

A Song for Everyone: Exploring Music for Worship in an Intercultural Church

By Damber Khadka

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Approved: The Rev. Dr. Dave Csinos

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## Certificate of Ethical Acceptability for Research Involving Humans

This is to certify that the Research Ethics Board has examined the research proposal:

AST REB File number:	0052022
Title of Research Project:	How do intercultural congregations in the United Church of Canada use music in their worship services?
Faculty Supervisor:	Rev. Dr. Dave Csinos
Investigator	Damber Khadka

and concludes that in all respects the proposed project meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability and is in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) and Atlantic School of Theology's relevant policies.

Approval Period: December 23 2022 to April 30 2023
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Dated this 23<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2022 at Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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Dr. Alyda Faber  
Chair, Research Ethics Board  
Atlantic School of Theology  
660 Francklyn Street  
Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3H 3B5

## **A Song for Everyone**

### **Exploring Music for Worship in an Intercultural Church**

By Damber Khadka

**Abstract:** This Qualitative Research study examines the data collected from worship leaders and congregational members of one specific Church that self-identifies as an intercultural church. Using the ethnographic case study methodology, having completed direct one-on-one interviews with seven participants, this study focuses on how music is conducted in their worship services and what the Church can do most accurately to meet the musical need of the congregation. This study identifies four overall themes which ultimately relate to theories and practices: Cultural differences and Expectations, Unmasking the Challenges, Language Barrier, and Celebrating the Cultural Differences. It is argued that the focus is on the music's spirituality rather than language. This research has many implications for the Church, with an anticipated increase in the number of intercultural singing dynamism.

April 2023

#### **Introduction**

I had the tremendous grace of attending Donald United Church in Winnipeg on June 14, 2009. As a newly arrived immigrant in a foreign land with lots of hope and expectation, all I could do in the first place would be to explore the opportunity to find someone who would at least help me in the transition. If I recall rightly of those memories now, perhaps there must be around 350 attendees sitting in their pews. Most people were predominantly white. Turning over the pages of the hymn book, I discovered hymns written in various languages. It was perhaps the first time witnessing such an affirming, inclusive, and welcoming worship service. Their singing impressed me profoundly, even though it was very different from my accent. My passion grew up dramatically toward learning more about the dynamism of cultural patterns, traditional beliefs, struggles, and

collective goals of the Church and its visional objectives .I thought I would begin my journey with music first. I heard that music has no language. It is. What I saw and heard inspired me to explore intercultural music. As a result, I started studying the church.

Human's relationship with music is as ancient as we know, and people have incorporated musical background with their religious, cultural, spiritual, and historical traditions. Meanwhile, I have also come across the statement that the United Church of Canada, as outlined on its website, says, “when we affirm and welcome a variety of expressions of faith, it deepens our understanding of God and of each other.”<sup>1</sup> Curious to know what this bold statement meant, I started researching. The reason is not that I did my research just to graduate my degree. I understood that the proposed statement must contain some essential elements, envisioning becoming an intercultural way of living within the current context. However, no matter how much the church tries to promote it, it has been found to accept it only partially. Most churches follow their traditional praxis despite the enormous effort and encouragement.

I wanted to add significance to this inquiry because I discovered that the group that has stood under the garb of a particular thinking stream and culture for centuries is seeking to be more broad and independent today to encompass all ideologies and cultural notions of other cultures. I went into a different setting in search of a place to serve. I may have arrived there in order to participate in the research. It may be argued that the Church

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<sup>1</sup>The United Church of Canada, Vision for Becoming an Intercultural Church, Accessed March 13, 2023, <https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/being-community/intercultural-ministries/vision-becoming-interculturalchurch#:~:text=Part%20of%20the%20vision%20of%20the%20intercultural%20church,welcoming%20church%E2%80%A6%20It%20is%20joyful%2C%20accepting%2C%20and%20life-giving.>

was exceptional in accepting diversity inside the Church and inclusively conducting the service. Sometimes, a vision is created, but its implementation may not be possible.

Churches themselves are struggling with change. The trend is the same, no matter how many philosophies are established. The Church also believes there is no such thing as a culture-free perspective.

Furthermore, the United Church of Canada committed to being bold enough to claim that they are a relational and welcoming Church.<sup>2</sup> Regarding music, multilingual literature on Singing has been developed, encouraging faith communities to use the available resources. Nevertheless, some struggle to implement due to language barriers or a lack of native speakers of that particular language at the congregational level.

Nonetheless, the number of people leaving the Church is increasing every week, and the Church struggles to find a way to prevent this nature – no absolute solution has ever surfaced. So, I thought I would dive into more conversation one on one so that voice of the unheard be heard and be able to figure out the way that it may suggest as it may be acknowledged and recognized.

### **Research Question**

This research aims to discover how intercultural music can be included in the worship services in self-identified intercultural congregations or churches seeking to be an affirming ministry. It does by exploring the struggles and challenges experienced by both worship leaders and congregational members dealing with music in an intercultural setting. This research will present the various practices, measures, and methods adopted

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<sup>2</sup>The United Church of Canada, An Intercultural Church, Accessed March 13, 2023.

by the Church through close study. In addition, the purpose of the research on intercultural ministry is to give people in the United Church an opportunity to express their experiences and attitudes about the Church's intercultural engagement as the Church works to implement its music interculturally.

Together, these studies provide important insights into the challenges and opportunities within worship services. To explore the entirety of this notion, a question has been developed with the hope that conversation may lead to the reality of how music happens in an intercultural church challenging the cultural differences and perspectives that each member brings into that space of worship.

The proposed question was: “How do intercultural congregations in the United Church of Canada use music in their worship services?” “In the context of the United Church of Canada, the word “intercultural” may sound unique to most congregations because either they recognize themselves as monocultural or at least multicultural, depending on the ratio of ethnic diversity in their population composition. However, this research also aims to show that some churches cannot conduct intercultural services even if they want to - maybe there is no concrete way or a lack of appropriate resources. Hopefully, this research will relieve the churches, letting the least of us know that anything is possible.

The cultural issue itself is critical, but through mutual search, in some cases, simple ways can be found. In this sense, it is also an absolute search to differentiate between the circumstances and experiences that I have seen and experienced for 14 years and how different they are from the experiences of others. Within this search, not only

differences and similarities have been made the focal point of the study, but priority has also been given to the extent to which there is a possibility of unity within diversity. This navigation process should and at least hoped to make it a case study that most congregations may be unaware of the dynamism in their communities. In fact, rarely a few congregations have begun realizing the need for change in their Singing traditions, theological interpretation and implementation since they started seeing new strange faces in their pews.

This may be a new context for some churches, while others may feel insecure. Undoubtedly, it is because it is difficult for people to deal with new things. Each person has his/her own culture, and the culture of others seems strange to them. Learning something new besides our regular, familiar experience is indeed a challenge. The foundational objective of this research will remain to explore how intercultural churches have continuously included multiple languages in their services despite the challenges of countless problems. Is language everything? The purpose of this search is to emphasize the role and importance of individual and collective contributions to the advancement and progress of the church. This research does not necessarily answer all those questions but at least tries to serve as a framework for insightful conversation. One of the limitations of this research is that we need to rely totally on what we hear from the participants. Trying to restrict their voices may leave us incomplete. Asking open-end questions often limits our accessibility due to the cultural norms of the individuals, while sometimes limiting in itself within the current context. So, in this research project, I implied a one-on-one



conversation approach to do the case study of the context that may make the environment more welcoming and invitational.

This research required me to be more critical than I normally do. Because being critical can also mean looking for reasons why we should not just take a defensive approach and or be just a liberal thinker, this can require us to identify problems that existed within the pattern of service, hindering the accessibility of other marginalized or racialized members. However, much of the research up to now has been descriptive in nature or at least covered the surface in a general context. As was pointed out in the introduction to this paper, the four themes discuss the findings which emerged from the interviews/conversation conducted with five participants of the same church.

### **Methodology**

As a new researcher, I choose to use the qualitative research method, which allows the researcher to look for the patterns, ideas, and beliefs of an identifiable group as expressed through their actions.<sup>3</sup> The approach used for this research was an ethnographic single-site case study. An ethnographic approach was used as this research sought to understand human behavior in its cultural context. Ethnographic research aims to describe and understand the structures and relationships between community or cultural group members. A mini-ethnographic case study was considered appropriate for an in-depth investigation into the church's worship service.

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<sup>3</sup> Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research A Guide to Design and Implementation* 4th ed., (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 23-24

The ethnographic case study examines a shared lived experience. Then it attempts to describe what the interviewees experience and how they experience it.<sup>4</sup> The focus is on “looking for patterns,” such as their ideas and social behaviors expressed through their actions, assisting in developing an understanding of their cultural interpretations.<sup>5</sup> Through this ethnographic case study approach, a thorough study has been done on a group of people who have been together for a long time and congregate together at various modes of the transition of their church life. Their shared language, patterns of behavior, and attitudes have been studied through multiple lenses, and we learned that it has taken a tremendous turn from monocultural to intercultural.<sup>6</sup>

In this study, the participants' cultural pattern is the experience of navigating their cultural perspectives as a member of an intercultural church. All of the participants interviewed were members of the same church, some in leadership roles, and some shared membership to the church. Cultures come with their own identity. No two cultures are similar— for example, eating rice for a westerner is rare. In contrast, rice serves as a staple food for the easterner. This study was designed to capture the essence of the experience of the members and leaders navigating their worship challenges and the joy they shared singing together.

In ethnographic research (realist ethnography and critical ethnography), the researcher may provide mundane details of everyday life among the people studied and

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<sup>4</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 306-307.

<sup>5</sup> Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 94.

<sup>6</sup> Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 306.

report objectively on the information learned from participants at a site<sup>7</sup> An attempt is made to respond to current issues, their (both leaders and congregational members) unheard voices, and perspectives that some difficulties on cultural variations have hindered. Of the five participants, each has come from a very different cultural background; even though, at least for most participants, they may be classified as of European descent, their cultural differences present the apparent distinction.

In ethnographic research, the emphasis instead is on interpreting the participants' experiences, which should not limit the representation of the whole congregation. In this case, the researcher is the listener/mediator of interpreting the experiences. It begins from analysis of the data received.<sup>8</sup>The researcher avoids imposing criteria or perspectives as much as possible but is a sincere, faithful listener to what each participant has to share.

I, as a researcher, have experienced navigating my own cultural involvement within the framework of the conversation. As a result, I decided to use critical ethnography for my study design, implying an advocacy perspective.<sup>9</sup> As Creswell points out, this research would continue its search for cultural themes, issues, and theories to study about the group. The themes, issues, and theories provide an orienting framework for studying the culture-sharing group.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, rather than the problem, the search for the secret of internal diversity is the primary purpose of this search. Because the secret was that even within the internal diversity, there was unity. It was not easy to find out its

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<sup>7</sup>Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 92.

<sup>8</sup>Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 59.

<sup>9</sup>Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research design*, 92.

<sup>10</sup>Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 93.

secret. However, it was not enough to guess, so it was necessary to go into the intentional conversation as it ought to.

## **Themes**

The themes are the invisible perceptions and experiences embedded in respondents' minds, appearing as feelings, experiences, values, and emotions.<sup>11</sup> To extract them, an interview needed to be conducted among the participants. The collected data from each participant served as an informant in analyzing the data (spoken words). In my research project, though several themes appeared, I chose only four out of those many since each would speak the same about all and could sense the common voice of all. In fact, the research was intended to explore the cultural pattern that existed among the participants and their impact on the congregation<sup>12</sup>. The proposed themes go so far as to say that churches are increasingly connected somehow and in some ways in urban cities, at least benefitting themselves at the denominational level. However, this does not mean that individuals and communities are truly symbiotic. Therefore, this research serves best by visiting those places that have never been explored or attempted to study to unpack the realities overshadowed by the so-called monocultural tradition.

Churches are established within their own culture and structure and do not want to come out of that culture. As a result, they cannot accept newcomers who are out of the imagination of the changed society. This search will work to find the authentic voices through intentional conversation and trying to get as close as possible to the participants

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<sup>11</sup>Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Designs*, 8.

<sup>12</sup>Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Designs*, 8.

being studied<sup>13</sup>. The exclusion of languages, cultures, and traditions of non-dominant cultural groups or individuals and disenfranchised minorities is evident. The subjects of this research are the themes guided by the participants' voices as the product of inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing the data.<sup>14</sup>

### **Theme 1. Cultural Differences and Expectations**

Today's society is characterized by frequent encounters with cultural diversity in the workplace, the Church, the neighborhood, and the classroom. However, we are less and less likely to interact with others who share our cultural identity and way of thinking. Immigrants are no longer the only ones who need to understand the culture and how cultural variations affect how we comprehend one another and live well. It is now a necessary life skill. The way Christians viewed cultural diversity as crucial for missions to distant lands does not align with the realities of today. This theme provides a concise, insightful review of how members have recently reconsidered their position on cultural diversity in order to think in Christian ways about how we cope with diversity, whether as a member or the leader of the Church who develops worship services for the so-called intercultural community, we must consider how people react to diverse cultures and the responsibility to welcome outsiders.

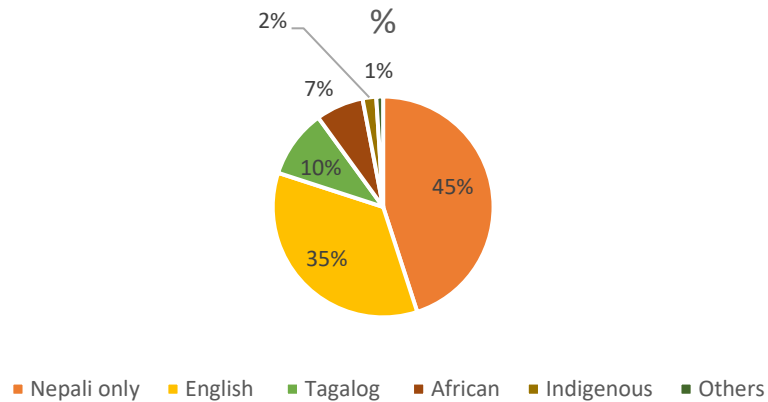
The Church that served me as a study site was composed of diverse cultural backgrounds, comprising the following cultural ratio mentioned below in a diagram. The

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<sup>13</sup> Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Designs*, 21.

<sup>14</sup> Creswell & Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Designs*, 21.

info for this research was collected from the Annual Statistical Report, 2018,<sup>15</sup> submitted to the United Church of Canada by the local congregation. The figure was converted to the ratio by the investigator to fulfill this project.



It is evident by the chart that a significant imbalance is noticed in the Nepali only speaking community, where most people are either unschooled or illiterate, with a few exceptions that the young generation can share the English language if the emphasis is offered. For all others, their fluency in their native language and English projects to incorporate more English songs would not be a problem. What stands out here is the question of the so-called-Nepali only speakers. Are there enough songs in the Nepali language to be included in singing? Non-English speakers are mostly found to be excluded from singing opportunities or may find themselves not recognized by the community. Due to the arrival of immigrants in the churches, there has been a significant

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<sup>15</sup> The statistical data mentioned above is based on the data collected by the church locally for their congregational assessment and their own benefit. No record has been sent to any governing body within the United Church of Canada.

change in the ministry and church operations. Cultures and traditions have also come along with people.

Nothing seemed to work correctly as opposed to the churches two decades ago when the congregation was solely monocultural. Even though it is a fundamental belief that the Church is a place where everyone who comes needs to be welcomed. Indeed, the Church belongs to God and does not belong to any specific person or is entitled to any specific ethnic community. The number of immigrants in urban churches has increased dramatically. With this increment in newly arrived cultures, the question of “how-to” has swept in. So, suppose we do not change the structure of services in churches. In that case, we will either dismiss from glorious transcendence or narrow down our religious periphery, so services should be provided inclusively for all benefits. Even though the religion is the same, God is the same. The rituals and culture differ depending on individual’s philosophical and ancestral background, so the argument of where to start is a theologically innovative topic. The convincing assurances that no matter how difficult the transition route is, the joy that cultural diversity brings is profoundly enrooted to our Christian history. As God has created diversity in the universe, so are the things we see, acknowledge and embrace daily. At this point, we can say that maybe the intercultural churches are following the same spirit to enliven the prophecy that has to be proclaimed by the faith community today.

An urban church in the heart of the city, neighboring itself to the surrounding communities of newly arrived immigrants, has the same situation as stated above. The Church tries to find a way to recognize each of those cultures in its best possible ways,

but even then, it feels inadequate and missing. On the question, “how do you interact with the cultural change in your church?” My interviewee responded, “Being intercultural is our essence, and it adds beauty to our existence, so there is no way we would not welcome such change.” Yes, because now, to walk on the intercultural path is more instrumentality than desire. Now, society is becoming multicultural from a single culture day by day. Whether we accept it or not, the truth is that if we do not follow this path, we will fall away from the principles established by the denomination. The participant whom I interviewed had his own culture. We can, for sure, assume that he must be afraid of losing his culture. He did not desire other people's rituals.

Nevertheless, he rose above his interests and envisioned a society fulfilling God's promises. Another member, who also leads the music ministry, said, in his voice, “I was born in Europe, spent my childhood in a multicultural society in a Canadian province on the East coast, taught and learned music in institutions and schools with students from Africa and Jamaica, endured the changing social environment and lifestyle of Canada. I believe that change is vital; it is and will happen. I believe that for the advancement and progress of society, we must remove the discrimination within us.” My interviewee's cultural journey and experience can hardly be said to be the experience of most Canadians. What he saw and experienced is relational to all immigrants and non-immigrants alike. However, one compelling outcome of his experience is that he would believe that it had been an opportunity to study his own culture more deeply, even though he would feel culturally insecure most of the time.



One of my other participants indicated the need for appropriate resources for the worship services. In their own effort, Knox has developed a songbook called “Knox Voices,” which includes songs from various languages and translations incorporated into their worship services. Even then, the leaders would feel it inadequate and route less to implement them. In his voice, he says, “we would expect the denomination to develop some specific ministry through which intercultural music could be recognized and assist the churches to help them implement without any trouble.” This quote gives us a straightforward yet challenging call to question, understand, and constantly adjust the cultural lens in which we interact with others as our world continues to become entwined in a network of diverse cultural and religious identities. These leaders bring sharp truths from compassionate hearts and from what they have learned from their cultural approaches.

I want to put some perspectives and opinions from the interviewees in their own words. “Who do you want to introduce yourself to culturally?” The answer to the question was as follows. “I am an Asian. I grew up in an English environment, sang songs from the traditional Western, and often visited services led by the current young generation. Culture varies from community to community and person to person. I understand it is a continuous lifelong process of learning from one another.” (Tertullian, the member). According to Tertullian, since culture differs from person to person, it is not surprising that their opinions also differ. Even though he is Asian, he says it is not difficult for him to sing in English because he grew up in an English environment.

Sometimes he complains that he does not find himself like others. He feels that intercultural formation is an epic journey in itself.

## **Theme 2. Unmasking the Challenges**

It is nothing new that the Church has to deal with unexpected challenges such as this. There is no doubt that churches face problems in one way or another. However, this problem is of a slightly different kind. All members, including the leader, recognized that the issue was complex. It is not that the leaders were not trying to find a solution. However, the goal was not achieved. Everyone needs a solution, whether their problem is small or big. The leaders thought the worship service would continue like this until a shoutout was heard. But now, the issue is much more complicated. Ultimately, leaders had to reach out to congregational members seeking their voices and opinions.

In order to understand the wishes of the people, I asked the following question, "Do you have any problems related to music in the service?" They presented their opinions in this way. "I take singing as part of my commitment to God, so the language does not matter to me – language is not a big deal to me. And I know I do not need to be perfect; God knows that too." (John, the Worship Leader).

According to the leaders planning the worship services, it had been the most challenging time when they felt a lack of adequate resources and equipment. In contrast to the time then and now, there is some relief that they can access to the website where at least a few translated versions of songs can be accessed. However, the leaders say, "it was tough as we did not get the same song in every language. When one side sings, the other side is silent." It is important to note that there have been no specific denominationally

recommended resources that would necessitate the signing need of the congregation besides a few on the church website.

Most worship leaders have a collective sense that finding an appropriate song is a genuine challenge. Since the problem is related to language rather than tradition, they suffered due to the lack of suitable or sufficient resources. Since all person's wishes and expressions are different, they reveal the truth that it is difficult to find a song that reveals the collective identity of everyone. After tireless efforts, the Church finally translated English songs into other languages, such as Nepali, Tagalog, Ilocano, and Zulu. As expected, the translation work was completed to some extent. Most of the songs that may be needed have been made available. The way to get to the root of the problem was certainly not easy because there were differences of its kind within the diversity. The desire of all was to be given equal priority to the interests of one. Culture is remarkable; everyone has a deep love for their culture. No one's cultures are small or insignificant. Everyone knows their culture closely and keeps it as a priority.

“We have applied many strategies to overcome the challenges around music making in our church, but among all else, the practice of presence has yielded us a hope of improvement,” said John, the worship leader. The practice of presence means the support of one believer for another—unconditional support. Ignoring mutual differences, when we support someone, we can feel unity towards him/her. Perhaps John has revealed that he has somewhat figured out the way now. Now he will have no difficulty in presenting his opinions to others; there will be no room for misunderstanding or confusion. Now cultural differences will not stand as a barrier between them.

Through the members' perspectives, it has been studied that singing in different languages had never been easy for them. They were often remained silent while others singing or pretended that they too were singing. Therefore, it seems both leaders as well as members of the church needed to work together in finding a resolution toward dealing with the cause. Turning to the scriptural framework, in Revelation 7, God's greatness helped us stand in solidarity with people of color to advance racial justice. People stand before the throne of God, protected by His presence. John's projection of every tribe and tongue worshipping together is a heavenly prophecy of diverse worship. What follows is the intentionality of God to see people gather from diverse cultural backgrounds, worshipping together with the words of praises through the beauty of their being under creation. Harold Best, puts it this way saying, "it is a spiritually connected culture that takes cultural differences, works through the tensions that they may create and comes to the blessed condition of mixing and reconciling them and of stewarding their increase and growth" (Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 2003). According to Best, Intercultural being is such a condition that breaks every elements of our culture and mix it up to make a new culture which brings fruition to our spiritual being.

We cannot assume anything because people sometimes dislike exposing or expressing themselves, so we never know what is happening there. One of my participants says "Our commitment toward it is to create an environment that is accessible to everyone as much as possible, and at the same time to prepare ourselves for the unforeseen change." It seems there is no quick-fix to this issue. However, by corresponding we can ponder together as a community in creating a space where

everyone can feel safe to share their views and opinions as to what can be done differently meeting the need of the worship service.

Overall, there seems to be evidence that the church as a corporate body has been putting effort into exploring a suitable pathway to guide them to the remedial process as each member participates in this communal work. Each member feels the need for change in their services as they experience imbalances in their worship services.

### **Theme 3. Language, the Barrier**

Immigrants are a large and diverse group in Canada. They comprise almost 21.9% of the population, and the trend is growing<sup>16</sup>. However, because of the language barrier that hinders their understanding, they often stop attending church services or seek services in their native language. A major barrier that the Church must overcome is the language barrier, which requires simultaneous interpreting. Therefore, creating a common ground for communicating and understanding what is being said during worship becomes necessary. If possible, we may need to find some tool that helps what the preacher is saying in their native language through the voice of a translator in real-time.

We intend to find solutions for the thousands of newcomers who do not speak the language of the sermon but wish to find others of the same religion or belief.

Unfortunately, despite the tremendous technological advances over the last few decades,

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<sup>16</sup>Eric Grenier, Canada's changing population: 2016 census shows more immigrants, visible minorities, Indigenous people |CBC News · Posted: Oct 25, 2017 7:44 AM CDT, published, October 27, 2017. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/census-2016-immigration1.4368970#:~:text=21.9%25%20of%20Canadians%20are%20immigrants%2C%20the%20highest%20share,since%202006%20...%204%20Home%20ownership%20stagnant%20>.

there is still no solution for automatically translating services without a human interpreter. As a result, most churches typically use google-run apps online services when they cannot hire one volunteer interpreter.

The worship leader says in her own words, "We felt we needed to do a whole new set of worship services to accommodate Nepali speakers." Worship services are now more fully integrated and accessible to all cultures and languages and help newcomers feel welcome and included. The language barrier is the biggest obstacle to singing. At the same time, no language in the world is the same: until it is not treated, it remains an impassable barrier, but when an outsider begins to communicate in the local language, the very barrier that prevented the transmission of the message changes.

Although it does little to break down the barriers of division and mistrust common in today's churches, where different groups exist in denominations and church meetings, it could be an interpreter from another language to English. This may vary depending on where the Church is based. For example, in a church where most members belong to a dominant culture or tribe, church officials may not realize the importance of an interpreter who can translate what the pastor says to the remaining 5%. There is. This, in large part, leads to cultural divisions that should not exist. An immigrant member, who identified himself as Asian, has been attending the church services on Sundays for the last twenty-five years and was overwhelmed due to language barriers. The member Oswald candidly observed the pastor preaching in the dominant language, in other words, English, but little was understood.

When people worship in a church, congregation members generally feel more comfortable when the word choice sounds familiar. Anything that sounds even slightly strange or unfamiliar can be unnerving. Oswald adds, "incorporating a new song without proper practice can make no sense to most, and often it leads to total silence." While some clergy responded to this issue, they felt that interpreting at church services also helped churches bridge communication barriers and implement inclusive programs. For example, suppose a language barrier exists between the preacher and the audience. In that case, it is essential to use the services of an interpreter. When Jesus came into the world, his ministry had no discrimination. When he approached the elite, he approached the non-elite, I think the Church needs to understand the principle of the kingdom and how to live into our calls. The participants also indicated the need of a cultural common ground, which would overcome the language barrier and create more accessibility for all. More and more members realize the need to serve their communities' shifting demographics.

Nonetheless, my participants noted that "becoming an intercultural congregation is difficult. It calls for tolerance for different church life styles and patience." There was a time when the church would invite opinions from members of the church that separate the worship services would be an option or not. Concisely that would not be an appropriate option for the church to go from inter-cultural to monocultural. The survey concluded that they would continue to be intercultural despite the challenges.

Martin, an immigrant member who has recently joined the congregation, felt the need for English classes as he struggled with accent. But, he adds, "I am scared of making mistakes while singing, so I remain calm most of the time." It is apparent from this

statement that the church must envision a new pathway that may teach the new members to speak and listen in a new way. Is it possible that the church could handle this demand? Will there be enough volunteers to take initiative of this task? Who would that be? As one interviewee said, “I would rather follow rhythm of the song than the words themselves. I discovered this way helpful; it is also a non-offensive approach to relate oneself with others.” So here is the challenge: how do we effectively incorporate the non-english song in the worship service? The answer may lie with what the church will spend to meet that need. Is holding a separate service a long-term solution? Amidst this upheaval, the church still believes they can celebrate their diversity by leaving the doors open in anticipation of a hopeful future. Nonetheless, the church continues exploring the possibilities on the horizon.

Almost all the participants expressed their longing for finding a common ground where the English accent is no more the norm and everyone can express their participation in singing more intimately. However, difficulties arise when we constrict our understanding based on the limited boundary and try to keep ourselves isolated from the ever-changing world around us.

#### **Theme 4. Celebrating the Cultural Differences**

Let us begin with a question, “why celebrate cultural diversity?”. Culture is a broad term that includes beliefs, values, norms, and behaviors, all of which can be understood as our 'way of being' ( When we go out into the world, we are exposed to people with different backgrounds and lifestyles (Wikipedia, web content). When applied



in the human context, diversity includes diverse cultures, ethnicities and groups, races, religious beliefs, socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and gender identities.

The diversity of life consists not only of vast areas of human culture and language but also of a diverse world of plant and animal species, habitats, and ecosystems.

Therefore, a more sustainable world is one in which biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity thrives on the system's power. As ever-evolving creatures in an ever-changing world, the myriad aspects of us humans – our way of life, our knowledge, and all the ways we navigate the world – are included in this one conception. As human beings, we manifest ourselves through the infinite diversity of intellect, language, race, values, politics, religion, gender expression, philosophy, and numerous other elements common to humanity, making ourselves known to each other. Recognizing our shared humanity is the first step to celebrating our differences (Kristin, 2015, Web Content). Differences shape our culture, values, thinking, and how we are all in the world. Diversity is a significant informant of creative life force and a central reality in our understanding and management. Understanding people and their contexts is essential for personal and community growth because diversity makes the world go round!

In the context of a musical set in an intercultural church, the worship committee is suggested to have members from diverse cultures in the committee. This may lead us to find an appropriate way to recognize the community's needs and facilitate innovative strategies to respond to these needs. For example, in the Church I chose as my research site, even though it has no worship committee, the leaders would first approach a few members from diverse cultural backgrounds beforehand to plan the worship service so

that preferences might be learned. Then, ideas may be incorporated into the service. During our interview session, I asked the participants how they celebrate the cultural differences in the church. Various responses would indicate that the church, as a whole, had a tradition of welcoming strangers and entertaining them as part of each of them. What could be understood from this tradition is that the church is well accustomed to receiving people from various cultural backgrounds, perhaps receiving them as guests or whatsoever. The church first receives people, studies the culture, and then works closely to find the music for them.

Walter, the member, said, “As much as possible, we try to remain hospitable and welcoming to the differences that enter through any one of our doors on Sunday morning.” In another sense, “hospitable” may mean “showing compassion” or feeling the same as others. This implies that trying to be compassionate of others is to recognize the need of others or to partake in shared human experience. The other participant added, “we try to be friendly and open to sharing our cultural differences with others to remain respectful of one another’s culture and not be shocked.” We need to understand from this that cultures are not something to hide, but we should respect each other openly. When we get the opportunity to understand each other's culture, and only by recognizing that culture we can find a way to create harmony in society. We can never move forward by denying each other's culture.

Natalia, the worship leader, posits that she would spend some quality time with her stranger so as to know the culture and share the stories that each may bring in the aspect of relationship building. As she says in her words, “I love to hang out with

strangers (a visitor to my church) and spend some quality time and share the story; by doing so, I may become a friend, at least a friend who shares the humanity, pains, and suffering as like me.” This experience is as gratifying to hear as it is challenging to put into practice. However, if we look closely at Natalia's experience, we will find that it is a mirror of today's society. Because people now want to live independently and cannot realize society's needs. People are becoming increasingly isolated. When a person shares his story with others, he creates a comfortable environment for the listener. When it is easy, there is growing trust between each other. Furthermore, it can be said that understanding each other's pain is friendship in partnership.

Diversity, when applied in a human context, it speaks about the whole realm of human existence and their multifaceted behaviors that come along with them. Nothing less or nothing more – they come as they are. But the substances that comprise this component must relate to our surroundings for sustenance of our being and the world we depend on. Walter, the member adds, “people must understand and learn to appreciate other cultures, and this is the one way that we celebrate our diversity.” Respecting culture different from our own is also inevitable because if we reject each other's culture then how can we be complementary to each other. Respecting the culture of others does not mean interfering but cultivating it in harmony. It is to deepen the mutual relationship.

### **Implications of this Research**

The concepts, approaches, themes, and principles obtained from this research can be applied to our worship services as it may have had some preliminary ideas to deal with

the demographic change in our ministry context. Moreover, those passionate about learning in depth the possible themes arising from the context may use this research as a backdrop to facilitate their learning goals.

There is no singular way that may be prescribed, but trying new approaches may somehow and in some ways be beneficial in assessing our cultural structure and underlying barriers and remedies. One possible implication is that one may use the concepts to formulate future research works. Extendedly, this research has also provided a playground for enthusiastic scholars to expertise their literature by examining the data and relating to the voices of the participants who shared their stories and experiences in this study. I had no idea that a community could have so many ceremonies. My search and research helped me learn a lot, and I hope it will be useful in the future. Whether we want it or not, we are unintentionally following the intercultural congregation's path every day. How many churches are trying to find a solution within themselves, and how many are trying to find a solution but are having trouble doing so. Perhaps this discovery has given them access.

## **Conclusion**

One of my participants, Walter, the member, said, “singing songs in other languages may appear intimidating. Often challenges us to learn a new language in which we may not even feel we belong. Nevertheless, embracing the discomfort of the difference would help us broaden our horizon.” Given that, this discovery may not answer Walter's question, but it will serve the curiosity of many others like Walter. Many efforts

are being made to give meaning to the vision adopted by the United Church, but it has reached a concrete destination. Still, many churches are ignorant of the meaning of interculturalism.

This research aimed to navigate the potential challenges and struggles of the intercultural churches within the United Church of Canada. Based on the analysis conveyed it can be concluded that there are multiple ways to meet the church's music needs. A few strategies identified through interviews would be recognizing cultural differences as an asset and acknowledging the beauty of God's creative work entrusted to humanity for its sustenance and caretaking. This research implicitly discovers three contextual ingredients that correlate to the essence of underlying issues: resolution to accent problem, working toward creating a hospitable space where people may find it home, and finding a way to translate songs into various other languages with the help of congregational members. The research also reveals the need for denominational efforts to support the local congregations in finding resources.

Tom Kraeuter writes, “one of the most challenging issues facing any church leader today is finding committed people and keeping them happy long-term (Kraeuter, *Worship Ministry*, 25). Finding committed people in the church today is rare; even if we find one, they are unstable. Keeping them stable requires the church to walk the extra mile. Nonetheless, So is the music that identifies all, for each needs to be recognized within his/her cultural parameter. The finding suggests that we are not to fix the music but instead fix the relationship that hinders the collective vision. So there is no obvious solution to imitating a culture. As Lingenfelter and Mayers put it, “Culture, then, is the

conceptual design, the definitions by which people order their lives, interpret their experience, and evaluate the behavior of others” (Lingenfelter and Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 1990). Culture, the conceptual design of an individual or a group, may also be quickly learned and taught. It begins with learning the behavioral patterns and their perceptions.

Taking a biblical stance and theological perspective, Lingenfelter and Mayers go on to say that “in essence, we need to move from a position comfortable to us and our culture to a position approximating the goals of the culture to which we are sent.” (Lingenfelter and Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 1990). As a church, a community, and an individual, we are to accept differences and indifferences for our spiritual growth and development as Jesus did on the Cross. Often we need to go beyond the boundary and be able to say yes. We need to recognize our vocation regardless of our comfort zone and be authentic followers of God.

You might have come across many themes and grounded theories in this research paper, as recognized throughout the conversation with participants and worship leaders. I admit that they are the genuine voices often disregarded or misvalued, yet bearing the reality of our day-to-day ministry situations waiting for us to intervene with them. As was mentioned earlier, there is no specific way that the issue could be addressed appropriately, but perhaps trying to be part of this research is a significant accomplishment in the long run.

**Appendix A: Literature Review**  
**Submitted: November 1, 2022**

## **Racism and Interculturalism: The Reality of Black Clergy in The United Church of Canada**

This paper examines the United Church of Canada's dream of "Becoming an Intercultural Church," exploring Paul Douglas Walfall's hopeful assertions that anti-racist awareness is necessary and must be deliberate and aligned with existing movements to become an intercultural church<sup>17</sup>. Indeed, ending racial discrimination is the beginning of an intercultural church. It is a decade-long quest to become an intercultural church and live to its vision for the United Church of Canada (UCC Website). In his article, Walfall explicitly mentions the reality of black clergy and the discrimination prevalent within the United Church of Canada. Since discrimination remains invisible and often unintentional, in some cases, it is evident that it is happening within a specific race or minor cultural group. As far as Walfall's case for white privilege is concerned - there is no doubt that it is a severe and inescapable case he reveals. Much of the literature endorses the significance of intercultural dialogue for churches and the challenges around pastoral ministry encountering racial discrimination in particular.

When it comes to rights - all the rights acquired by caste, culture, language, and descent are connected, so it can be said that racial discrimination is a unique element that gives energy to it. The United Church of Canada, in response to the growing need for recognition of emerging ethnic ministries, the Task Force was formed dated back in 1978

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<sup>17</sup>Paul A. Douglas Walfall (2020) Racism and Interculturalism: The Reality of Black Clergy in The United Church of Canada, *Black Theology*, 18:1, 23-41, DOI: 10.1080/14769948.2020.1752445

and was named NEC (National Ethnic Committee) to keep liaison with presbyteries and conferences on the development of the ethnic ministries<sup>18</sup>. Although this trip was decided in 1978, it could take shape around 2012. It is still limited within the organizational structure because many still find this mission unapproachable or daunting to their settings. The 39th General Council of UCC (2006) declared that the "Church must be intercultural. " The Ethnic Ministries Unit (EMU) of the General Council proposed a vision for the church<sup>19</sup>"Where there is a mutually respectful diversity and full and equal participation of all indigenous, francophone, ethnic minority, and ethnic majority areas in the total life, mission, and practices of the whole Church."<sup>20</sup>The UCC values diversity as a defining term of interculturalism. The reality is that although we are diverse, it is the experience of minority cultures that the UCC is still predominantly Anglo-Celtic and Western, at least if it is viewed through existing worship patterns widely formulated in its traditional practice, articulating that the UCC has an influential culture. Our diversity is often not reflected in our existence and work as opposed to what had been expected. Our worship, our orders, and our decision-making process mainly appear western. There should be equal access and participation of all races and languages. The decision should be based on an understanding in which no one is left out and no one-sided authority is formed. It was announced that an intercultural church would be formed, but people were unaware of the definition of the intercultural Church. The sudden entry from one Church

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<sup>18</sup>UCA, DMC, "proposal for New Ethnic Ministry Task Group", Minutes, (22C-box 1-file 3, 24)July 1978

<sup>19</sup>ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ethnic Ministries Re-Visioning Task Group, "A Transformative Vision for the United Church of Canada," 39th General Council (August 2006), COMM-149.



from one system to another confused their visionary pathway. Apart from the urban churches, the churches established in the rural communities were significantly impacted by keeping them unaware of this transition.

Though the vision is anticipated, the minority cultures do not have their voices heard, their experiences are not valued, their cultural needs are not understood, and the spirituality they bring is not recognized and acknowledged. The churches still have a hunch of sticking to the old traditional ways of thinking. Mook thinks that olden ways of thinking are no more relevant to current dynamism; quoting Thandeka from her work, he critiques that "Interracial/intercultural relationships give us new lenses for viewing the world, and once we learn to see in new ways, the old lenses that used to help us make sense of the world never really work again."<sup>21</sup> It can be said that it could be a very complex attack for those who live in old thinking. So now everyone must change their thoughts because old ways are irrelevant to the post-modern world. Being reluctant to learn the new form may position us as outdated.

Additionally, Mook also reveals a new context emerging from racial perspectives, as he goes on to question, "Is it possible for people ensnared in the racial divisions and politics deeply embedded into the very fabric of this country, to become free to discover more depth of meaning and a different way of being in the world?"<sup>22</sup> It seems to Mook that racial differences are closely related to politics. It is almost impossible to get out of it

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<sup>21</sup>Sharon L. Mook, "The Transforming Power of the Interracial/Intercultural Church," *The Journal of Pastoral Theology* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 35.

<sup>22</sup>*ibid*,35.

because it is associated with the country's social and political customs inherited in tradition.

Nonetheless, our nation and Church are not progressing on racial understanding and issues. But what should the Church, and especially the white Church, do? First, I suggest that the strategy for addressing racism is not singular. Instead, three distinct, interrelated areas must be addressed: understanding, reconciliation, and justice. Some quarters of the Christian congregation may attend to one or the other, but we need a whole-hearted approach with leaders leading the way. Emphasizing what it takes to become an intercultural church, Walfal writes, "The decision to become an intercultural church presents a vision for the future of the Church. This future will not become a reality through wishful thinking but by deliberate, intentional hard work"<sup>23</sup>.

Interculturality, according to Walfall, must begin primarily at the micro level, in the places where people meet and live<sup>24</sup>. The immediate context for interculturalism in the Church should be at the local congregational level. In that Church, people will meet and find the meaning of their Christian witness and service. At the grassroots level, people gather weekly for nourishment, inspiration, and empowerment<sup>25</sup> to live out the meaning of their faith. At this level, cultures learn from each other, and most importantly, new cultures of diversity are conceived and born. People will understand each other and see each other and ease their difficulties. The internal cultural structure of the Church should be studied, and a harmonious environment should be created. It is necessary to be

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<sup>23</sup>ibid, 37.

<sup>24</sup>ibid, 37.

<sup>25</sup>ibid, 37.

respectful to each other and follow the path of identity that reflects each other's art, culture, expression, and past. Unity must be sought within diversity, not division from unity. This article clarifies that it is not impossible if everyone can agree.

The term "Intercultural" for the United Church of Canada would mean—living together with a respectful awareness of each others' differences. Moreover, achievement would be achieved by examining ourselves, building relationships, and distributing power fairly (UCC, Website Content). However, the issue of the distribution of powers is controversial at the local level. Unfortunately, most board members or the Church's governing body in some churches are predominantly white. Although some churches have an intercultural setting, the primary responsibility for decision-making goes to the majority community. This means we have not yet entered the vision, even if we believe we did just halfway through. In addition to its terminology, the UCC has projected a comprehensive pathway to pursue the vision, such as to be a welcoming, relational, adaptive, justice-seeking, intentional, and missional church<sup>26</sup>. To live into this call, the UCC might need to undergo a transformation process – the Transformation, as Mook says, "Transformation is a matter of the heart as well as a matter of mind, or the renewal of the mind (Mook, 41). Transformation - in the sense that - there can be a radical change in people's thinking. Mook insists that faith communities that intentionally embrace difference as sacred become transformative communities in which God's transforming power is revealed and powerfully and deeply experienced, deepening and broadening

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<sup>26</sup>The United Church of Canada, "Vision for Becoming an intercultural Church, Accessed October 27, 2022. <https://united-church.ca/community-and-faith/being-community/intercultural-ministries/vision-becoming-intercultural-church>

individual and communal spiritual life and bringing the expression of the Christian faith into the public sphere (Mook, 42). Mook discovers a theory that binds us into a single knot, a trustworthy sphere where everyone can find belonging. Diversity, as per him, is a blessing, entrusted to accept and admire the beauty of creation.

Nonetheless, Cho quotes Schreiter's similar theory: "Intercultural" means across cultural boundaries- an intercultural church would cross cultural boundaries. The literal meaning or definition of intercultural is to go beyond one's cultural boundaries or to accept or show mutual respect for the culture of others. The call to become intercultural will not be fulfilled if it is limited to itself. Therefore, becoming intercultural requires a spiritual will. Suppose some sacrifice is required.

Walfall, in his article, claims that the United Church is a church made up of racists and also suggests and writes that, To state, therefore, that The United Church of Canada is a racist organization is neither to condemn nor to judge it negatively. It is simply to acknowledge that the Church is part of a society that is racist. To overcome its racist heritage, the Church must intentionally address the issues of racism that are evident within it (Walfall, 39). It can be said that the confusions, disputes, and reasonable criticisms that have appeared in the church operation are invisible symptoms of racism. The controversial topics aimed at the culture will never lead the Church toward success. Members tend to leave the Church in splits - some return after a while, and some leave.

Walfall also presents the remedial process of how the Church can repair the damage done to ethnic ministries as he writes, "it is evident that to end the scourge of racism, more must be done at all levels of the Church. As the Church institutes these

changes, it must work to repair the damage done to the relationship between the Church and the working black ministers."<sup>27</sup> Even though he speaks on behalf of the "Black Clergies," it applies to all ethnic ministries within the United Church of Canada that are struggling to preserve their cultural identities while serving in the general congregations, those that often feel bewildered and isolated from and within the ministerial and governing system. Both writers have analyzed and observed little in their writings, but there is more to explore in the research project.

## **Appendix B: Theological Reflection**

The people of God sing. The part of music in worship is biblical. After escaping the Egyptians' captivity and crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites sang a song to the Lord as a word of praise and thanksgiving for what God did to them (Exod. 15, NRSV). It had always been that

Singing was the portion of Israel's formal worship in both the tabernacle and sanctuary (1 Chron. 6:31-32 16:42 NRSV). The Psalm bears a rich testimony of the life moments; whether in joy or distress, in praise or lament, the faithful raise their voices in singing to God. Jesus practiced the Singing of hymns and his devotees (Matt. 26:30 NRSV).

Evidently, through his ministry, the apostle Paul gave the Colossians the following instructions: "Let the word of Christ live in you deeply; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with thankful hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

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<sup>27</sup>Walfall, 39.

And whatever you are doing, whether in words or deeds, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving God the Father thanks through him" (Col. 3: 16-17 NRSV).

Music has long been and continues to be the unwritten theology of individuals who lack or reject any official belief. Its influence on our culture is increasing (Heaney, *Music as Theology*, 6). Additionally, Heaney, quoting from Weitzman, writes, "The Psalms were the songs of the people of Israel, that nation singled out and chosen by God to initiate his story of salvation with humanity" (Heaney, *Music as Theology*, 6). Indeed, music plays a crucial part in the life of church attendees nowadays. Robert E. Webber writes, "The history of this musical expression teaches us a great deal not only about the culture and everyday life of earlier Christians but also about their unique experience of and insights into the Christian faith."<sup>28</sup> In this sense, an intense connection between music and humans was seen in ancient times. That is why people find their identity in music and feel that service without music is boring. Referencing the Old Testament, Webber reveals, "Both Jews and Christians revere a transcendent God, and both give honor to Scripture. For these reasons and others, Jewish synagogue worship and modern Christian services are similar in content and spirit."<sup>29</sup> Both Christians and Jews preserved the culture of using hymns since the time before the Medieval age and still have the tradition to this day. The arrival of different peoples and languages into the church brought new changes to the music. The church had to choose a hymn that recognized all, so it was natural for

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<sup>28</sup> Robert E. Webber, "The Complete Library of Christian Worship: A Brief History Of Music In Worship," accessed November 26, 2022, <https://www.worshiplibrary.com/library/music-and-the-arts-in-christian-worship/music-inworship/a-brief-history-of-music-in-worship/>

<sup>29</sup> Webber, "History of music."

the old hymns to fade. Perhaps, that makes it not only challenging to find the balance, but it also is not very easy, indeed.

Modern culture and progressed technology brought fresh new possibilities and unventured challenges to the music service of the church. People's lives are encompassed with various kinds of music. Some are sticking to their traditional ways, whereas some believe we need to expand the horizon to make it more accessible for all languages and cultures. However, music often functions as a "background" instead of an opportunity for serious listening, much less participation. The church has more access to and has shown openness to a wide variety of music—from classical hymnody to Christian rocks, from European cantatas to South African choruses, nonetheless even contemporary music. Such differences are to be welcomed and recognized; it reflects the diversity and gifts of God's creation. But these diversities in music and choices in music call for a significant discernment process and care in arranging and implementing the music service in the church. Congregants love to sing and try to identify their relationship with God through Singing, so it becomes crucial to know what people want to sing and what is recognized culturally and communally. Karl Barth, the reformed theologian, posits singing is not to be taken as optional; instead, it is one of the fundamental ministries of the church as he says, "The praise of God which finds its concrete culmination within the singing of the community is one of the crucial forms of the ministry of the church."<sup>30</sup> If music is to be seen as an alternative service, how will those believers who are connected

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<sup>30</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), Vol 4. 58.

through music understand the closeness to God? While they know their God through music. Music is and should be a priority. Karl Barth also said that a church without music is not a church.<sup>31</sup> Putting the other way, we can also say that Christianity is a singing faith, that it was one of the chief things supporters of Jesus are famous for, both down through the ages and presently all around the world. More than any other symbolic expression, music holds together matter and spirit. Nothing so strongly affects our bodies and spirits; our embodies spirits, as music does (Heaney,11). The way that music impacts our embodied spirits makes all music powerful. Hence our fascination with it as well as our dread of it! Our idea of faith needs to be revised in light of God's involvement in our human lives. Though the extent of Singing has changed from time to time and from culture to culture, most churches nowadays give almost a third of their gathering time to congregational Singing and make a significant contribution of their time, exertion, and vitality to the singing side of church life.

Let's examine the biblical chemistry of Psalm 96, verses 1-4, which declares the glory of God to the whole world. God cherishes to receive the rejoicing and praise of his people communicated in song, particularly the new song. A new song can come from scriptural inspirations and realities in which people of God pick up new mindfulness of God's love and beauty. A song of peculiar fabulousness, for in this sense, the term new is over and overtaken within the Sacred texts. God has done extraordinary things for us, and we ought to exceed expectations in praise and thanksgiving." The term "new" does not limit us to think about our usual periphery but rather take us to decentralize our

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<sup>31</sup> Karl Barth. Church Dogmatics, 68.



theological outlook of singing ministry. Yahweh deserves worship from the whole earth because He is not just like the divine beings and symbols of the agnostics. He is the Maker who made the Heavens, Earth, and everything that exists within it and beyond. Even the languages, cultures, and diversities of identities across living beings. Therefore, He deserves to be praised with a "new" song, a new language, and explicitly our acknowledgment and acceptance of what God has for us.

### **God's Intercultural Calling**

The United Church of Canada asserts that the Bible has many verses and stories that provide context for our commitment to racial and cultural diversity. At Pentecost, God's Spirit establishes the intercultural church, which preserves cultural and linguistic distinctions while fusing them into a fresh and expansive expression of our shared humanity. The day of Pentecost opened up the Bible to people from many linguistic and cultural backgrounds (UCC, Intercultural church, Website Content)<sup>32</sup> In the context of music selection for the worship services, and it may require us to have a lot of compassion for one another. The task is never easy. We may encounter pulls and pushes across, finding common ground within diversity. The transformational process is a challenging way of life, both individually and communally. The journey is indeed challenging, uncomfortable, and full of risk. In addition, as it spreads out into the greater community with creative, life-giving power, the transformational journey profoundly enhances and dramatically expands the lives of everyone who walks this path. The church

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<sup>32</sup> United Church of Canada strongly believes that we have a call to incorporate music from all languages that recognizes the diverse identity of the believers. The church takes authenticity of the scripture to be a visionary directive toward our call.

might have a significant impact on the process of Transformation. On the other hand, the church might be a tremendous obstacle (Mook, *The Transforming Power*, 2005).

The theological implication of diversity in music may broaden the scope of inclusivity, becoming a more welcoming church. Conflict may arise if we want a church to pay more attention to musical differences than collective goals. However, since church musicians have argued about matters of worship for centuries can assist congregations in putting their disputes into perspective. Obviously, stands may vary from person to person, but it does not mean there is no solution to it. Suppose we understood God to be central to all our differences. In that case, language should not be the barrier for God, who has called us from multicultural beings to be in one body, resides in each of our differences. To acknowledge this common call is to give praise to our God. Our differences are nothing but God's intention to make it whole in creation- perfected.

According to Jim Marriott, a musician and a professor of liturgy, Intercultural music is defined as music that in some way derives from sources outside the traditional Western canon of the genre (Marriott, *Disrupting the Dichotomy*, Web Content). Although, of course, it is very unusual to Western ears, it may not sound easy and comfortable at times, but the fact is that we are coming closer to what had been intended by God. Our call is to find common ground within our diversity that resembles what we are to God. Marriott also assumes that Western music has profoundly influenced global music in one way or another (Marriott, *Disrupting the Dichotomy*). No single language or singing culture looks alike anymore, at least not within church culture but in the secular world.

The editors – Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, in their book, they believe that the first step in the process of incarnation is learning the language, which they would think that learning a second language is a difficult and consuming challenge (Lingenfelter & Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*, 27). The challenge is real, and the journey is harrowing. Nevertheless, we must accept that we must compromise our simplicity and ease to some extent because God is pleased when we glorify Him through diversity. The cultural identity we have received is for ourselves, which we have accepted as a gift, and it is unique as God is both unique and peculiar. How important would a more significant cultural presence give the glory? Our culture should not appear as a barrier for others to bring glory to God.

### **Conclusion:**

Summarizing, we look at where the singing tradition began, its origin, and its substantial reformation that shaped the culture in pluralistic singing patterns. Then, it takes us to the ritual of giving praise through singing to God. Whether it be chanting Psalms or Choral, Traditional Hymns or Contemporary Music – all are to serve God, encounter God personally, and build a relationship with God that can be summed up in agape love. Rather than what song or music can make God happy, we should focus on what God intends us to do. Because what God is looking for is all races, all languages, and all kinds of voices created within the Order of Creation. Then we fulfill his will when we, his sons and daughters, glorify him with a collective voice from diversity. Whether we like it or not - music is a journey with no destination - it's constantly moving and changing. No genre of music is worthless, each has its merits, and we must preserve all genres of music.

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## Appendix C: A Letter to The Congregation and the Board at Knox

### Subject: **Seeking Assistance in the Research Project**

Dear -----,

My name is Damber Khadka. I am a student enrolled in the Master of Divinity Program at the Atlantic School of Theology. You are invited to participate in a research study on “how do intercultural congregations in the United Church of Canada use music in their worship services?”

As part of my course work, under the supervision of the Rev. Dr. Dave Csinos, I am conducting a research study to explore the musical journey experienced by the churches identified as intercultural church.

This study will investigate the efficacy of how leaders manage diverse cultural groups and individuals as it relates to music and inclusion. By answering a series of seven open-ended questions, I will be able to capture the participants' lived experiences and the challenges faced by the worship planners in finding the appropriate music for the worship services. Participation in this qualitative ethnographic case study is voluntary and confidential as mandated by the ethical standards of the Research Ethics Board of the Atlantic School of Theology. Individuals are eligible to participate in this study if they are part of the congregation, worship planner, leaders, or music directors.

The participants applying to participate in this study will be asked to complete the consent form. Selected participants will be asked to consent to and fill up a form provided to them prior to the actual interview date. The candidates will have an opportunity to preview the questions before the interview time. The interview session will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes on a date and time convenient to each participant during January 2023.

The individuals participating in the interviews will not be identified within the research study. Instead, the research will focus more on capturing patterns, themes, and trends based on the data collected. The findings from this study will assist churches in addressing some of the many challenges of including music in their diverse demographic communities. I would like the board to inform the congregation of this research project and encourage them to participate in this cooperative learning journey.

Your assistance in conducting this research study would be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, please contact me at 204-218-9440 or email me at [damber.khadka@astheology.ns.ca](mailto:damber.khadka@astheology.ns.ca).

Sincerely,

Damber Khadka

## **Appendix D: Informed Consent Form**

I acknowledge that I have been given a copy of this consent. I acknowledge that the research procedures outlined have been explained to me, and that any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction. I know I can contact the researcher anytime should I have further questions. I am aware that my participation in this study is purely voluntary, and I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time. I know that the researcher will make every effort to keep all information obtained in this study as confidential and anonymous as possible. Names and potentially revealing facts will be changed. This consent form will be sealed in an envelope to protect individual identities further and stored separately. My name will not appear anywhere and no one except the researcher will know about my specific answers. The researcher will use a made-up name for me, ensuring that he will not reveal details or personal information about me. I acknowledge that an audio recording of the interview will be made, and field notes may be taken. This recording, along with the transcript of the interview and field notes, will be destroyed following the completion of the research project.

I have been informed that pastoral care is available through Rev. Bill Millar. I know I can confidentially contact Rev. Millar at 204-292-8999 or mbmillar@gmail.com for pastoral care relating to the experiences I have shared during this research.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the Atlantic School of Theology in keeping with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. Any questions or concerns about this project can be taken to Rev. Dr. Dave Csinos at 902-222-2771 or dcsinos@astheology.ns.ca.

By signing below, I am consenting to participate in this research study.

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix E: Proposed Interview Questions**

### **Proposed Interview Questions for congregational members**

- How are you doing today?
- What do you enjoy most during the worship services?
- Which song did you enjoy most today in the worship service?
- Tell me, what is your singing preference in the worship service? Traditional, Contemporary, or any other of your own choice?
- How comfortable are you with learning a song from a language other than your own?
- What is your view of using different languages in music during worship services?
- What would you do differently if you were introducing a new song? Any suggestions or comments?

### **Proposed interview Questions for Leaders/ Worship Leaders**

- How do you choose songs for the worship services?
- What factors do you consider when choosing the songs for the services?
- Some leaders think it is a challenge to find the appropriate songs that meet the need of all congregants. What would you say about this?
- How do you approach your congregants if you are to introduce a song that is not in their language?
- Do you have a system for surveying the music in worship services? If yes, how do you do that?
- How do you select a list of songs for a typical Sunday service – Gospel, traditional, contemporary, other languages, etc.?
- What would you suggest to the worship leaders would be the best approach to make worship services more effective and relational, especially music?