

welcoming



A helpful handbook for welcoming people from
diverse cultures into the church

Introduction

Every day we drive by, walk past or interact with people from a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds. The world has been constantly arriving in our neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, professional encounters and our churches. We are now blessed with wonderful opportunities for ministering to a variety of diverse races and cultures.

As our ministry target sites become more culturally diverse, our churches are faced with the challenge of welcoming people from different racial and cultural backgrounds into our fellowships. Each church needs to ask whether it is truly a welcoming church to all people? Even if we say yes to this question we may not realize the unseen and unknown attitudes, actions and words that may hinder us from being a welcoming church to people from other racial or ethnic backgrounds. Our challenge is to make all people feel at home(Rom. 5:17; Heb. 13:1)

The Bible Fellowship Church is fortunate to have a number of Pastors, Missionaries and Lay People who are from various racial and cultural backgrounds. These BFCers have hands on experience with ministering among diverse racial and cultural groups. Some of these people are serving on the The Committee on the Multi-Cultural Church and have contributed their expertise and insights to this Handbook.

The first thing to consider is *what the Bible says* about the cultural mosaic God planned for His church. Then we need to consider *how our oral and written communications can help us be more welcoming*. ThenAlso, there are *the dos and don'ts* that will assist us in being sensitive. Finally, there is the *listing of*

helpful resources for churches to consider. May this Handbook provide some assistance for our churches to welcome diversity along with helping its people to reach out to those from other cultures in their workplaces, neighborhoods and personal contacts.

Preparing the Church for Welcoming Diversity

We learn how to love, appreciate and assimilate all of God's people into the church from God Himself; as revealed to us in the Scriptures. A church that welcomes diversity will regularly teach and preach on God's hatred for racism and injustice. The church will also instruct its people regarding the beauty of God's diverse races, cultures and traditions. Here are some Biblical topics for consideration:

Old Testament

God's word obligates us to love and care for the "Alien, Stranger, Sojourner."

- God's call for His people to demonstrate love, mercy and compassion for the alien and all people, Gen.18:19; Deut.10:17-19; Micah 6:8.
- God's desire for His people to love and show compassion because they too were aliens in the land of others (Edomite and Egyptians), Deut.23:7
- God's command to not take advantage of aliens living in the land (poor, needy, alien), Deut.24:14
- God's command to show justice to the alien and the widow, Deut.24:17-21.

- God protects the alien considering them as susceptible to the wicked as widows and orphans, Psa. 146:9.

God's word reveals the inclusion of people from all cultures in His redemptive plan:

- God's intention is to provide redemption to the elect from all "people groups." Gen.12:3;28:14; Mt.1:5 (Ruth and Rahab in Christ's genealogy), Mt.15:26-28 (Syro-Phoenician woman).
- God's covenant intention for Abram was to "get thee out from thy country and thy Kindred" and go to another people," Gen. 12:1.
- God wants the alien included in the tithe distribution, Deut.26:1-10
- God wants the alien to receive equal justice with His people, Deut.27:19

Worship responsibilities assigned to the Alien

- God instructs culturally diverse people to worship under the same guidelines as His people, Num.15:14 (Alien)

Condemnation for Mistreatment of the Alien

- God condemned Judah for their mistreatment and exclusion of the alien, Jer.7:4-7; Mal.3:5

Further Old Testament Passages to Investigate:

- Ex. 12: 43-49; Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Num. 15:29-30; Deut. 14:28-29; 24: 14-17, 19-22; 26:12-13; 29:10-13; 31:12; I Kings 8:41-43; Ezek. 44:6-9.

New Testament

Christ's love for the "stranger...neighbor"

- Matt. 25: 35, 38, 43ff. (sheep and goats): Jesus equates welcoming a stranger with welcoming him.

- Mark 12:31: The second greatest commandment was to love our neighbor , no matter what racial or ethnic background, as ourselves.
- Rom. 12:13: The mark of a true Christian is to extend hospitality to strangers, no matter who.
- Heb. 13:1,2: Again hospitality is to be shown to all strangers.

God breaks down the barriers between races and cultures

- Eph. 2:12, 19: Paul shows how the gospel brings about the end of Jew and Gentile hostility, which had significantly increased since the intertestamental Hellenization of much of Judaism. Gentiles are no longer “strangers” (or even “enemies”), but members, along with believing Jews, of the household of God.
- In contrast with the openness and hospitality toward strangers in the OT law, by NT time, Ezra’s injunction against intermarriage with non-Israelites had developed into strong feelings of superiority within Judaism. This hostility was demonstrated in the Herodian temple, with its separate Court of the Gentiles; which according to Josephus, under threat of death, no foreigner was allowed to go beyond., • In Acts 10:28, Peter expresses these common Jewish feelings toward outsiders; and it took a special vision from God to correct those prejudices.
- Heb. 11:13 adds another element to all this, stating that even OT believers in some sense wore the label of “stranger” or “alien” as long as they lived on earth and had thus failed to receive the fullest expression of God’s promises. And beyond that, all Christians are to consider themselves as strangers on earth, since their true citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20).

- Christians are therefore to be hospitable toward the believing stranger (III John 5). I Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:8 both include hospitality as a requirement for elders. And since another requirement is to possess a good reputation with those outside the church, it can perhaps be said that such hospitality should be shown to these as well. Indeed, it is a universal charge made to all Christians that they are to do good to everyone, and especially to fellow believers, described as the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

Welcoming Diversity By Means of Our Communications

Language, both written and verbal, can be misunderstood and create barriers between people if our words are not culturally transferable. For example; the BFC *Biblical Principles for Living (BPLs)* were produced with sensitivity to having these Principles understood by any person from any cultural background.

100-1.3 Increasing ethnic and cultural diversity in many of the churches and the prospect of new congregations being formed among various people groups have prompted the BFC to seek to state the principles so that they may be understood and applied by believers in any cultural context.

Here are some helpful ways to make your communications understood by people from any cultural background.

- Teaching/Preaching – The Pastor, along with another elder, or preferably a person in the church from another culture, could review the sermon manuscript or notes to make certain the words of the message will be understood by all the hearers.

Teachers should be trained to use terms and concepts that can be understood by all their students.

Those who select and purchase teaching curriculum should look for curriculum that is culturally transferable.

- **Written Communications** - All written communications should be reviewed. Again, a person from another culture would be a good reviewer.
- **Oral Communications** – Take note of the “Dos and Don’ts” section listed later in this Handbook.
- **Unwritten/Non-Verbal Communications** - Our facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, posture, tone of voice, and even where we sit in church and who we sit with send positive or negative messages. Encourage your flock to approach people who are culturally different in a friendly, welcoming and inviting manner. People in your church can approach a person from another culture with a smile, an introduction and a request to sit with them during the service or meeting. The icing on this welcoming cake would then be to invite them for dinner or some other time of get-together.

“Dos and Don’ts” of being a good host

Do

- Be yourself, Be genuine, Be warm, Smile
- Be aware of cross gender issues when greeting man and women; i.e. shaking hands, hugging, kissing.
- Learn the person’s name and how to pronounce it
- Women can shake women’s hands

- Listen and do not interrupt when they are speaking (they will stop talking)
- Talk about immediate experience i.e. the service just finished
- Let them lead conversation (what they are comfortable talking about)
- Ask questions about what they just told you
- Pay attention to body language and facial expressions
- Greet before and after service. Introduce the visitor to others
- Phrases like "God bless you, thank you for coming" or "God bless you this week" are appreciated
- Create a "Diversity Team" in your Church to learn and continually evaluate the Church's 'Diversity Ethos'

Don't

- Think your guests understand every word you say just because they speak English well
- Ask a lot of questions
- Shake a woman's hand first the first few times; be sensitive to whether she offers her hand
- Keep correcting your guests
- Use English idioms
- Make general statements- I know a man from Africa or the
The Classic Mistake - do you know so and so from India
- Speak too fast
- Assume Generalizations about them. You are from India you must work with computers
- Look around when talking - look at your guests

- End the conversation abruptly
- Stare at guests as they come into the service
- Be afraid
- Make assumptions

Resources

- **Multiracial:** A Guide for Using "**Welcoming Diversity**" - RCA
www.rca.org/sslpage.aspx?pid=6807
- **Welcoming Diversity** - Partners for a Racism-Free Community
prfc-gr.org/uploads/resources/Welcoming-Diversity-Inventory.pdf
- **Welcoming Diversity** | Teaching Tolerance
www.tolerance.org/toolkit/welcoming-diversity
- **Diversity Team** | **Welcome!**
www.diversityteam.org
- www.bridgesoption.org

Halal and Hijab – a look into Islamic Culture for Western Women

Karen & John Elias are available to present one to three hour long seminars on Awareness of Cross Cultural Issues to your group

ADDENDUM:

Welcoming Diversity: An Inventory for Congregations

A sub-committee of the Religion Sector of the Summit on Racism, (*Reformed Church In America*) has created this inventory to aid

congregations seeking to embrace and welcome the diversity of their communities. The inventory focuses on six areas: perceptions, leadership, worship, visual, educational, and events. The subcommittee recommends that this inventory be used by a committee or team of interested persons.

To stimulate your discussion, read each statement and place the response you feel is most appropriate, on a scale of 1 to 3, in the space provided to the left.

NA = not applicable, **DK** = don't know

1 = not at all true, **2** = sometimes true, **3** = true most of the time

PERCEPTIONS, ATTITUDES, VALUES—WHAT WE HOLD IN OUR MINDS AND HEARTS AFFECT OUR ACTIONS.

1. ____ The healing of racism and an appreciation for racial/ethnic diversity are values of the leadership of our congregation.
2. ____ Opportunities are provided for dialogue about these values between our congregation and our leadership.

3. ____ Our leaders comprehend and communicate the way in which ethnic, economic, social, and political justice makes visible the reign of God.
4. ____ Our congregation is receptive to preaching, teaching, and dialogue about the harm of racism and the value of diversity.
5. ____ Our congregation is open to the ideas that people from other racial/ethnic traditions bring about worship, education, community, and outreach.
6. ____ Our congregation is aware of our denomination's position on issues of racism, poverty, and violence because the positions are consistently held before the people.
7. ____ Members who reflect our congregation's racial/ethnic diversity are being recruited and equipped for leadership.
8. ____ Our congregation addresses root causes of poverty, racism, and other forms of discrimination, while also relieving immediate needs through ministries of charity, compassion, and mercy.
9.
 - a. ____ Past attitudes/actions of prejudice and discrimination have been addressed in our congregation forthrightly and healing is taking place around these issues.
 - b. ____ We have a process of reconciliation in place, when needed.

LEADERSHIP/ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE – Leaders and structure set a congregation's course.

10. ____ Our congregation's leadership promotes anti-racism and diversity.
11. ____ The leadership is conscious of diversity when selecting vendors for supplies and services.
- 12 a. ____ Our congregation has a team that works with the leadership to address issues of racism in our congregation and society.
- 12 b. ____ The team has developed a strategy for addressing racism within the congregation and community.
- 12 c. ____ The resources of our congregation support this team.

13. ____ People outside our congregation's primary racial group are consulted about how we might address unintentional racism and become more inclusive.

14 a. ____ We have a system of greeting in place so that all those who attend receive a warm welcome.

14 b. ____ Members of the "greeting team" are educated to be welcoming to a wide variety of people.

14 c. ____ The members of the "greeting team" are representative of the racial/ethnic make-up of our congregation.

***WORSHIP* – Does our worship inspire us to greater understanding and appreciation for the diversity of God's people?**

15. ____ Our liturgies and music incorporate a variety of racial/ethnic traditions.

16. ____ We invite speakers, dramatists, musicians, etc. who represent a variety of racial/ethnic traditions.

17. ____ Our preaching addresses the sin of racism and challenges the congregation to examine themselves in light of Scriptures and religious vows.

18. ____ The gospel message is expressed in ways relevant to diverse people.

19. ____ We give voice in worship to issues important to diverse people.

20. ____ As a congregation we welcome and befriend all visitors before, during, and after worship.

***VISUALS* are strong messages. What do we see around us?**

21. ____ A wide variety of racial/ethnic people are represented in our windows, pictures, wall hangings, etc.

22. ____ The classrooms for young children are supplied with dolls, books, games, and other toys that represent a wide variety of racial/ethnic people.

23. ____ All classrooms and libraries have books, videos, etc. that represent a wide variety of racial/ethnic people.

24. ____ Our displays, brochures, and publicity pieces reflect diversity.

25. ____ The staff and leadership visually reflect a commitment to multiracial ministry.

EDUCATIONAL – What are we reading, studying, and promoting?

26. ____ We strive to teach a respect for diversity.

27 a. ____ Our educational materials reflect a variety of racial/ethnic people (and language groups if appropriate to our congregation.)

27 b. ____ Racial/ethnic people are consulted when new curriculum or educational materials are developed.

28 a. ____ We regularly offer classes that give insight into different racial/ethnic people.

28 b. ____ We are sensitive to the differences in teaching and learning styles among people from a variety of cultures and traditions.

28 c. ____ Our faith is presented in terms of the history, tradition, and contribution of minority cultures as well as the dominant culture.

29 a. ____ We offer on-site racism and diversity sensitivity training.

29 b. ____ We promote off-site racism and diversity sensitivity training for members of our congregation.

29 c. ____ We offer our site for racism and diversity sensitivity training.

EVENTS – Do we schedule events to broaden our experiences and perspectives?

30. ____ Our congregation invites other congregations representing different racial/ethnic groups to share opportunities for outreach, recreation, and worship.

31. ____ Our congregation promotes times for members to visit or to participate in other racial/ethnic groups' work, play or worship experiences.

32. ____ We hold activities to celebrate the diversity already among us and to become familiar with a variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural traditions.

Thank you for your efforts with this inventory. Racism is a serious and often subtle problem in our country and in our congregations that must be addressed. This inventory is intended to help a congregation engage in conversation about its own reality of racism. Then, from that discussion, the congregation can begin designing ongoing healing actions that will serve as a guide for planning and annual evaluation. If you would like more information, we invite you to share your experience with others and with us. At

your discretion, please contact:

Earl James or ~~Kenita~~ Harris, Office of Multiracial Initiatives and Social Justice

Reformed Church in America

475 Riverside Dr., 18th Fl.

New York, NY 10115

Phone: (212) 870-3254

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