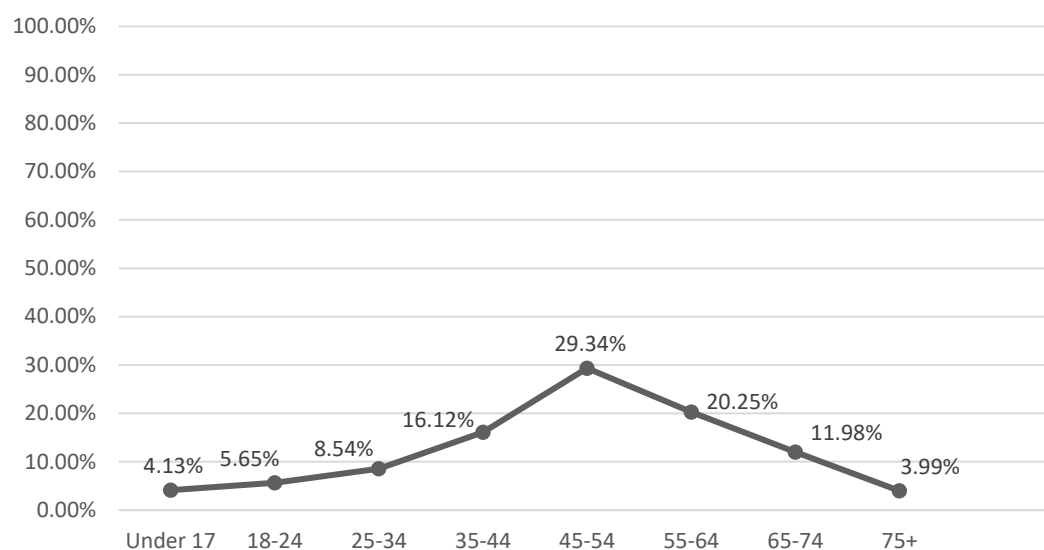
Table 5.1. Walnut Hill Multiethnic Survey 2010

Those born outside the United States represented 38 different nations and 32 languages other than English. The researcher also found that 20.3 percent recorded that they had lived in a country other than the United States for more than three years, representing 63 total nations. The longtime members of Walnut Hill who were interviewed reflected on the significant change in the church culture. One of the interviewees said, “We hired a [British] pastor which I believe influenced the change in our diversity. We began to see more people from other nations attending the church.” Neil and Eva shared that this was a critical moment of change for the church. For the first time a person representing the minority culture was in leadership. The new pastor, Clive Calver, could relate to those who had moved from their home country to live in the United States. He also brought a global perspective to the church because he served for eight years as the president of World Relief. When disaster strikes, World Relief responds by providing immediate aid and ongoing programs to help the most vulnerable in the world address the issues and challenges they face. As the president of World

Relief, Calver gained an appreciation for the importance of the body of Christ working together to meet the needs of people across the globe. With this experience, he began to teach on the importance of being the body of Christ together. Through his leadership, several of those interviewed expressed that they felt honored and valued as persons of color.

Walnut Hill in 2017

On June 4, 2017, the researcher conducted a survey to capture the current demographics of Walnut Hill. Of the 1,223 people in attendance, 733 completed the survey. According to the survey, 58 percent of the congregation were female and 42 percent were male, while 71 percent were married and 29 percent were single. The results concluded that 29 percent of the total group surveyed described their family as multiethnic, while 45 percent of the minority groups surveyed described their family as multiethnic. Families with special needs in their immediate family represented 15 percent of the total group and 10 percent indicated someone in their immediate family was disabled. The data showed a wide spectrum of representation concerning the ages of the congregants, as seen in Table 5.2. The congregants were asked to disclose their race. In 1994, the congregation was 98 percent white. After 23 years, the church was 76.79 percent white. This represented a considerable change in diversity at the church. Table 5.3. describes the race demographics at Walnut Hill as of June 2017.

Table 5.2. Age Demographics 2017**Table 5.3. Race Demographics 2017**

Race	Percent	Number of People
White	76.79%	559
Black/African American	9.07%	66
Brazilian	6.46%	47
Chinese	3.71%	27
Asian Indian	2.06%	15
American Indian or Native American	0.55%	4
Korean	0.55%	4
Vietnamese	0.41%	3
Filipino	0.14%	1
Japanese	0.14%	1
Native Hawaiian	0.14%	1

The data showed that the younger people in the church were more racially diverse. For those 35 years or younger, 67 percent were white and 33 percent represented people from minority groups. Interviews with the children's ministry team showed diversity has increased within the children of the church as well. The children's ministry has seen significant change in diversity after the implementation of a special needs program and the addition of younger diverse families.

The research confirmed that Walnut Hill increased in diversity considerably between 1994 and 2017. Christian Smith and Michael Emerson said, "According to the 1998 National Congregations Study, about 90 percent of American congregations are made up of at least 90 percent of people of the same race."³ According to Curtiss DeYoung, Michael Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Kim, "If we define a racially mixed congregation as one in which no one racial group is 80 percent or more of the congregation, just 7.5 percent of the over 300,000 religious congregations in the United States are racially mixed."⁴ Based on this data, Walnut Hill has increased in diversity and should be considered a multiethnic church.

Potential for Greater Diversity

Walnut Hill has campuses in four Connecticut towns. Bethel is 83.7 percent white, New Milford is 87.1 percent white, Derby is 63.8 percent white and Waterbury is 40.6 percent white. The researcher found that Waterbury and Derby have significant

³ Christian Smith, Michael O. Emerson, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 135-136.

⁴ Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.

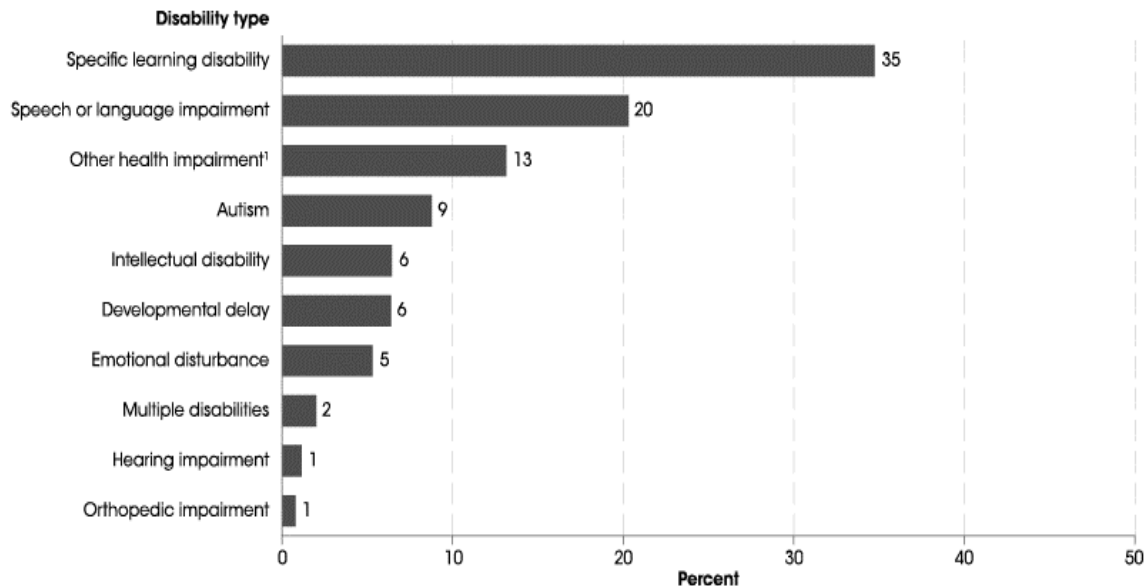
Hispanic populations. Danbury, which borders the town of Bethel, is 54.5 percent white and 29.3 percent Hispanic or Latino. Ministering into areas with substantial diversity offers Walnut Hill the opportunity for continued growth in diversity. According to the research of Kristen Deasy, the demographics of the United States are changing with each passing year. Based on trend analysis, Deasy stated that by 2042 “the United States will be a majority-minority nation in which there will be more collective minorities than the historically white majority.”⁵ According to Frank Bass, “Minority children will be the majority of kids in the entire United States by 2019.”⁶ Because of the changing demographics, the white majority churches in the United States must be prepared to change as well. If they are prepared, the potential for greater diversity is probable.

The researcher also found that there is a great need to provide care and support to families with special needs and disabilities. The National Center for Education and Statistics reported, “In 2014-15, the number of children and youth ages 3-21 receiving special education services was 6.6 million, or 13 percent of all public school students. Among children and youth receiving special education services, 35 percent had specific learning disabilities.”⁷ Figure 5.4 indicates the percentage of special needs and disabilities based on disability type for the 2014-15 school year.

⁵ Kristin Deasy, “Whites to Be Minority in America in 2043: Census,” *Global Post* (December 2012). <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/americas/united-states/121212/whites-be-minority-america-2043-census>.

⁶ Frank Bass, “Census Bureau Says Minority Youth to Be Majority by 2019,” *Bloomberg* (December 2012). <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-12-12/census-bureau-says-minority-youth-to-be-majority-by-2019.html>.

⁷ “Children and Youth With Disabilities,” National Center for Education Statistics, Last Updated: May 2017, accessed February 13, 2018, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp.

Table 5.4. Disability Percentages and Type for the 2014-15 National School Year⁸

The data the National Center for Education Statistics gathered in 2017 regarding children and youth ages 3-21 living with activity limitations, or disabilities, represents a 16 percent increase from a decade ago. Based on this tremendous increase the researcher believes there is great opportunity for Walnut Hill to grow in diversity in terms of disability and special needs by providing care and support to this part of the family of God.

Assimilation Is Not the Answer

The June 2017 Walnut Hill survey revealed that 38.4 percent of minorities feel somewhat connected or not connected at all at Walnut Hill. The face-to-face interviews showed that this lack of connection stemmed from the church's identity being strongly rooted in the majority culture: (Appendix B). The researcher discovered that the minority

⁸ "Children and Youth With Disabilities," National Center for Education Statistics, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp.

groups of the church desired to establish a new culture together rather than be required to assimilate into the majority culture. Mark DeYmaz and Oneya Okuwobi said,

The word assimilate means “to integrate somebody into a larger group so that differences are minimized or eliminated.” Yet the word accommodate means “to adjust actions in response to somebody’s needs.” This means you must not ask or expect diverse others to check their culture at the door in order to become part of your church. Rather, those in the majority are responsible to adjust their own attitudes and actions intentionally in order to enfold diverse others into the life of the growing, developing body.⁹

The researcher learned that an intentional plan for unity in diversity must develop a culture of accommodation instead of a culture of assimilation.

The first question the researcher asked every interviewee was “What has been your experience at Walnut Hill in terms of general hospitality and your personal feeling of belonging in the congregation?” Of the 50 interviews conducted, 100 percent of the participants communicated that they felt welcomed at Walnut Hill. Although there is a great sense of hospitality at the church, more than 80 percent of the persons of color interviewed commented on the strong majority culture that is represented on the stage every weekend during worship services. Jennifer is an African American woman actively involved in the life of the church. She often reads Scripture to the congregation on Sunday mornings and is a powerful prayer warrior. When asked about the areas where Walnut Hill has missed opportunities to embrace unity in diversity, she said, “Each Sunday, we have an opportunity to showcase who we are. We continually miss opportunities to demonstrate to people that we love all people. Through the lack of diversity on the stage, we are missing a great opportunity to express who we are as the

⁹ Mark DeYmaz and Oneya Fennell Okuwobi, *Multiethnic Conversations: An Eight-Week Journey Toward Unity in Your Church* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016), 177.

body of Christ.” Jennifer stated the importance of utilizing the church’s worship gatherings to celebrate the richness of diversity. In doing so, Jennifer commented that Walnut Hill will become a more effective and powerful force for Jesus.

In addition, more than 60 percent of those interviewed voiced their desire to see more diversity on the greeting team. An African American couple in their early thirties reflected on the reality that if people visited Walnut Hill today, they would be greeted by white faces on the website and then again by white faces at the main entrances. The visitors would then make their way into the worship center to be greeted by a white worship leader and taught by a white pastor. The general sense from those interviewed was that Walnut Hill did not have a hospitality problem but a majority culture problem. The persons of color interviewed saw the majority culture as the ones who determined and influenced the worship style, the upfront leadership positions of the church and the major decisions of the church.

From this learning the researcher conducted an experiment to find out how a greater level of celebrating diversity through participation in places of influence could change the sense of belonging for minority groups at the church. From July through September 2017, the researcher required the involvement of persons of color and a variety of ages and abilities in the 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. worship services at the Walnut Hill Bethel campus. During these three months, the team brought persons of color onto the worship teams, invited an African American guest worship leader and began a special needs choir that sang once a month. New greeters were also brought onto the team to reflect the diversity of Walnut Hill. The researcher heard repeatedly that if people do not see others who look like them serving in significant roles, they may not believe they can

belong. According to Jane, an African American woman in her early thirties, “When we see others who look like us serving in prominent places, we know that we are welcome and can belong.”

After the three-month experiment, the researcher took a survey of a select group of 50 people from the church to determine the success of the experiment: (Appendix D). This group of 50 was chosen from the list of people who completed the 2017 Walnut Hill survey. The group was composed of a cross-section of the diversity present at Walnut Hill. The researcher intentionally selected a group that represented multiple races and ages. Of the 50-surveyed, 100 percent noticed a significant change in the worship services. Every person surveyed strongly agreed that over the three months they felt a strong sense of belonging at the church and 25 percent shared that they invited friends to join them for a worship service. During this time, the worship and arts team invited a 16-year-old Jamaican dancer to perform an original piece during one of the worship songs. Val and Jason, an African American couple, commented, “When that young girl danced, we felt like Walnut Hill finally became a multiethnic church. We had stepped beyond inclusion and even belonging. We were now becoming something together.” The researcher learned that the minority groups of the church were not interested in simple assimilation but desired the opportunity to become family together with a culture that emerges from all involved.

Bill and Jenny are from Ghana. They came to Walnut Hill in 2012. Bill candidly said, “The idea of assimilation should be removed. I do not want to be like everyone else. I want to glorify God the way He has chosen to create me.” Bill and Jenny spoke about the clear majority culture that exists at Walnut Hill and how it is assumed that people will

adapt to the majority as opposed to the majority changing to embrace aspects of a culture different from their own. The interviews revealed a desire from the minority groups to become community together. This goes beyond inclusion and even belonging to becoming something together. Many of the interviewees commented on the need to establish a new shared culture to influence the worship, teaching, preaching, hospitality, events and communication (internal and external) at Walnut Hill. The overall consensus from the interviewees was for Walnut Hill to be a place where a diversity of people could belong and become community together.

Education Leads to Greater Understanding

The researcher found that education is a key element to bringing greater awareness and understanding. Over 40 percent of those interviewed commented on the need to educate the congregation on diversity topics such as race, ethnicity and special needs. Will is an African American man who served as the CEO of several non-profit organizations. In an interview with the researcher, Will stressed the importance of educating the church leadership on how to prepare for and lead a multiethnic church. Will and his wife Jackie both served in education and said an intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill must include ongoing education and development for the congregation, staff and leadership. Through education and development, Will strongly felt the church will be more aware of cultural differences and more equipped to lead into a new future.

The researcher learned that a successful plan for unity in diversity development and education must include several key components. These key components were discovered by talking with five diversity experts from secular business organizations that

have implemented strategic plans for greater unity in diversity within their companies.¹⁰ Through dialogue with the five corporate leaders and knowledge gained from the literature review the researcher found five key components that are necessary for an intentional plan for unity in diversity. First, a plan must include creating safe spaces for people to have conversation about diversity. Second, a successful plan should boldly address the historical hurts that have caused lines of division among people of various backgrounds. Third, the plan must include the wisdom of outside experts to help bring greater awareness and practical ministry training. In humility, the church must affirm and invite the people who have greater experience with unity in diversity. Fourth, a successful plan will include a commitment to ongoing development for staff and leadership. Finally, practical and applicable teaching for walking daily in unity is necessary.

Safe Spaces for Conversation

Through dialogue with experts from secular organizations the researcher found that creating safe spaces for communication is critical. John, a human resource expert from Praxair,¹¹ said, “You need a safe space to truly express your perceptions and thoughts as well as shape them. One needs a safe space not only to feel safe, to be open and less guarded, but to be able to consider the concepts and ideas of others.” Through the use of safe spaces people will learn about the perceptions and experiences of those different than themselves. Diversity education needs to start with safe spaces for conversation.

¹⁰ The researcher interviewed the President of Duracell North America, the President of Love146, the National Leader of Culture, Diversity and Inclusion at RSM (Response Surface Methodology), the Quality Director of Unilever and the Chief Human Resources Director of Praxair.

¹¹ Praxair is the largest industrial gasses company in North and South America.

Jason, an African American man, expressed the need to create atmospheres and environments for people to have conversations about diversity. He said one of the major oversights of the church has been the lack of conversation. Through conversation, Jason believes the congregation will learn from one another and grow in appreciation of each other's experiences, hurts and pains. To punctuate this point, Jason commented, "I yearn for conversations on diversity because I am curious about how white people are feeling. What are their fears? And I want a place where white people can be curious about me. These conversations will be risky but they will go nowhere if we are unwilling to take the chance of offending one another." For Jason, education happens through the sharing of personal stories with one another. Jason was not alone in believing safe spaces for conversation are necessary in diversity education. When asked what steps Walnut Hill can take to celebrate unity in diversity, over 30 percent of those interviewed said it would be important to have safe places to talk about issues of diversity.

Boldly Address Past Hurts

Stew is the president of *Love146*, a non-profit organization working to end sex trafficking. He grew up in the United Kingdom and now lives in Sandy Hook, Connecticut. Stew stressed the need to provide education on the historical hurts that persist within the United States. He insisted that a major part of educating a congregation must include a reconciliation plan that addresses past hurts. According to Stew, "Historic atrocities have lasting repercussions and cannot be swept under the rug as if they did not happen. For instance, the church must address the rift that exists between blacks and whites. It must be done honestly and carefully. Doing nothing is doing the worst possible thing." Stew encouraged Walnut Hill to go boldly toward reconciliation. Education for

him was not simply about building awareness but about healing past wounds. John, a human resource expert from Praxair, agreed with the concept of boldly addressing past hurts but stressed the importance of deciding and communicating the vision behind addressing such issues. John concluded, “Before we boldly address past hurts one needs to discern whether they are doing it for reconciliation, for the chance to move forward together, or for pay back. The only successful way to address past hurts is when you first agree on the reason for the conversation. When reconciliation is the focus unity is possible.” When addressing past hurts an intentional plan for unity in diversity must commit to make reconciliation the objective.

Outside Experts and Ongoing Development

Justin is the lead pastor at City Church in New Haven, Connecticut. City Church is comprised of four campuses. Three of the campuses are 60 percent white, 30 percent Latino and Mexican, and 10 percent Black. One of the campuses is less diverse with 90 percent of its members being white. The church was founded in 2011. According to Justin, he did not focus on diversity at all during the first three years of the church’s existence. In the fourth year, he said to the congregation, “For those of you who came to City Church in the first three years and are not white like me, I am sorry it has taken us this long to intentionally speak about diversity and celebrate who we are as the family of God.” From this conviction, Justin implemented a training and development plan for the staff and leadership team for diversity at City Church. Justin said it was essential for him to lean on experts in the field to bring his leadership and staff teams the kind of training that would equip them to minister to an increasingly diverse church. Today, City Church hosts training sessions once a month for the staff on topics such as unintentional bias,

micro-inequities or micro-aggressions, how to talk about events like the deadly 2017 protest in Charlottesville, Virginia, and building knowledge of the history of injustices toward persons of color. These intentional times of conversation and training have proved to bring about greater understanding among the staff and leadership. Justin invited diversity experts from local companies to speak to his staff on these issues and allowed for extended time to have conversation. He realized he could not give the training that his people needed. Therefore, he sought out local people who were qualified to raise the level of awareness and understanding within his staff.

After initiating a development plan for unity in diversity at *Love146*, Stew said, “As a privileged white male leader there is no way to facilitate this conversation without bringing in a third party who can represent and steward the diversity, equity and inclusion conversation without the bias of white male privilege.” Stew has relied on people from outside the organization to foster conversations on diversity. The researcher learned that diversity education and development cannot be a single event but instead must become a part of the organizations ongoing rhythm of work. Gail, an executive leader for Unilever, said, “It is important to constantly be exposing people to other’s experiences. There is always room to learn about one another and our own perceptions so that we can change.” Each of the five corporate experts the researcher dialogued with had experienced the benefits of ongoing development and the use of outside professionals.

Practical and Applicable Teaching

Diversity education must include practical and applicable teaching for walking daily in unity together. Each of the five corporate diversity experts the researcher consulted stressed the importance of ground-level teaching on diversity. In their

organizations they are hearing staff and employees at every level asking for practical tools to help them build and grow relationships. An intentional plan for unity in diversity must equip the congregation to build and grow healthy relationships with one another.

Leadership Must Be All In

In his Doctor of Ministry thesis, James Olson stressed the importance of leaders embodying the overall vision for diversity: “The initial step of implementation for the kingdom culture leader is to simply embody the principles and the values of their larger vision.”¹² Leaders must fully commit their lives to the vision God gives them. If the vision is for a unified church, then leaders must reflect that vision every day through the way they live. More than 68 percent of those interviewed commented on the importance of leaders wholeheartedly embracing a vision for unity in diversity. Through the interview process and the use of a focus group, two main themes emerged. First, for leaders to be all in, they must communicate a vision for unity in diversity and show that vision through the way they live. Second, leaders must be trustworthy.

Leaders Must Share and Show the Vision

Leaders communicate a vision with their words and lives. City Church’s lead pastor, Justin, emphasized the need for leaders to share the vision for unity in diversity and live the vision out in their daily lives. He said that any plan for unity in diversity needs to be marked through a statement of personal commitment from the leadership of the church. He reflected that City Church’s success was not because of a plan on paper. It was because of a life commitment from those with influence to make a change through

¹² James Olson, “Becoming an Intercultural Church” (DMin thesis project report, Bethel Seminary, 2010), 150, accessed July 2017, Bethel Seminary Library.

the way they lived. From this encouragement, the researcher took time in an Elder meeting at Walnut Hill to share about the work of this project. The Elders were told that the findings and conclusions would change the culture of the church. The researcher asked the Elders to make a public declaration of their commitment to unity in diversity by standing together. All the Elders committed to support the fact that Walnut Hill would change to accommodate a new culture in pursuit of celebrating unity in diversity together. When the researcher asked the group interviewed, “What steps do you think Walnut Hill needs to take to more successfully become a strong, healthy, and growing diverse church?” more than 55 percent of the interviewees stressed the importance of leaders sharing and showing a vision for unity in diversity.

Judy is a congregant of Walnut Hill who was born in Haiti where her uncle was the president. She moved from being a part of the ruling class of Haiti to living as a minority in the United States. Judy stressed that unity will not happen by accident. The church must use its voice to help communities overcome the issues of division. She wanted the church to become a voice for unity in diversity. She openly expressed her hope for the church: “I want to be a part of a church that is not afraid to use its voice. A silent church is a condoning church. Racism is an issue of the enemy. Leaders need to declare war against his schemes. If not the church, then who?” Judy expressed her frustration at the lack of concern shown by the American Church when incidents of injustice happened around the country. The researcher consistently found that persons of color were deeply hurt when leaders remained silent when injustice happened. When leaders commit to a vision for unity in diversity, they must share and show that vision.

Leaders Must Be Trustworthy

When leaders commit to unity in diversity, they must fully commit to earning trust from those they lead. The leadership principles outlined in Chapter 2 were often reflected on by the interviewees as important aspects of leadership. The interviewees most often voiced the need for leaders they can trust. When the interviewees were asked, “What has been your experience at Walnut Hill in terms of general hospitality and your personal feeling of belonging in the congregation?” more than 50 percent of the group commented on a strong sense of belonging because of the relationship they had with the lead pastor team. Through this relational bond, the interviewees said they could follow the vision and direction of the church. Trust was about having assurance that the leadership was taking them to a place where their differences would be celebrated.

The researcher met with a focus group of twelve people from Walnut Hill. The focus group consisted of African Americans, Africans, Brazilians, Asians and parents of special needs children. The group also had a mix of age and gender. This group was hand selected by the researcher and met one evening for a three-hour session. During this session, the researcher utilized the collective wisdom of the focus group to test the strength of the research findings. In one exercise, each group member wrote down five qualities they believed were most important for a leader to possess when leading toward greater unity in diversity. Everyone then revealed their responses to the group and discussed which was the most important. After 20 minutes of discussion, the group decided that the most important quality was that a leader must be trustworthy. It was important to them for a leader to be humble, loving, strategic and compassionate, but if the leader was not trustworthy, he or she would fail to bring people into greater unity in

diversity. After the focus group had met, the researcher emailed the participants and asked them to respond to the question, “What does it mean to be trustworthy?” Based on the responses, this diverse group of people wanted leaders to voice a compelling vision for unity in diversity and actively lead that vision forward.

Amber, a white woman in her early thirties, commented, “No one follows a person they do not trust.” Amber told the researcher that people will cross boundaries when they are following someone who has demonstrated a commitment to the vision and has proved to be trustworthy. The researcher heard from several of the interviewees that trust will give people a reason to go into uncharted territory and will embolden people to go into places that are uncomfortable. Any leader who is fully engaged in efforts of greater unity in diversity must build trust with those they are leading.

A Strong Identity in the Lord Helps in Overcoming Adversity

Jesus taught His disciples to resist hating those who hate them or cursing those who curse them (Luke 6:27-28). He asked them not to be governed by the way they were treated by the world but instead by who they were as God’s children. The interviews showed that when a person’s identity is strongly rooted in the Lord, he or she can overcome adversity. The twelve-person focus group was asked to write down the most effective way to overcome offenses. Some of the responses were prayer, Jesus and Scripture. Each word came from the group’s strong identity in God. The group agreed that a strong identity in God is most important when facing offenses and adversity. Although offenses cannot be avoided, the focus group helped the researcher understand that offenses can attach themselves to an individual and become a part of his or her identity. However, the group strongly communicated to the researcher that when you

have a relationship with the Lord, those offenses become passing events instead of long-lasting labels. Of those interviewed, 60 percent commented on the importance of relying on a strong identity in the Lord to help overcome adversity.

Aaron is a Puerto Rican man in his late fifties. He and his wife Becca have attended Walnut Hill for more than 23 years. Aaron spoke about not allowing his identity to be shaped by what others say about him. As an appliance technician, Aaron makes many visits to people's homes for repairs. On one such occasion, Aaron visited a family from the church to fix their appliance. He was there two days in a row. The second day he noticed the family hung a Confederate flag outside their front door. The flag was not there the first day. This was very hurtful to Aaron. He remembered having to make a choice. Would he allow this to affect his attitude for the day or would he not allow it to have power over him? Aaron said, "I saw the racist intent, but I did not allow it to take residence in my life. That is the difference between having an identity in Jesus and constantly looking for your identity from the opinions and perspectives of others." Becca added, "You can either carry around offenses like a ton of bricks every day, or you can bring them to the foot of the cross. We choose to bring them to the foot of the cross because they are burdens we cannot carry."

Jackie has Multiple Sclerosis. She has been wheelchair bound for over fifteen years. She told the researcher that she struggled with her identity. She had a hard time seeing beyond the chair and disease that controlled so much of her life. It wasn't until Jackie met the Lord, surrendered her life to Jesus and began to follow Him that she no longer defined herself by the disease she lived with and the chair that carried her. She told the researcher, "I was weakest when my first thought was that I was a person in a

wheelchair. I became strong, even as my body got weaker, when I learned that I'm a child of God."

Josie is a Brazilian woman who has attended Walnut Hill since 2005. Most of the interview with Josie was spent talking about helping people discover their identity in Jesus. She said the answer to greater unity is through a greater understanding of what God thinks of His people. Josie noted, "When people are hurt, they take everything as a personal attack. They are easily offended and assume discrimination. But when they know who they are in Christ Jesus, they can have healthy conversations, because they are not affected by everything others say or think about them." Through the data gathered from interviews and the focus group, the researcher concluded that a strong identity in the Lord is the foundation to overcoming adversity and offense and must be a part of any intentional plan for unity in diversity.

Serving Increases a Sense of Belonging

When people serve they have an increased sense of belonging to the organization in which they serve. The researcher gathered data from the 50-person survey to arrive at this finding. The group of 50 was chosen originally to respond to the three-month diversity inclusion experiment. They represent the wide spectrum of diversity at Walnut Hill and each participant serves at least twice a month in the life of the church. The researcher wanted participants who were actively involved in serving to discover the effects of serving in relation to a sense of belonging. Through the survey the researcher learned that serving is a positive way for people to connect into the life of the church and develop a sense of belonging. Friendship, compassion and partnership are all strengthened through serving. Table 5.4. details the data gathered.

Table 5.5. Serving and Belonging 2017

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I would describe myself as a person who is connected in the church.	45 (90%)	5 (10%)	0	0	0
Through serving, I have connected into friendship.	50 (100%)	0	0	0	0
Through serving, I have grown in compassion for others.	38 (76%)	5 (10%)	7 (14%)	0	0
Through serving, I feel a part of the mission of the church.	42 (84%)	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)	0

From this data, the researcher asked several of those surveyed to share more about how serving has deepened their sense of belonging to the church family within the key areas of friendship, compassion and partnership.

Serving Leads to Friendships

All 50 of those surveyed noted that serving led to friendships. Scott and Jessica are a Chinese couple who began attending Walnut Hill in 2011. When asked to elaborate on the value of developing friendships through serving, Scott answered, “We immediately began to serve because we knew that this was the best way to get to know others. When you serve, you naturally get connected with other people, and you become a family together.” Scott and Jessica have made friendships through the connections they have made while serving.

Melody and John are the parents of four children. Their second oldest son is autistic. Melody said that in the early years of attending Walnut Hill some people treated them badly because their son did not look different but acted different. By building friendships, people began to understand and care for their family. Melody voiced that serving is directly connected to a person’s sense of belonging at the church. She said,

“Belonging requires two things, an invitation and engagement. Walnut Hill needs to continue to invite people to participate in the life of the church. In response, people need to take a risk by stepping out and engaging.” Melody stressed the importance of stepping out and building relationships through serving. She said, “The people we served with became surrogate family to us.” Strong friendships are built when people serve together.

Serving Compels Compassion

All 50 people surveyed agreed that serving increases compassion for others to some degree. Ryan and Traci began attending Walnut Hill in 2012. Because of her battle with muscular dystrophy, Traci uses a wheelchair. Both Ryan and Traci expressed a sense of belonging from the very beginning of their time at Walnut Hill. They attributed much of this to the friendships they formed through serving. Beyond building friendships through serving, Traci commented, “Serving together lets you see someone else’s gifts and what needs they might have. When you serve with people, you grow to love them. What hurts them hurts you. The people who have cared for me in the greatest of ways are the people I serve alongside.” The researcher found from this interview with Ryan and Traci that people who serve together develop a love for one another and care for one another. The researcher officiated a heartbreaking funeral for a young mother who died of cancer. Kelly served in the women’s ministry. At the funeral, the women Kelly served with were sitting in the second row. These were the woman who cared for Kelly throughout her battle with cancer. According to Traci, “I have great compassion for those I serve with because I know them and I love them.” When people serve alongside one another they grow in friendship. Through friendship a heart of compassion is built for one another.

Serving Builds Partnerships

Ninety-eight percent of those surveyed felt like serving built effective partnership between diverse people and established a greater connection to the mission of the church. The researcher found that when a diverse group of people are called together to achieve a common goal, greater unity in diversity is possible. Through the context of working together, a diverse group of people learn how their differences can benefit the group. When a diverse group of individuals agree on a goal and the way to achieve that goal, unity in diversity will be the result of working to meet that goal.

Kay is a child development expert who works on the children's ministry staff at Walnut Hill. She is also a key leader in Walnut Hill's special needs ministry. When interviewed, Kay spoke about the special needs volunteer team: "We have a shared vision to love and care for families with special needs. This vision has bonded us together because we have a purpose together. We have a partnership that exists to love these families." Kay said that serving builds a sense of belonging because partnerships are formed. The group of people Kay leads has an agreed goal and an agreed way to achieve that goal. Therefore, they enjoy unity in diversity together as they journey toward that goal together. Through interviews with two volunteers in the special needs ministry, the researcher found that the volunteers are strongly connected because they are working on something together that unifies them in a powerful way. The special needs ministry volunteer team represents diversity in age, gender and race. A common vision to faithfully love and serve families with special needs brings them together.

Honor Brings Healing

The Apostle Paul said, “Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Rom. 12:10). When people choose to honor others, they live out the commands of Scripture, which represent the desires of God and result in healing. From the interviews conducted, the researcher heard from many who have been greatly affected by the brokenness of this world. Clear dividing lines exist among people of different nationalities, races and ethnicities. Boundaries also exist between the special needs community and those living with more typical circumstances. In many cases, entire people groups carry great wounds from their past and present experiences. Honor, therefore, became a powerful ingredient to the intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill.

When the researcher asked the interviewees, “What steps do you think Walnut Hill needs to take to more successfully become a strong, healthy, and growing diverse church?” more than 92 percent commented on the need to honor the minority groups in the church. The researcher asked the twelve-person focus group to share stories about times they had been honored. The group did not struggle to remember stories as each member contributed. The researcher then discovered that each of the stories told directly impacted the person’s past hurts and wounds. The focus group agreed that through these times of honoring they experienced healing. Whether honoring took place through words or actions, those moments reminded them of who they were created to be instead of the labels and aliases the world had placed on them. When the focus group was asked “Have you experienced healing through times where you were honored?” every participant agreed that honor brought healing. From this the researcher found that an intentional plan

for unity in diversity must include opportunities for the majority groups in the church to honor the minority groups of the church. When the majority begins to honor people in the minority groups, past hurts and wounds begin to heal. The opposite is true as well.

Opportunities must be created for the minority groups to honor the majority groups.

Through the survey of 50 select people in the church, the researcher learned that honoring is meaningful and can happen in many ways. Table 5.5. captures the data.

Table 5.6. Honor Brings Healing 2017

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
When someone honors me, it reminds me of who I really am.	41 (82%)	6 (12%)	3 (6%)	0	0
When I'm greeted and welcomed, I feel honored.	38 (76%)	8 (16%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)	0
When I see people like me celebrated, I feel honored.	36 (72%)	5 (10%)	8 (16%)	1 (2%)	0
When people take time to listen to me, I feel honored.	45 (90%)	5 (10%)	0	0	0
When I'm encouraged by someone, I feel honored.	50 (100%)	0	0	0	0

Honor through Hospitality

Honor happens through hospitality. Of the 50 surveyed, 96 percent strongly agreed that when people representing the minority groups within the church are greeted they feel honored. Returning to the conversation with Scott, the researcher discovered that simple acknowledgment goes a long way. Scott emphasized several times the importance in the Chinese culture of taking time to greet one another. He said that by simply taking the time to greet someone, you honor their presence. Scott hoped that leadership would be more intentional about greeting people as they enter and leave times

of worship. In the researcher's interview with Bill, an African in his late forties, the idea of change agents was suggested. Bill suggested that Walnut Hill designate a group of people on the hospitality team who specifically keep their eyes out for persons of color as they come to worship services and events. He said it is a step of vulnerability for a person of color to simply walk through the doors of Walnut Hill. The suggestion was to meet that vulnerability by stepping out and making sure every person is greeted well and assured that he or she belongs. People from the minority groups have a greater sense of belonging when the majority group honors them through hospitality.

Honor through Celebration

Ninety-eight percent of the group surveyed agreed that when people like them are celebrated, honor is given. In her work with the special needs community at Walnut Hill, Melena suggested that the researcher invite the special needs group to lead a worship song on a Sunday morning. The group came and led a song for the 9 and 11 a.m. services at the Bethel campus. The church was visibly moved by the experience. Parents of special needs children came to the researcher and expressed their gratitude. Judy came to the researcher and stated, "That was a tangible picture of the family of God." Dan approached the researcher and said, "As the father of a special needs child, I have never had a greater sense of belonging here at Walnut Hill than I do today." Through the celebration of diversity, people are honored. Through the celebration of their children, healing took place. When people are honored publicly, it brings healing and a greater sense of belonging to the family of God.

Honor through Listening

One hundred percent of the group surveyed agreed that they feel honored when someone takes time to listen to them. Pastor Mike from Wellspring Church in Kensington, Connecticut shared about the power of listening. Mike said people get hurt because of the absence of listening. He concluded that when people choose to listen, they understand. When they understand, they empathize. When they empathize, they begin to see themselves in the other person's place. When this happens, the one telling the story receives great honor because the listener has shown him/her value. Pastor Len from New Hope Baptist Church in Danbury, Connecticut shared that healing takes place when people honor one another with their full attention. He stressed that when listening is involved, understanding is gained. The pastor of City Church in New Haven, Connecticut invited congregants to intentional nights where people from diverse backgrounds share their stories. During these events, the congregants meet around tables to dialogue with one another about issues of race, ethnicity and division. They have found that the storytellers are so honored by those who come to listen. Through these intentional gatherings, City Church's leader, Justin, told the researcher that he is seeing people's pasts and perceptions being healed in front of him.

Honor through Encouragement

All those surveyed strongly agreed that honor happens through the gift of encouragement. When people experience encouragement, past wounds and hurts begin to heal. Encouragement as it relates to this study refers to the potential every human has to identify the work of God in others. When people share about how they see God at work in someone's life, it has the potential to heal areas of past hurt. From the interviews, the

researcher learned that moments of offense wrongly label people and cause them to walk through life carrying false labels. However, through encouragement new labels can be applied. Becca recalled several occasions where she and her son had been victims of hatred because of their race. Because her sons have drastically different skin tones, she has seen preferential treatment given to her lighter-skinned son as opposed to her son with a darker complexion. She acknowledged, “I had to spend more time with my darker complexion child explaining and teaching him how to behave so that he would not be falsely accused of something or caught in a situation where he was naively unprepared.” Past stories continued to have an impact on Becca today. In contrast, she told the researcher about people who have given her and her family words of encouragement. She said, “Words of encouragement heal our broken identities. They tell us who we really are.” Through words of encouragement, Becca said identities will be healed and relationships will grow in unity.

Relationships Change the Heart

The researcher met with the twelve-person focus group to prove that unity in diversity is discovered in the context of relationship. In this meeting, the researcher printed four pictures of people who were very different in age, race, gender and physical ability. The four were also very different in the way they dressed and presented themselves. Before he met with the focus group, the researcher also captured video of each of the four subjects. In the five-minute videos, the subjects shared details about their life. One by one, the researcher revealed a picture and then gave the focus group five minutes to write that person’s story simply based on what they saw. The focus group was encouraged to write about the subject’s family, job, faith, hobbies, economic position and

education. After the pictures were shown and the focus group had the chance to write a story for each subject, the researcher showed the videos. The researcher then had the focus group members read the stories they had written. Most of the focus group members were embarrassed to read their stories because they did not reflect the true stories of the subjects. Once the focus group heard from the subjects themselves, they had a much better understanding of who they were. The focus group was asked, “Do you believe you would be able to tell a more accurate story if you had the chance to spend the day with the person?” An overwhelming 100 percent of the group agreed that if they could get to know the person they would be able to tell a more accurate story of who he or she was. This proved that through the context of relationship, perceptions are broken, understanding is achieved and friendship is possible.

Dave and Shannon have attended Walnut Hill for six years. They grew up in India and came to the United States due to a work transfer. Both Dave and Shannon expressed the importance of authentic relationships. According to Dave, “You can influence someone’s mind through information on printed paper, but you can change his or her heart through relationship.” Dave shared the importance of a complete heart change when it comes to unity in diversity. He longs for every person at Walnut Hill to look at others like Jesus did. He believes this can happen only in the context of relationships. Dave learned this from the context of his corporate work and his church family. Dave shared that in the context of his corporate work he had been in many diversity training sessions where valuable information was given, yet the culture never changed. He contrasted that with the experience he and Shannon had in their community group. In the context of their church community group, they spoke to one another about diversity and built friendships

alongside the information. Through these different experiences, Dave spoke about the positive role of relationships in building greater unity in diversity.

Bill and Jenny are a couple from Ghana who have been attending the church for more than four years. Bill and Jenny believed perceptions are broken down through relationships. Bill spoke highly of their small group. Meeting together on a regular basis, having meals together, studying the Word of God together and praying for one another built strong relationships within their small group. In the context of the relationships they had built in their small group, they were able to share about their culture and background. Bill and Jenny were pleasantly surprised by how intrigued much of the group was about their culture. Through Bill and Jenny's openness, the group could learn about the realities of being African in the United States. The environment was right because the group had a developing love for one another through their growing relationships. Relationships provide the context for people to learn about one another and dispel false perceptions that may exist.

Summary

The eight findings became the foundation for Walnut Hill's proposed intentional plan for unity in diversity. Walnut Hill has grown in diversity and has the opportunity for continued growth because of its diverse local community demographics. An intentional plan for unity in diversity must work to establish a new shared culture. In establishing this new culture, diversity education must be a key component to growing in understanding and awareness. Beyond the implementation of diversity education, a plan for unity in diversity must be fully supported by the leaders of the church. For a greater celebration of unity in diversity to be achieved, leaders must fully embrace the vision. A

strong identity in the Lord helps people overcome offenses and adversity. A greater sense of belonging happens through serving, honoring one another and in the context of relationships. From these eight findings, the researcher has developed an intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill.

CHAPTER SIX: THE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN INTENTIONAL PLAN FOR UNITY IN DIVERSITY

The goal of this project was to develop an intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. In this chapter, the researcher accomplished six main objectives. The researcher has given a detailed account of the potential impact of each finding on the practice of ministry at Walnut Hill. Next, the strengths of the research project are addressed followed by the weaknesses and suggested modifications for improvement. The researcher then proposed several possible applications of wider impact for the project and presented one suggestion for further research. Finally, the researcher has connected the work from the biblical and theological section, literature review section and the field research section into several important integrated conclusions.

The Impact of the Findings on the Practice of Ministry

Each research finding had a significant impact on the practice of ministry at Walnut Hill. In this section, the researcher has outlined the benefits, application and challenges that each finding presented to the practice of ministry at Walnut Hill. The findings led to the formal recommendations for an intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. Through these recommendations, the researcher believes the congregation will not only feel a sense of inclusion and belonging but will also truly experience the reality of Jesus' prayer for unity as the church becomes family together. The researcher also included application questions for each finding that could prove to be useful for ministries and organizations outside of Walnut Hill that desire to implement

their own intentional plan for unity in diversity. The questions will equip ministries and organizations to apply the findings of this project into their own context.

Walnut Hill Has Become a Diverse Church

The uniqueness of this research project was that it focused on an intentional plan for celebrating the diversity that already existed at Walnut Hill. The findings will have a positive effect on continued growth in diversity; however, the main objective was to respond to the diversity already present at Walnut Hill. To that aim, the researcher surveyed the congregation to reveal an accurate picture of diversity at Walnut Hill and discover the local demographics of the community in which Walnut Hill serves.

According to Curtiss DeYoung, Michael Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Kim, a racially mixed congregation is one where no racial group represents more than 80 percent of the congregation.¹ Walnut Hill's majority group represents just over 76 percent of the congregation. Therefore, based on this definition and the supporting data, Walnut Hill should be considered a multiethnic church. The researcher also found through the data gathering process that the congregation has not only changed dramatically in terms of racial diversity but has also become more diverse in age, marital status and physical ability.

The Benefits of Being a Diverse Church

Diversity growth within the church gradually progressed throughout its 36-year history. The benefit of this finding for continued growth in unity in diversity is that the

¹ Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.

church does not have to start from scratch. Instead, it can lean into the movement in a more intentional way. With this knowledge, the intentional plan for unity in diversity was developed to build and grow from the gift of diversity already present. With more intentionality, the researcher believes the congregation will greater enjoy the unity God envisioned for His church. Paul taught, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). As Walnut Hill continues to increase in diversity and the celebration of diversity, it will more and more reflect the coming vision of heaven recorded by John, “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” (Rev. 7:9). A great benefit of continued growth in unity in diversity is that it reflects what will one day be enjoyed by the body of believers in eternity.

The Application of Being a Diverse Church

In analyzing the diversity data from the latest survey sent to congregants, the researcher gathered detailed statistics about the specific minority groups that exist at Walnut Hill. Through this clarity in the level of diversity that exists at Walnut Hill, the researcher discovered several opportunities for application within the ministry of the church: (Appendix E). The first opportunity lies in the special needs ministry. The researcher found that 10 percent of the congregants said they were physically disabled and 15 percent said someone in their immediate family had special needs. The researcher interviewed three special needs experts. Two are members of Walnut Hill who served with special needs students as trained professionals in the public school system and one is the founder and CEO of a non-profit organization that provides care and development

programs for special needs children in schools through mentorship programs, sports programs and technology resources called *Dylan's Wings of Change*.² Each of the experts said there is a gaping hole within faith-based organizations for special needs opportunity and care. Families with special needs who want to belong to a church have limited options. The researcher recommends that Walnut Hill equip the growing special needs ministry by increasing resources with dedicated staff, increased training and awareness for volunteers, and spaces within the church building that properly accommodate the special needs community. With a focused and healthy infrastructure in place, Walnut Hill will better attract and serve families impacted by special needs.

The second opportunity is to utilize the diversity that already exists in the context of weekly ministry. The researcher learned that when people see others like them on stage and in the congregation, a greater sense of belonging emerges. This was validated through the surveys the researcher conducted. With diversity already present at Walnut Hill there is an opportunity to utilize this diversity in the context of worship services and ministry teams throughout the church. The researcher recommends that Walnut Hill intentionally engage and invite a diversity of people to participate in significant roles in the ministry of the church. People should not be chosen only because they represent a certain group of people. However, those who are gifted and ready for serving in ministry should be intentionally engaged and invited.

Local demographic research revealed a high percentage of Hispanic and Latino persons in several areas where Walnut Hill ministers. Walnut Hill's Bethel campus

² Find more information on Dylan's Wings of Change at www.dylanswingsofchange.org.

borders the city of Danbury where 29.3 percent of the population is Hispanic or Latino.³ The town of Derby where one of Walnut Hill's campuses meets is 25.4 percent Hispanic or Latino. Finally, in Waterbury, 35.3 percent of the population is Hispanic or Latino. With such a high percentage of Hispanic and Latino persons, the researcher recommends that Walnut Hill actively investigate ministry opportunities that appeal to and best serve this demographic.

The Challenges Associated with Being a Diverse Church

As Walnut Hill implements an intentional plan for unity in diversity, the researcher can foresee several challenges associated with the recommendations. In this finding, the researcher recommends that Walnut Hill maximize the gift of diversity already present at the church. Several opportunities were outlined in the previous section that will celebrate the diversity that is present and will most probably attract more diversity within the church. With a more intentional commitment to embracing and celebrating diversity, many within the majority group may become uncomfortable due to the inevitable change that will result from such a commitment. On the flip side, minority groups could feel like they are being chosen for roles and responsibilities simply to fulfill the vision for unity in diversity instead of for their God-given gifts and abilities. The church will need to be prepared to share the vision of unity in diversity with regularity to overcome these potential landmines in the field of growing and celebrating diversity.

³ Demographic statistics found at www.neighborhoodscout.com.

The Application Questions

The following questions can be used by organizations and ministries to apply the findings of this research project into their unique context:

- What are the current demographics within your ministry or organization?
- What are the current demographics of the local communities at large in which you serve/work?
- What opportunities emerged based on the demographic research?
- Based on the demographic research, are your diversity goals realistic? If not, how should you adjust your goals? For example, if you live in a community that is 95 percent Latino setting a goal to grow to be a church with 20 percent Latinos and 80 percent other ethnicities may not be a realistic goal.
- What opportunities exist for the organization to grow in diversity in terms of age, gender and physical ability?

Assimilation Is Not the Answer

To embrace unity in diversity a community must be prepared to adopt a new culture together. Assimilating the minority groups into the majority group should not be the goal. Unity in diversity goes beyond inclusion and belonging to becoming a community that embraces a shared culture together. The researcher found that people from minority groups do not want to sacrifice what they bring to the table to assimilate into the majority culture. It would also be detrimental to unity in diversity to create an “us” and “them” culture. The people interviewed want a new “we” mentality where Jesus is at the center of creating culture together. The title of this project, *Unity in Diversity: An Intentional Plan to Move from Inclusion to Belonging to Becoming*, was chosen because this became a goal for Walnut Hill’s intentional plan for unity in diversity. Unity in diversity does not stop at inclusion or belonging but stretches into the unprecedented and uncharted ground of becoming a community that celebrates the many unique and beneficial facets God created in one another.

The Benefits of Establishing a New Culture Together

When diverse believers commit to establishing a new culture together, they benefit from exposure to and an understanding of God's creativity through interactions with people who do not look like them. A common vision to follow and serve Jesus Christ is necessary. This new culture will emerge as people cast aside personal preferences and live to bless others with love and compassion. The Apostle Paul exhorted the believers in Philippians 2:1-4,

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

According to Paul, a Christian community should be united in Christ by the Spirit of God and live to value others through love and compassion. When all people are valued, a shared culture emerges that provides a fuller reflection of God's vision for His church.

The Application of Establishing a New Culture Together

The first recommendation within this finding is to set an expectation among congregants that the chief priority of a shared culture together is Jesus Christ. An emerging shared culture cannot be birthed out of competing for personal preferences but instead by leaning into becoming a Christ-centered body of believers. The researcher believes the attendees of Walnut Hill have a great opportunity to achieve unity together because of their common love for Jesus Christ. With Jesus at the center the question becomes "Will this glorify Jesus?" instead of "Does it satisfy my preference?" When Jesus called His disciples, He said, "Come, follow me" (Matt. 4:19). Believers who thrive in unity strive after Jesus Christ together. He becomes their shared passion. Through

following Jesus, shared practices and behaviors will develop that glorify God. The researcher believes this can be done through a commitment to Jesus-centered preaching and teaching. The researcher also recommends that Walnut Hill continues to support its First 20 initiative, which challenges each congregant to spend the first 20 minutes of his or her day with Jesus through the study of Scripture and prayer. Through an intentional pursuit of Jesus individually and corporately, Walnut Hill will increasingly establish a culture with Jesus at the center.

The second, third and fourth recommendations flow out of the first recommendation of making Jesus the center of an emerging culture. The second recommendation is to create spaces for transparent conversation between majority and minority groups. Transparency will be a necessary part of building a new culture together. Through safe spaces for transparency, people will be able to share about the tensions that exist between their differences and the successes of walking together in greater unity in diversity. These spaces will be in the context of smaller groups, such as community groups, workshops and Bible studies. The third recommendation is to empower trusted and qualified persons of color and a diversity of age and physical ability into positions of influence to bring new perspectives to the table. If a shared culture is a commitment, the establishment of that new culture must be led by a diverse leadership team. Finally, the fourth recommendation is to communicate and celebrate the vision for unity in diversity. The vision needs to be reapplied many times through effective and inspiring communication. This communication must be done through multiple channels, such as personal testimonies, biblical teaching, media presentations, songs and prayer. This communication of the vision of unity in diversity must not be limited to one area of

the ministry but needs to be done throughout the organization. One person or one aspect of the ministry cannot successfully carry the vision for unity in diversity. It must be an all-inclusive effort. The vision must also be celebrated. When steps are made toward fulfilling the vision, they must be acknowledged and applauded by the leadership of the church. Through the celebration of progress, the vision of unity in diversity is affirmed and people are inspired to continue working toward success. Celebration of such successes can happen through public or private recognition of an event or a personal story that models the vision for unity in diversity.

The Challenges Associated with Establishing a New Culture Together

The main challenge will be sacrificing preference to establish shared practices. This will be for both the majority and minority groups within the church. The challenge will be keeping the pursuit of Jesus the main priority and not allowing disagreements on preference to distract from the main goal. Challenges will emerge when the majority culture is asked to shift and make changes. The church that congregants once knew will change and this can be uncomfortable. To overcome this challenge, the researcher recommends that Walnut Hill continually and intentionally share its vision for unity in diversity. The vision will help people understand why their church is changing and enable them to become positive contributors to the journey toward greater unity in diversity.

The Application Questions

The following questions can be used by organizations and ministries to apply the finding, “Assimilation Is Not the Answer,” into their context:

- Who are the minority groups within our organization/ministry?
- Do the minority groups sense the majority group has all the influence in the organization/ministry?

- What is your shared goal/vision? Is there a vision or goal that could become the catalyst for a new shared culture?
- Are there persons of color in prominent places and positions within the organization/ministry?

Education Leads to Greater Understanding

Diversity education will be a critical component of the intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. Through education, the walls of naivety and unawareness come down and greater unity is achieved. With greater understanding comes deeper levels of empathy and ultimately stronger love for one another in the body of Christ.

The Benefits of Greater Understanding through Education

Through a commitment to diversity education, Walnut Hill will develop the skills necessary to overcome divisional barriers and enjoy greater unity together. Knowledge is required for understanding and understanding is necessary to change culture and behavior. A deeper level of understanding will benefit Walnut Hill in several ways. First, it will lead to greater empathy for one another. Through environments committed to healthy conversations about unity in diversity, people will begin to see how it would be to live in someone else's shoes. The Clifton Strength Assessment describes people with the strength of empathy: "People who are especially talented in the Empathy theme can sense the feelings of other people by imagining themselves in others' lives or others' situations."⁴ Through the lens of empathy, reality is seen and perceptions are overcome. Empathy is important for unity in diversity because it allows individuals the ability to understand what others are experiencing and feeling. Second, through education people

⁴ Definitions for each of the 34 strength themes can be found at www.gallupstrengthscenter.com.

will develop awareness and understanding of the past hurts and current daily pressures that affect others. Understanding the hurts of others will equip Walnut Hill congregants to better care for one another and act more graciously toward one another when those hurts re-emerge. Third, education will benefit the church by equipping people with the skills to have healthy friendships with one another. Finally, through education, the church will learn how to practically and intentionally move forward into greater unity in diversity.

The Application of Greater Understanding through Education

Through the following commitments, the researcher believes the church will grow in understanding and benefit from greater unity together.

Become Storytellers

Stories expand people's knowledge, understanding and empathy for others. By using personal testimonies, the value of unity in diversity can be expressed and taught. The researcher recommends that Walnut Hill embrace the role of storyteller. Through the telling of personal stories, congregants will see people like them and learn about a variety of different people groups. Through these stories, they will discover God's heart for everyone. University of Haifa professor Freema Elbaz Luwisch said, "In work on cultural difference, personal stories are powerful means of becoming aware of the taken-for-granted arrangements of one's own culture, of piercing walls of hostility and of coming to understand other cultures."⁵ Personal testimony can be included throughout the ministry of Walnut Hill to create opportunities for congregants to grow in their

⁵ Freema Elbaz Luwisch, "Understanding what goes on in the heart and the mind: learning about diversity and co-existence through storytelling." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 17 (March 2001): 133, accessed November 1, 2017.

understanding and appreciation of one another. Stories should be told during the weekend services by having people share their testimonies. In the context of small groups, the discipleship curriculum should include the use of personal stories. The researcher also recommends that Walnut Hill uses its social media platforms to share stories more broadly through video. Through the power of storytelling, the one sharing his story invites others into his world. Luwisch said, “Storytelling can make it possible for members of marginalized groups to claim the voices silenced by mainstream culture; at the same time, storytelling can be a way of admitting the other into one’s world and thus of neutralizing the otherness and strangeness.”⁶ The researcher encourages Walnut Hill to commit to regularly telling stories to celebrate the gift of diversity.

Prepare for a Marathon

The journey to unity in diversity is not a short sprint but a marathon. The researcher recommends that Walnut Hill commit to ongoing unity in diversity education. The church should not look at education as an event but instead as a marriage. A regular rhythm of training and development will be necessary for the congregation, staff and leadership. Leslie E. Overmyer Day stated, “It is crucial to involve the entire organization in diversity-related efforts. Buy-in is critical to success.”⁷ The researcher recommends that the lead pastor team provide regular opportunities throughout each ministry year for specific teaching on unity in diversity during weekend services. Preaching and teaching on unity in diversity must become a regular part of the ministry rhythm. In addition, the

⁶ Freema Elbaz Luwisch, “Understanding what goes on in the heart and mind,” 133.

⁷ Leslie E. Overmyer Day, “The Pitfalls of Diversity Training.” *Training and Development* 49, no. 12 (December 1995): 28, Accessed December 7, 2017.

researcher recommends that the lead pastor team develop an ongoing plan for unity in diversity training and equipping for staff, ministry leaders and Elders.

Create Safe Spaces

For unity in diversity education to succeed, the church will need to make time to have the difficult conversations in safe environments where people feel heard, validated, loved and honored. This could happen in many contexts, such as small groups, workshops, staff meetings and worship services. The researcher recommends that the church leadership decide on ground rules for conversations about unity in diversity. The safe places for conversation should have a trained guide who knows, communicates and ensures the ground rules are followed.

Get Practical

An intentional plan for unity in diversity education must get practical. Unity in diversity education and training must answer the following questions:

- How do we reconcile past hurts?
- How do we have healthy conversations with one another?
- How do we incorporate traditions/practices representing multiple cultures?
- How do we know when we have offended someone?
- How do we talk with someone who has offended us?
- How do we ensure people do not get overlooked?

An element of unity in diversity education must focus on how Walnut Hill will move forward practically as a community that embraces and celebrates unity in diversity. The researcher recommends that the church take all its small groups through Mark DeYmaz and Oneya Fennell Okuwobi's eight-week study called "Multiethnic Conversations."⁸

⁸ Mark DeYmaz and Oneya Fennell Okuwobi, *Multiethnic Conversations* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016).

This study not only provides a great biblical vision for unity in diversity but also equips participants to practically live out that vision.

The Challenges Associated with Greater Understanding through Education

The researcher believes the greatest challenge will be the need to repeatedly motivate congregants to become active learners. Casting a strong vision for unity in diversity will be essential in keeping congregants engaged and active in pursuing diversity education and training. Convincing the majority group of their need for education and training will be a challenge because many in this group will not realize how they might benefit from the education. Issues of race and prejudice do not affect the majority to the same level as the minority groups. Therefore, some in the majority group may not understand the importance of diversity education. The majority group must look internally at its own blind spots and areas of naivety to reach a greater level of understanding. There is also a risk that persons of color and persons with disabilities will tire of continually bearing the weight of having to initiate the conversations, answer questions and be vulnerable with majority groups as the majority grows in understanding. Another challenge will be helping people understand that no one perfectly fulfills the command to love one another. James and Lillian Breckenridge said, “True ministry within a multicultural context must begin with the admission that each of us is prejudiced.”⁹ Every person is born into a family, lives in a community and receives an education that influences how he or she views people who are not like him or her. Education can help people become aware of subconscious biases they may believe. A

⁹ James Breckenridge and Lillian Breckenridge, *What Color Is Your God?: Multicultural Education in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bridgepoint Books, 1995), Kindle Locations 69-70.

willingness to acknowledge biases is a critical step to unity. For education to lead to understanding, those involved must approach the conversations in humility believing there is room for everyone to grow and learn.

The Application Questions

The following questions can be used by organizations and ministries to apply the finding, “Education Leads to Greater Understanding,” into their unique context:

- Are there safe spaces for conversations on issues of diversity within the organization/ministry?
- What ground rules would be important for the organization/ministry to establish safe spaces for conversation?
- How could stories be used within the organization/ministry?
- What areas of training would the organization/ministry benefit from most?
- What current meetings within the organizational structure could be used for diversity training and education?
- How can the organization/ministry protect and encourage minority groups as they lead the way in diversity education?

Leadership Must Be All In

Leadership buy-in will be critical to the success of an intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. Leadership from every level must fully embrace and support the vision. Not only must the entire organization commit to unity in diversity but every leader must personally embrace the vision. DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey, Kim and Chai proposed that every leader must commit his head, heart and history to unity in diversity:

By head we mean leaders are committed to learning all they can about multiracial ministry. By heart we mean leaders have a passion for becoming multiracial. And by history we mean that leaders already have a history of living integrated,

multiracial lives. Leaders cannot lead a congregation in becoming multiracial if they, themselves, are living segregated lives.¹⁰

The researcher found that an intentional plan for unity in diversity must be lived out and supported by the leadership.

The Benefits of Leadership Being All In

When a leadership team is fully engaged and committed to unity in diversity, the value will naturally be reinforced throughout the organization and resources will be more freely released to meet the vision for unity in diversity. When leadership fully embraces the vision for unity in diversity, new levels of innovation will spark initiatives geared toward promoting the vision for a multiracial, multiethnic and multicultural church. Unity in diversity must be led by those who are fully engaged and fully committed to the biblical vision to be one in Christ Jesus.

The Application of Leadership Being All In

The researcher recommends that the leadership of Walnut Hill fully embrace a vision for unity in diversity. In doing so, he recommends that the leadership commit to sharing the vision, showing the vision and supporting the vision for unity in diversity.

An intentional plan for unity in diversity must include a compelling and communicable vision. Walnut Hill must agree on a clear and concise vision for unity in diversity that will be shared across the organization by multiple voices and through multiple modes of communication. For a vision to take root within the congregation, it must be shared regularly and have a consistent message. When asked how she had seen

¹⁰ Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey and Karen Chai, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 170.

Walnut Hill's value for unity in diversity practiced over the past ten years Jill, an African American congregant, shared, "Until recently I didn't know we had a value for diversity because nothing was ever said." The researcher recommends that Walnut Hill adopt an intentional communication plan that works to instill the value and vision of unity in diversity. This communication plan should include agreed-on language, an intentional rhythm of communicating that language in weekend services and a plan for nonverbal communication through artistic expression, music and pictures used in prominent places across the campuses, website and social media platforms. The researcher recommends that Walnut Hill use its already established vision, "We Are Family," to promote and embrace unity in diversity. This core statement could easily provide the opportunity to communicate a biblical vision for the family of God that would embrace the vision for unity in diversity.

Second, the researcher recommends that Walnut Hill intentionally show and model the vision for unity in diversity. Sharing the vision for unity in diversity is important but noneffective and unfruitful without showing the vision. The researcher found that Walnut Hill is growing as a multiracial church. Many races are represented in places of lay leadership in the church; however, Walnut Hill needs to hire well-qualified persons of color to its staff. The researcher found that the staff is overwhelmingly represented by the white majority. Because this may take time, the researcher recommends that the white leadership create strategic ministry teams to provide spaces for the minority groups in the church to speak into the vision and implementation of ministry. The authors of *United by Faith* stated, "A commitment to having representational leadership and dismantling white privilege go hand in hand with

developing an authentic multiracial congregation—particularly when that congregation began as a predominantly white congregation.”¹¹ The researcher also recommends that Walnut Hill continue to make a mandatory agreement that diversity will be celebrated in every worship service. With the diversity already present at Walnut Hill, this goal is realistic and reasonable to employ immediately. Through the intentional celebration of diversity on stage, newcomers from minority groups whether they are age, ability or ethnicity-related will not only feel welcomed but will also trust they belong and can contribute to becoming something new as a church family.

Finally, the researcher recommends that Walnut Hill establish a process infrastructure that supports the vision for unity in diversity. This goes beyond sharing and showing the vision. The church will need to evaluate its structure and systems to ensure they support the value and vision for unity in diversity. For example, communication on the vision for unity in diversity is needed in the membership class. A page should be added on the teaching about the church’s value and vision for unity in diversity. This is one example that represents many opportunities to instill the vision for unity in diversity in every aspect of the ministry of Walnut Hill. The researcher also recommends that the church leadership agree on a budget for new unity in diversity initiatives. Financial resources will be required for new education and training, serving initiatives, small group curriculum, and worship experience changes. Finally, the researcher recommends that the church learn how to hire persons of color to the staff team. Part of this process will require consideration of several factors. What processes need to be in place? Where should job descriptions be posted to attract a diversity of applicants? How should

¹¹ DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey, Kim and Chai, *United by Faith*, 95.

interviews be conducted? These and other questions will need to be answered to intentionally hire future employees.

The Challenges Associated with Leadership Being All In

The biggest challenge will be to free up resources that will enable leaders to equip the church to support the vision for unity in diversity. The existing proclamation at Walnut Hill that “We Are Family” gives the church a clear way to express the vision of unity in diversity. The more challenging aspect of fulfilling the recommendations of this project will be freeing up resources to show and support the vision. Another challenge is the potential for leaders to grow weary in the process of sharing, showing and supporting the vision for unity in diversity. This is an area where leaders can easily be misunderstood and harshly judged by the majority and minority groups within the church. For spiritual protection and ongoing encouragement, the researcher recommends that Walnut Hill entrust a group of congregants to faithfully pray for the leadership as they forge new paths in unity in diversity.

The Application Questions

The following questions can be used by organizations and ministries to apply the finding, “Leadership Must Be All In,” into their unique context:

- Does the organization/ministry have a compelling vision for unity in diversity? If not, what team could work on producing one?
- Is the leadership team of the organization/ministry fully bought into the vision for diversity?
- Do the leaders in the organization/ministry reflect the local community?
- How is the organization/ministry currently sharing the vision for unity in diversity? How could the organization/ministry share the vision for unity in diversity moving forward?

- How is the organization/ministry currently showing the vision for unity in diversity? How could the organization/ministry show the vision for unity in diversity moving forward?
- How is the organization/ministry currently structured to support unity in diversity? How could the organization/ministry support the vision for unity in diversity moving forward?

A Strong Identity in the Lord Helps in Overcoming Adversity

The researcher found that those with a strong identity in the Lord can more quickly overcome offenses. They know their value is not found in what the world believes about them but in the fact that God has created them to be His children.

The Benefits of a Strong Identity in the Lord

When people rely on the definitions given to them by the world, they carry the burden of false labels and aliases produced by the standards often set by the majority culture in which they live. When people discover their identity in the Lord, they adopt an identity as children of God. With an identity confidently found in the Lord, the false labels and aliases subjected on people by the world have no ability to stick. The benefit of this finding is that believers can discover their God-intended identity. As the family of God, when one brother or sister faces an offense, the whole family should feel the hurt and take on the responsibility to stand up for those who are discriminated against. Lastly, the researcher found that when people receive their identity from the Lord, they are more prone to have positive assumptions for others. With an identity firmly placed in the Lord, people can more positively allow grace for others. Positive assumptions are essential for unity in diversity. Through positive assumptions, healing can take place where bitterness and anger have taken root.

The Application of a Strong Identity in the Lord

For this finding to take root within the congregation, the leadership must intentionally provide opportunities for people to discover and understand that their identity is found in the Lord. This will need to be done using sermons, small groups and care groups. The researcher also recommends that Walnut Hill utilize the *Gallop Strength Finder* assessment tool to help people discover how God has uniquely created them.¹² Each of the three lead pastors, including the researcher, intentionally received training as StrengthsFinder coaches to help people discover more about how God has knit them together. Utilizing the strengths that emerge from this tool and the virtues taught throughout the pages of Scripture, the researcher believes Walnut Hill can provide spaces for the congregation to discover and adopt their God-given identities. Establishing a firmer understanding and foundation as the children of God, uniquely made to follow and serve Him, will place Walnut Hill in the right position to grow in unity in diversity.

The Challenges Associated with a Focus on Identity

The greatest challenge associated with this finding is celebrating a shared identity in the Lord and the uniqueness of each individual and group. To embrace unity in diversity means to embrace both unity and diversity. The challenge will be teaching about a shared identity while celebrating the differences among the congregation within that shared identity. The goal is not to become color blind, age blind, disability blind or gender blind but to see clearly the need for one another's unique gifting. The goal of an intentional plan for unity in diversity is to become the unified body of Christ. Richard

¹² More about the *StrengthsFinder* assessment tool can be found at www.gallupstrengthscenter.com.

Twiss contributed, “Our greatest strength as the body of Christ lies in the fact that though we are different individuals, we are one in Him.”¹³ The researcher has four daughters. Each is very different, but all of them call the researcher Dad (Papa). An emphasis on unity in diversity celebrates the grace of being called the children of God and the uniqueness of being a one-of-a-kind child of God.

The Application Questions

The following questions can be used by organizations and ministries to apply the finding, “A Strong Identity in The Lord Helps in Overcoming Adversity,” into their unique context:

- What are the shared values the organization/ministry would appreciate seeing from each employee/congregant?
- How is unique gifting/talent celebrated and rewarded within the organization/ministry?
- What opportunities exist within the organization/ministry to teach on identity?
- What myths about the identity of those within the organization/ministry exist? How can those myths be dispelled through training, storytelling or teaching?
- How could a culture of positive assumption help your organization/ministry? How could this culture be developed?

Serving Increases a Sense of Belonging

Through serving, people gain a sense of belonging. Serving becomes the environment where friendships are built because of a shared mission and purpose. As people serve together, they develop ownership in the corporate vision, which translates into a greater sense of belonging to the organization/ministry. Timothy Keller attributes this unique sense of belonging to the work of the Gospel:

¹³ Richard Twiss, *One Church, Many Tribes: Following Jesus The Way God Made You* (Minneapolis, MN: Chosen Books, 2000), 101.

The Gospel creates community. Because it points us to the One who died for His enemies, it creates relationships of service rather than selfishness. Because it removes both fear and pride, people get along inside the church who could never get along outside. Because it calls us to holiness, the people of God live in loving bonds of mutual accountability and discipline. Thus the Gospel creates a human community radically different from any society around it.¹⁴

When serving centers on the work of Jesus, the church has a unique opportunity that the world does not share: to experience a divinely inspired unity. This unity is to be compared to the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Benefits of Serving Increasing a Sense of Belonging

This finding is a benefit to the church because the ministry of Walnut Hill is implemented by hundreds of volunteers. The church will expand through the support of more people serving. With an intentional plan to increase serving, the church will benefit both from a heightened sense of belonging and an increase in the capacity to serve the needs of the church and the local community. With more people engaged in serving, stronger relationships and a sense of belonging to the church community will develop, resulting in deeper levels of commitment to the mission of the church. When people serve side by side, friendships are built. Through the strengthening of diverse friendships, the researcher believes the church will have greater impact for Jesus in the life of the church and in the local community. When diversity is embraced and celebrated, the church benefits from the empowerment of multiple gifts, strengths, perspectives and talents.

¹⁴ Timothy Keller, *Serving a Movement: Doing Balanced, God-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 133.

The Application of Serving Increasing a Sense of Belonging

The researcher has several recommendations for Walnut Hill that will help the leadership implement a strengthened culture of serving. First, leaders need to encourage people to serve at corporate church gatherings. Leaders must share the vision for serving and invite all people to join the serving team. The vision must include a belief that there is a position for everyone to serve in the life of the church. Second, when people accept the invitation to serve, the process to engage in positions of serving must be clear and easy. Congregants need to know how to sign up and how to get involved. Third, the training for new team members must be sensitive to every kind of person. Training must cast a vision for the strength of diversity in serving. Utilizing Paul's teaching regarding how the body of Christ benefits from each member to impact the work of Jesus would be appropriate (1 Cor. 12). Fourth, the church should regularly celebrate and honor the people who are serving. This can happen through storytelling, publicly acknowledging those who serve or private celebrations where individual ministries can take the time to thank and honor each person.

The Challenges Associated with Serving Increasing a Sense of Belonging

The church needs to address the barriers that exist for many who want to serve, such as when English is someone's second language or the person is physically disabled or mentally challenged. The church needs to be creative and find a position for everyone who wants to serve. In overcoming this challenge, it would be helpful to openly speak about the opportunities where people can easily serve. An example of this would be saying, "Even if you are not comfortable speaking English, we want to encourage you to join our greeting team. All you need is a heart to serve and a smile." A church that

commits to celebrating and embracing unity in diversity must be prepared to welcome all people into serving and be prepared to creatively think through the logistical implications that result from such diversity.

The Application Questions

The following questions can be used by organizations and ministries to apply the finding, “Serving Increases a Sense of Belonging,” into their unique context:

- Is there a vision for serving in the organization/ministry?
- Do the training opportunities for serving cast a vision for unity in diversity?
- Are there opportunities within the organization/ministry for all people to serve?
- Are there ways within the organization/ministry to connect people through serving to provide the opportunity for friendships to build?
- How could the organization/ministry celebrate those who serve?
- Are there serving opportunities that would benefit unity in diversity?

Honor Brings Healing

The researcher found that through honor comes healing. When people are honored for their God-given gifts and uniqueness, the wounds from past offenses receive healing. People who have been told that they are more worthless than others can receive great blessing when they are honored. Walnut Hill has a great opportunity to see wounds healed through a commitment to honor one another.

The Benefits of Honor Bringing Healing

The researcher interviewed 50 people representing the minority groups within Walnut Hill. More than 80 percent of the group expressed that it was often difficult to be a part of a minority group in the church. This was not because they felt offended or received disapproval from the leadership or congregation. Their weariness came from a continual need to sacrifice their own preferences and exercise vulnerability each time

they walked through the doors of a Walnut Hill campus. Through intentionally honoring persons of color, they will be refreshed and the church's commitment to love all people will be affirmed. Healing will take place in the body of Christ. Danny Silk commented, "The clear fruit of establishing a culture of honor is that the resurrection life of God begins to flow into people's lives, homes and communities, bringing healing, restoration, blessing, joy, hope and wholeness. If we are not seeing this fruit, then we must ask ourselves whether we are truly honoring those around us as we ought."¹⁵ The researcher believes if church attendees can embrace this finding wholeheartedly, they will experience a breakthrough in their relationships with one another. Barriers will be overcome and unlikely friendships will emerge.

The Application of Honor Bringing Healing

Honor happens in many ways. The researcher recommends four opportunities for Walnut Hill to live out honor. First, honor happens through hospitality. The researcher recommends that Walnut Hill begin an "ambassadors" initiative. The ambassadors would be a diverse group of people tasked to be on the lookout for new people who come through the doors of the Walnut Hill campuses. This would be a new level of the hospitality ministry in the life of the church aimed at making sure all people are hosted well and welcomed. Through intentional hospitality, newcomers will feel honored and welcomed into the life of the church. The researcher recommends that Walnut Hill more intentionally welcome people from minority groups who in vulnerability have chosen to attend a majority white congregation. The researcher also recommends that Walnut Hill

¹⁵ Danny Silk, *Culture of Honor: Sustaining a Supernatural Environment* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2009), 28.

fully prepare themselves to welcome those with special needs and disability. This will require physical structure changes as well as proper training and equipping of volunteers.

Second, honor happens through celebration. The researcher recommends that the church intentionally incorporate practices from minority groups in the context of church gatherings. For example, honor can happen through celebrating different cultures by the style of worship chosen and the meals that are served in the context of small groups. The researcher also recommends that the worship services be used to celebrate unity in diversity. This can happen by involving a diversity of people in times of teaching, preaching, Scripture reading, prayer and worship. A great example of this has been having members of the special needs community leading worship during the offering time each month. The researcher recommends that the church regularly celebrate when people use their gifts for the Lord through storytelling and personal testimony. In the context of worship and through videos on social media, the researcher recommends continually celebrating the beauty of God's vision for unity in diversity.

Third, honor happens through listening. As previously suggested, the researcher recommends that congregants go through a study like Mark DeYmaz and Oneya Fennel Okuwobi's eight-week study entitled *Multiethnic Conversations*. The church should train and prepare small group leaders to host spaces for conversations on topics about unity in diversity. Within these times of conversation, each group should be instructed to listen to each other's stories. Through listening and being heard, those telling their stories will be honored. Likewise, the researcher also recommends that the lead pastors remain connected to the Diversity Advisory Team so the issues and concerns of minority groups within the church can be heard and supported.

Fourth, honor happens through encouragement. The researcher recommends that each ministry leader incorporate teaching on encouragement for their volunteers each year. The gift and ministry of encouragement should be modeled by the leadership and filtered down into each of the ministry areas of the church. Through encouragement, people are honored and inspired to pursue the things of God.

The Challenges Associated with Honor Bringing Healing

The challenge will be to honor with sincerity. People will question the actions of a leader who aggressively pursues unity in diversity out of selfish motivation. For honor to be authentic, a person must honor out of pure motives. A person who honors with a pure heart genuinely desires to uplift another person and does not seek to display his or her own righteousness. Jesus said, “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Matt. 6:1). Honor should be practiced out of a heart of love for one another, not for promoting a unity in diversity plan or initiative.

The Application Questions

The following questions can be used by organizations and ministries to apply the finding, “Honor Brings Healing,” into their unique context:

- What hurts exist in the context of the organization/ministry?
- How has honoring brought healing to the organization/ministry?
- What is the congregation’s/employee’s perspective on the church’s/organization’s display of hospitality?
- How might the idea of ambassadors help the organization/ministry?
- Are there opportunities for people to share their stories?
- Is the organization/ministry considered a listening organization/ministry?
- How have you seen honor in the organization/ministry used in an effective way?

Relationships Change the Heart

The researcher found that through relationships people change their minds and hearts about others. Through personal connection, false perspectives are cleared away and hearts are changed for one another. James and Lillian Breckenridge said, “Researchers have found that negative attitudes toward ethnic groups often accompany a lack of knowledge regarding and a lack of contact with specific ethnic groups.”¹⁶ The researcher believes the way to foster positive attitudes toward one another comes through the context of relationship.

The Benefits of Relationships Changing the Heart

The benefit of this finding is that it provides the way to reconciliation and restoration. If diversity education is going to be a part of an intentional plan, it must include room for building relationships. If honor is going to bring healing, it must be done in the context of relationships. Serving will bring a sense of belonging only if relationship is a central part of the equation. Leaders must fully embrace the vision for unity in diversity, yet they cannot do it all alone. Leaders must have a healthy relationship with those they lead and those who can help them pursue unity in diversity. Likewise, congregants must build healthy relationships with one another. Building and developing relationships with one another are essential for the other findings to take root.

The Application of Relationships Changing the Heart

The researcher has one critical recommendation for this finding. The church must continue to provide opportunities for people to get to know each other. The best way for

¹⁶ Breckenridge and Breckenridge, *What Color is Your God?* Kindle Locations 834-835.

this to happen is to maximize the use of small group settings within the ministry of Walnut Hill. The congregation needs to regularly be encouraged to join a small group. The leadership needs to find ways to ensure the small groups are diverse. The researcher also recommends that the church provide first step opportunities for congregants to get to know one another. The researcher recommends enlisting section leaders within the worship center. The section leaders would look out for new people in their section (an assigned group of rows in the main sanctuary) each week. They would introduce them to others in their section and help them get connected to the life of the church. The researcher recommends the church ask people to regularly commit to sitting in the same section each week. The preaching pastor could also use the section leaders to guide short discussion times during the weekend services. Through this innovative initiative, newcomers would be welcomed more intentionally and relationships would develop from the consistency of sitting together.

The Challenges Associated with Relationships Changing the Heart

The implementation of this finding could put a lot of pressure on the minority groups in the church. Walnut Hill is just over 76 percent white. Just over 15 percent of the congregation belongs to a family with a special needs member. Over 10 percent of the fellowship lives with disability. With this in mind, the difficulty of challenging the church to have more diversity in their friendships is that people in the minority groups may feel great pressure to befriend everyone. The minority groups might also be hesitant to join groups of people who do not look like them outside of the weekend services. To overcome this challenge, the researcher recommends that the church continue to cast a broad vision for unity in diversity. Although important, the call for unity in diversity

should not be strictly focused on racial diversity. A vision for unity in diversity must embrace diversity in age, race, physical ability and gifting.

The Application Questions

The following questions can be used by organizations and ministries to apply the finding, “Relationships Change the Heart,” into their unique context:

- Are there opportunities within the organization/ministry for people to get to know one another?
- Is there a good connection process for new people in the life of the organization/ministry?
- Are people within the organization/ministry equipped to have conversations with people who are different from them? If not, how might they be equipped?
- Are there particular fractures between people groups in the life of the organization/ministry? How might those fractures be overcome?
- Are there any stories of current congregants/employees that could benefit the vision for unity in diversity?

Strengths of Research

A qualitative research project enables the researcher to dive deep into the context of a human problem and see from the perspective of those who interact with that problem. Denzin and Lincoln said, “Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.”¹⁷ A strength of this research project was that the researcher was able to live within the context of the problem addressed. The researcher interacted directly with the people who have firsthand experiences and perspectives about the research problem. From the data gathered through the qualitative research model, the

¹⁷ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2011), 3.

researcher was able to address the need for an intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill.

The case study method of research enabled the researcher to focus on one church ministry and provide recommendations tailor-made for that ministry context. This focus enabled the researcher to become highly knowledgeable regarding the case. Robert Yin offered, “Whatever the field of interest, the distinctive need for case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena.”¹⁸ Through a high level of knowledge gained through this case study, the researcher was able to give context-specific recommendations that will be particularly fruitful for Walnut Hill.

One of the strengths of the research project was the historical data that showed the change in diversity representation at the church over time. Another strength was the positive responses of the diverse congregants who were surveyed and interviewed. Through the vulnerability and transparency of the interviewees, the researcher gained an accurate picture of Walnut Hill’s current culture and the needed steps to embrace and celebrate unity in diversity. The project also benefited from the Diversity Advisory Team, which helped the researcher begin to implement the findings immediately into the context of ministry. Finally, the researcher found that the personal call of God to pursue the topic of unity in diversity served as the backbone to the execution of this research project.

Weakness of Research and Suggested Modifications

The project was limited by the timeline available to complete the project. The researcher analyzed just three outside churches that have implemented an intentional plan

¹⁸ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 4.

for unity in diversity. If more time was allowed, the researcher could have benefitted from the experiences of a larger list of local church leaders.

The researcher would have liked to have spent time with specific control groups for further data. Although the researcher was able to interview 50 people, the project would have benefited from pulling specific groups together for conversation and data gathering. For instance, do families with special needs children feel a sense of belonging at Walnut Hill? Or, do those over the age of 75 feel connected to the life of the church? The researcher could have gained more data using specific control groups.

Finally, the researcher believes that one of the main weaknesses of this project was the variety and number of the findings. With eight key findings ranging from serving to education to honor, the research was restricted to a limited degree of depth in each finding. The researcher is thankful for each of the findings and believes each will be important to the development of unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. However, the project would have been stronger had there been a more refined set of findings into which more time and development could have gone. For example, a detailed list of educational resources could have been developed for the diversity education finding if the list of findings had been shorter.

Possible Applications of the Project

The project's findings and recommendations are specifically relevant to the ministry of Walnut Hill. This project has become an intentional plan for unity in diversity that the researcher will continue to implement into the ministry of Walnut Hill. The findings can be applied to other organizations and ministries wanting to establish an intentional plan for unity in diversity. In addition, the findings of this project can be

valuable for churches looking to implement a plan that would help them grow in diversity as well as those looking to maximize the gift of diversity with which they have already been entrusted.

Integrated Conclusions

From the biblical-theological reflection, related literature and field research, a set of integrated conclusions emerged. Each of the three integrated conclusions are affirmed from each of the three main data streams utilized in this research project. The three main data streams affirmed God's desire for unity in diversity. Unity in diversity is a divinely inspired idea. God equips leaders to encourage greater unity in diversity. Throughout Scripture, God chose leaders to bring people together. Whether it was Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Peter or Paul, God used each to call people together. Each was equipped and empowered by God. The literature and field data affirmed the need for strong leadership to embrace the vision for unity in diversity. Leaders are needed to promote and advance unity in diversity. Unity in diversity is a strong witness to the world. As the family of God, Christian brothers and sisters can invite people to know the one who unites them, Jesus Christ.

Summary

The recommendations given in this chapter became the intentional plan for unity in diversity at Walnut Hill. The next step will be to implement each of the recommendations into the individual ministry areas of the church. The researcher plans on utilizing Walnut Hill's Diversity Advisory Team and Strategic Leadership Team to ensure the recommendations are implemented. The recommendations should not be one-time events or initiatives but instead long-term values that need to be adopted into the

DNA of the church. By implementing these recommendations, the researcher believes Walnut Hill will thrive as a church that celebrates and embraces unity in diversity.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE PROJECTS IMPACT ON PERSONAL GROWTH AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Personal Growth

The researcher has personally grown through the process of working on this thesis project. This section addresses the researcher's growth as a researcher, leader, pastor, father and son.

Growth as a Researcher

The researcher now understands how to construct and implement a solid and trustworthy research plan. The writings of John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth,¹ Robert K. Yin,² Nancy Jean Vyhmeister,³ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod⁴ were instrumental in preparing the researcher to carry out this thesis project. The researcher learned how to design and implement the qualitative research method. The researcher has developed a solid understanding of how to plan and implement a case study. Through these methods, the researcher learned how to gather, analyze and interpret data. Equipped with these newly gained insights, the researcher is better prepared for future research

¹ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013).

² Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014).

³ Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, *Your Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

⁴ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research Planning and Design* (New York, NY: Pearson Publications, 2013).

endeavors, such as possible book writing, sermon preparation and the investigation of new church initiatives. Weekly sermon planning and writing have benefited from the researcher's new level of skill in research design and implementation. Sermons are stronger and more impactful because the researcher has exercised the research methods learned through the doctoral program in sermon study and preparation. The researcher has also used these newly understood research methods to move forward other major initiatives within the ministry of the church. For example, in designing a new discipleship program for the church, the researcher utilized the use of surveys and interviews to make recommendations that reflect the desires and needs of the congregation. Data was gathered, analyzed and interpreted to arrive at helpful recommendations for a new discipleship model for the church.

Growth as a Leader

This project was an exercise in research and leadership. The researcher grew in the ability to lead productive conversations about unity in diversity. Throughout the project, the researcher led the Elder Board, Strategic Leadership Team and Diversity Advisory Team in discussions about unity in diversity. The researcher found that it took preparation, sensitivity and humility to guide these conversations in a healthy and productive manner. From the experience gained from the field research, literature review and biblical and theological study, the researcher is more prepared to lead Walnut Hill into a new season of embracing and celebrating unity in diversity.

The researcher also grew as a leader through learning to listen. When working in a fast-paced ministry setting, decisions are often made without much consultation. The

researcher learned about the benefits of patiently seeking wisdom from a diverse group of people representing multiple perspectives. DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey and Kim said:

The majority group must be willing and even eager to listen to nonmajority people. Without this conscious approach, the consequences are typically a sense of frustration within the minority groups, the loss of opportunities to expand faith and community, a higher turnover rate of minority groups, difficulty in sustaining the multiracial character of the congregation, and either the forced assimilation of the minority group members that remain or the ability to attract only culturally assimilated minorities.⁵

Listening was the avenue to understanding in this research project. Through patiently listening to the stories and perspectives of others, the researcher gained understanding that led to helpful recommendations for an intentional plan for unity in diversity. The researcher grew in understanding through listening. The minority groups felt included and became influencers by what they shared with the leadership of the church.

Growth as a Pastor

The researcher has also grown as a pastor. The researcher more fully understands the hurts, pains, views and perceptions of the persons of color and persons with disabilities who attend the church. This new level of understanding has helped the researcher become more sensitive and empathetic to the needs of the non-white congregation. This increased empathy and compassion have led the researcher to resist quick judgements about congregants. The researcher has learned that there is always a story under the surface that contributes to a person's actions and attitudes.

⁵ Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 174-175.

The researcher also grew as a pastor by working to heal fractures created by tragedy. Disunity can occur because of multiple factors in the life of the church. Race is certainly one of those factors. The researcher has also learned that the impact of tragedy can cause disunity. Walnut Hill was impacted deeply by the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012. The researcher's initial plan was to do a thesis on the church's response to tragedy. Instead, God moved the researcher's heart to pursue a thesis on unity in diversity as the next step in the healing journey for a congregation deeply impacted by tragedy. The differing levels of impact caused by the tragedy created division lines within the community. This project allowed the researcher to learn about these lines and how to help in the healing process. Trauma can instigate disunity. The findings in this project will help Walnut Hill embrace unity in diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, age, physical ability and traumatic impact. The recommendations given in this project are the next steps to healing for a community severely impacted by tragedy.

Growth as a Father

The researcher has grown as a father through the work of this research project. The researcher is compelled to see his four daughters learn about and cultivate a passion for unity in diversity. The researcher has begun to ensure that his children have opportunities to experience friendships with people from different cultures, ages, abilities and backgrounds. The researcher has committed to make unity in diversity a family priority by investing in opportunities that celebrate and embrace unity in diversity.

Growth as a Son

As a child of God, the researcher feels more connected to God's heart for unity. The researcher was naïve to the hurts and pains of fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Unknowingly the researcher was deeply naïve to the issues of diversity. God wanted the researcher to understand and change before the church he helped lead could be changed. Through the work of this project, the researcher has a deeper understanding of God's love for all people and His heart to see all people united. The Lord addressed and strengthened the researcher's own areas of weakness through the experience of this work. The researcher developed a new sensitivity for minority groups and a greater level of empathy and compassion for persons of color who step out in vulnerability to attend a majority white church. Finally, the project challenged the researcher's own selfishness. Change will be required to embrace a new way forward together. The researcher had to be the first one to lay down self-interest for the benefit of unity in diversity. For these reasons, the researcher is now a more mature son of God.

Suggestions for Further Research

A suggested area of further researcher would be to study how honor brings healing. The researcher was led to this conclusion but was unable to collect sufficient data to thoroughly test the nuances of the finding. Recommended research questions could be: What constitutes honor? Does honor bring healing emotionally, physically and spiritually? What does it look like to equip a community to honor one another? Where in Scripture does honor bring healing? What is the role of honor in collaboration and leadership? How is honor best practiced within different cultures?

Another area of further research would be to develop a relational driven diversity education program. The researcher has discovered several helpful resources for individual study but believes there is a need for an innovative training and equipping resource that utilizes a relational framework. Can a small group of diverse people meet to

learn from one another? If so, what foundational education would be necessary? What would be the ground rules? How would they work through potential conflict? What would be the shared goals of meeting together? Could the researcher's recommendation about serving together be a part of the relational education plan?

Another potential area of further research could concentrate on how to transition a staff team into a more diverse representation of the community it serves. The researcher has recommended that Walnut Hill become more diverse within its staff and leadership teams. Several questions arise from this problem, such as: What is the healthiest way to accomplish this goal? What processes need to be put in place for future hiring? How can an organization guard against profiling? How can the current staff prepare for change?

Summary

The researcher set out to propose an intentional plan for unity in diversity for Walnut Hill. Recommendations have been made that the researcher believes will benefit Walnut Hill's goal to embrace and celebrate unity in diversity. These recommendations will become steps in the healing journey for a community struggling through the effects of tragedy and trauma and will draw the community together in greater unity. Beyond the implementation of an intentional ministry plan, the project made a big impact on the researcher's personal life. The researcher looks at the world in a new way and more deeply understands the heart of God for unity. The researcher joins Jesus in praying for the church, "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one" (John 17:11).

APPENDIX A
2017 WALNUT HILL SURVEY

2017 WALNUT HILL DIVERSITY SURVEY

Q1: Contact Information

Name (optional) _____

Email (optional) _____

Telephone (optional) _____

Q2: What is your gender?

Male Female

Q3: Are you married or single?

Single Married

Q4: What is your age group?

- a. Under 17 years old
- b. 18-24 years old
- c. 25-34 years old
- d. 35-44 years old
- e. 45-54 years old
- f. 55-64 years old
- g. 65-74 years old
- h. 75 years or older

Q5: In what country were you born?

Q6: Besides the United States, have you lived in another country for more than three years? If so, what country(s)?

Q7: What language(s) other than English do you speak?

Q8: Do you or anyone in your immediate family have special needs?

Q9: Are you or anyone in your immediate family physically disabled?

Q10: Does your immediate family represent multiple ethnicities?

Q11: Are you of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin?

- a. No, not of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin
- b. Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano
- c. Yes, Puerto Rican
- d. Yes, Cuban
- e. Yes, another Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin (write below)

Q12: What is your race? Mark one or more boxes:

- a. White
- b. Black, African American
- c. American Indian or Alaska Native
- d. Asian Indian
- e. Chinese
- f. Filipino
- g. Japanese
- h. Korean
- I. Vietnamese
- j. Asian not mentioned (write below)

- k. Native Hawaiian
- l. Guamanian or Chamorro
- m. Samoan
- n. Pacific Islander not mentioned (write below)

- o. Brazilian
- Race not mentioned (write below)

Q13: How connected do you feel into the Walnut Hill Community Church family?

- a. Extremely Connected
- b. Very Connected
- c. Somewhat Connected
- d. Slightly Connected
- e. Not at All Connected

APPENDIX B

WALNUT HILL CONGREGANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

WALNUT HILL CONGREGANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What has been your experience at Walnut Hill in terms of general hospitality and your personal feeling of belonging in the congregation?
2. Have you seen or experienced Walnut Hill's value for diversity? Can you describe this?
3. In what ways has Walnut Hill missed opportunities to show its value for diversity?
4. From your experience, what have been the barriers to unity in diversity at Walnut Hill?
5. What steps do you think Walnut Hill needs to take to more successfully become a strong, healthy and growing diverse church?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PASTORS OUTSIDE WALNUT HILL

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PASTORS OUTSIDE WALNUT HILL

1. How would you describe the diversity of your church before and after you implemented an intentional plan for unity in diversity?
2. What is your church's vision for unity in diversity? How did you arrive at this vision?
3. What were some of the barriers to unity in diversity that you had to face?
4. What practical steps did you take to encourage and celebrate unity in diversity?
5. How has a concentration on unity in diversity influenced the way you lead?

APPENDIX D
DIVERSITY SURVEY OF 50 CONGREGANTS

DIVERSITY SURVEY OF 50 CONGREGANTS

Q1: Over the past three months, the involvement of diversity in the weekend services has changed:

- a. Significantly
- b. Slightly
- c. Not at All

Q2: Over the past three months, I have felt a strong sense of belonging at church.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Somewhat Agree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Q3: I have invited a friend over the past three months.

- a. True
- b. False

Q4: If Walnut Hill continued to involve more diversity in the worship services every week, I would invite friends to join me.

- a. True
- b. False

Q5: I would describe myself as a person who is connected in the church.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Somewhat Agree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Q6: Through serving, I have connected into friendship.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Somewhat Agree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Q7: Through serving, I have grown in compassion for others.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Somewhat Agree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Q8: Through serving, I feel a part of the mission of the church.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Somewhat Agree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Q9: When someone honors me, it reminds me of who I really am.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Somewhat Agree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Q10: When I'm greeted and welcomed, I feel honored.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Somewhat Agree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Q11: When I see people like me celebrated, I feel honored.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Somewhat Agree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Q12: When people take time to listen to me, I feel honored.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Somewhat Agree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Q13: When I'm encouraged, I feel honored.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Somewhat Agree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX E
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

UNITY IN DIVERSITY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding	Recommendations
Walnut Hill Has Become a Diverse Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equip the growing special needs ministry by increasing resources with dedicated staff, training and awareness for volunteers, and spaces within the church building that properly accommodate the special needs community. • Engage and invite persons of color and persons with disabilities to participate in significant roles in the ministry of the church. • Actively investigate ministry opportunities that appeal to and best serve the growing Hispanic and Latino community.
Assimilation Is Not the Answer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set an expectation among congregants that the chief priority of a shared culture together is Jesus Christ. • Empower trusted and qualified persons of color and persons with disabilities into positions of influence to bring new perspectives to the table. • Communicate and celebrate the vision for unity in diversity both publicly and privately. • Create, develop and implement new ministry ideas and direction with and through diverse leadership teams.
Education Leads to Greater Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embrace the role of storyteller. Tell stories of transformation in services, on social media and in writing across all ministries. • Commit to ongoing unity in diversity education. • Create safe spaces for congregants to learn from one another. • Get practical. Take all small groups through Mark DeYmaz and Oneya Fennell Okuwobi’s eight-week study called “Multiethnic Conversations.”

Leadership Must Be All In	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the vision. Adopt an intentional communication plan that works to instill the value and vision of unity in diversity. Use the already established vision, “We Are Family,” to promote and embrace unity in diversity. • Show the vision. Model the vision on stage each week, on the leadership teams and on staff. • Support the vision. Evaluate the structure and systems of the church to ensure they support the value and vision for unity in diversity. Agree on a budget for new unity in diversity initiatives. Learn how to hire persons of color to the staff team. Continue working with the Diversity Advisory Team.
A Strong Identity in the Lord Helps in Overcoming Adversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach on identity in services and small groups. • Utilize the <i>Gallop Strength Finder</i> assessment tool to help people discover how God has uniquely created them. • Intentionally plan on moments throughout the year to teach on discovering your identity in God through the children’s ministry.
Serving Increases a Sense of Belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders must share the vision for serving and invite all people to join the serving team. • Create a clear and easy way for people to engage in serving opportunities. • Incorporate serving training that includes the vision for unity in diversity. • Regularly celebrate and honor the people who are serving.
Honor Brings Healing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honor through hospitality. Begin an “ambassadors” initiative. The ambassadors would be a diverse group of people tasked to be on the lookout for new people who come through the doors of the Walnut Hill campuses. • Honor through celebration. Intentionally incorporate practices from minority groups in the context of church gatherings. • Honor through listening. Train and prepare small group leaders to host spaces for conversations on topics about unity in diversity. • Honor through encouragement. Incorporate teaching on encouragement for volunteers each year. Through encouragement, people are honored and inspired to pursue the things of God.

Relationships Change the Heart	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regularly encourage congregants to join small groups within the church.• Provide first step opportunities for congregants to get to know one another.• Enlist section leaders within the worship center to look out for new people in their section (an assigned group of rows in the main sanctuary) each week.
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