

**LEADERSHIP TRANSFER AWAKENS DORMANT DILEMMAS
IN A MULTIETHNIC CHURCH: CORRECTIVES FROM
CHURCH PLANTING**

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abstract

This case study examines the six-month transition to a new pastor for a multiethnic, multicongregational church near Washington, DC. It describes four dilemmas that emerged and proposes correctives from church-planting literature, particularly the facilitative approach of Tom Steffen (and principles from Donald McGavran and David Garrison). First, the ownership dilemma asks how a multiethnic church can achieve genuine mutuality among varied cultural groups and suggests the need for chronological Bible teaching. Second, the identity dilemma asks how deeply individual pastors and congregations need to agree on matters of governance and doctrine, and how non-negotiables can best be communicated. It insists that familiarity and trust are essential to both. Third, the cohesion dilemma asks how power and authority should be distributed to assure cohesiveness; it suggests that a facilitative senior pastor continually shed power to a diverse team so that leadership transfer happens without disruption. Fourth, the mission dilemma asks how a church can help diverse members keep sight of why they need one another in reaching the world and illustrates the need for frequent, ongoing, cooperative missional efforts among all congregations. The four dilemmas and their correctives point to interdependence as an essential core value for the MEC.

In a crowded McDonald's restaurant just around the corner from a multiethnic church in the Washington, DC, metro area, customers of innumerable nationalities wait patiently in line, fully confident that they will receive their meals. The fact that the employees are working under the supervision of a new manager makes little difference to the hungry patrons; in fact, it bears only minimally upon the workers, who know their jobs and the McDonald's brand so well that they can flip managers and burgers with equal ease. No one in the store—neither customers nor employees—wonders whether this restaurant has become a Burger King, or whether it now sells only chicken nuggets, because of a new boss.

The church, on the other hand, has discovered four dilemmas during its process of leadership transfer from one pastor to another: unsettled questions about ownership, identity, cohesion, and mission that have been quietly developing throughout the church's multiethnic lifetime. Invisible barriers rather than public crises, these four dilemmas describe structural and ideological weaknesses that may have subconsciously annoyed or discouraged members without ever being constructively noticed or named. The church has modeled multicultural worship and multicongregational structure for ten years, and the time of transition presents a teachable moment.

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This article will first present a case study of the transition period and then examine latent weaknesses through the lens of cross-cultural church-planting literature, a corpus not yet brought into discussion about the multiethnic church (MEC). A mainstay of qualitative research, case study limits its scope to a single locale or situation in order to allow for careful analysis. The focal point of this case study is the six-month period during which the church bade farewell to Dan (the beloved founding pastor of the church's multiethnic configuration), evaluated candidates, and finally welcomed a new pastor. Information comes from participant observation and from informal interviews with Dan, the assistant pastor, the lay head of the board, and the church secretary. Dan and the assistant pastor critiqued the first draft for accuracy, and the final reflects these adjustments. My opportunity for observation came from twenty months of weekly attendance at multiple events, plus membership on the board, active volunteer service, and participation in Dan's pastoral team meetings.

background

A buoyant, gentle Caucasian in his late sixties, Dan pastored in the Washington, DC, area for nearly ten of his forty years in pastoral ministry. In 2000, he arrived at a struggling older church which had been recently reshaped through the merging

of two dwindling congregations in the area. Total attendance was eighty at best, and almost all were older Caucasians with strong denominational loyalties. Dan prayed for help in mobilizing the members to reach the metropolitan community around the church. He recalls the process of drastic change.

When I asked the leaders if they'd be open to having many ethnicities in the church, all of them said yes, so we began praying. They gave me a free hand to work with potential new pastors and groups as they would come in.

The Sierra Leoneans came first. A Sierra Leonean church leader was visiting the United States and invited friends here in the city to come to our church on a Sunday. They were immediately very, very excited about the church, and most of them are still with us. Their group met with us in the original service, and they really grew. Then they came into contact with another group of Sierra Leoneans in the area, and that group and their pastor joined us. Eventually, most of the Sierra Leoneans spun off to form a separate congregation, but when the pastor had a moral failure, a lot of the people came back into the original service. That's the blended service today.

Next came Samuel, a Korean pastor, in 2002. He heard about us from someone and approached me about starting a service at the church. He already had a congregation [and] has always pretty much kept them to himself. He seems to have a bit of an independent streak.

The Indian and Pakistani group came to us through some connections in the denomination, and our relationship with them has always been wonderful.

Our three Spanish-speaking groups came through the woman who works with our church accounts at the bank. Her husband is a pastor, and . . . he told some pastors he knew about the church, and they came with their own congregations. So now we have three.

Whenever I presented a new pastor or congregation, the board always said yes. The new groups had to agree on doctrine and shared vision, and they had to be in agreement about the details, like how we'd share space and resources. Thus had a white church become multiethnic and multi-congregational. A sense of activity, excitement, and progress drew new attenders into the original service. Within a few years, eight congregations were meeting at the church.

Dan's description of the process reveals two important points that affect overall relationships and stability. First, two of the groups—the Sierra Leoneans and the Indian/Pakistani congregation—came into the church through denominational relationships rather than word-of-mouth connections from elsewhere. As time went on, these two became the most involved in joint activities with other congregations. Second, almost all congregations came into the church

as existing bodies rather than as individual pastors seeking to build from scratch. These relationships have continued generally as they were in the beginning: those who arrived as separate groups continue to worship separately and have resisted blending.

This reality makes this church a unique counterexample for current literature on multiethnic ministries, which exclusively categorizes churches as either heterogeneous (one multiethnic body) or multi-congregational. This one is most assuredly both—a *blend* of the two. Multiple homogenous congregations worship separately throughout the week, sharing the facilities of two campuses, and annual or semi-annual combined activities involving all congregations are generally well attended and communicate a celebration of diversity. The original congregation alone is robustly heterogeneous, drawing equal numbers of Caucasians and Sierra Leoneans, as well as a few members of other cultural backgrounds, like Brazilians, Cameroonians, Bolivians, and Bulgarians. Most members of this congregation of all cultural backgrounds intermingle with one another during the worship services, classes, committee/planning meetings, and parking lot chatter. During Dan's pastorate, music in this heterogeneous service balanced the traditions of both Africans (songs from their homeland) and Caucasians (hymns and older choruses). Clothing during Dan's time provided the first tip-off to newcomers about the welcoming of diversity, since every other female wore a traditional West African gown and headscarf, and many of the men wore long tunics.

As a forthcoming article¹ will describe in more detail, Dan's experience at the church was most visibly characterized, with some exceptions, by trust and cooperation between himself and his staff, including the various congregations' pastors. Church staff and members seemed happy to follow Dan's leadership, and the atmosphere celebrated inclusiveness. No local church is perfect, but this one was functioning as a successful multiethnic work-in-progress with an outlook of possibility.

latent dilemmas become visible

But uncertainties surfaced when Dan announced in 2009 that he would be resigning. Although he had entertained no thoughts of leaving the church, Dan had been praying fervently about personal family needs. When he received an unexpected call to pastor a church relaunch effort in the rural Midwest, he ultimately came to see the invitation as a surprising, divinely-orchestrated answer.

¹ Drury, "Leading the Multiethnic Church: Help from New Metaphors and *The Leadership Challenge*," forthcoming.

The DC church felt deep loss and immediately began considering the prickly challenge of finding a new pastor for such a unique church. Without Dan's direct influence, dilemmas which had been hidden became visible in four distinct areas: ownership, identity, cohesion, and mission. For each dilemma, surface-level questions facing church leaders hinted at deeper problems.

the ownership dilemma

The first crack to become visible in the sidewalk was that of *ownership*. The board immediately delved into the surface-level question of whom to consider for the position. All candidates were Caucasian. That the new pastor would be white was an assumption that was never questioned publicly or with sustained vigor in private.

Beyond whom to hire, who should do the hiring? Who makes important decisions? Although the church structure officially included members of all congregations in board representation and in voting, only members of the original congregation ever participated, and most of them (eight out of ten) were Caucasian. This reality had been present for years, but the need to find a new pastor brought it out into open discussion. Bigger questions—unpleasant ones—thus came into focus. Why are most (perhaps even all) decisions made by Caucasians? What factors contribute to the lack of minority involvement in the governing process? Often, the tone of such questioning was, “How can we make them participate?”

The ownership dilemma revealed questions that were not being asked. Whose church is this? Who owns it? Who controls it, and why? Is it a certain ethnic group, the congregation contributing the most money, or the people who have attended the longest? In this case, all three possibilities pointed to the same group: Caucasians, distantly representing the original creaking body which Dan had begun to resuscitate ten years earlier. Though they now constituted less than fifteen percent of overall attendance, they still assumed the church to be theirs.

the identity dilemma

The second crack to be discovered—one related to *identity*—took everyone by surprise. The surface-level question concerned whether the committee should consider ordained women in the search for a new pastor. Leaders felt this dilemma acutely for two reasons. First, the denomination's position of highest ecclesiastical authority was held by a woman (who happened to be cherished by the church as a member of Dan's own family). Second, one of the most promising candidates (and the one vigorously promoted by the district superintendent) was an experienced

and energetic female whose widely-respected marriage and intercultural ease had yielded much fruit in pastoral ministry. But despite the precedent, pressure, and prior performance, the committee ruled her out. Board members feared that the Hispanic congregations would never recognize a woman as their senior pastor.² Discussion revealed that one Hispanic congregation did not even count women in weekly attendance and assigned voting responsibility only to men.

This incongruity revealed a deeper question, itself a crisis of identity. Who are we? Do we know one another's beliefs and practices? Are we one church or a collection of many? Even though it had grown the church quickly and had sparked a sense of excitement, Dan's relaxed approach to recruiting and inviting new pastors and congregations probably had not helped to define identity. Many intercultural variables could have complicated Dan's efforts to communicate matters of doctrine and governance.

But an even more critical concern about identity emerged during the leadership transition. Do the voters and decision-makers want to continue to be a *blended* multiethnic church, or would they prefer to go back to the good old days of just being white? Dissent about Dan's inclusive approach became voiced publicly for the first time, and struggles erupted over music and facilities management. Shortly after Dan left, the relaxed tone of one meeting suddenly stiffened when a long-time Caucasian member blurted in exasperation, "How long do we have to keep letting them [the Sierra Leoneans] sing their songs in our service?" After a long, stunned silence, he continued, looking around, "Well? This is supposed to be a *traditional* service, after all." Again, silence hung awkwardly in the air, until someone carefully said, "No, Jim, . . . it's supposed to be a *blended* service." The unsettling realization from moments like these was that beneath the inclusive rhetoric lay, for many committed members, a continuing private struggle with ethnocentrism (and possibly even racism), as well as a sense of loss and fatigue.

Almost paradoxical to this realization was the disappointment that struck many in the heterogeneous congregation after the new senior pastor arrived. Like any pastor accepting a new assignment, he felt the burden of setting the tone and planned the worship services according to what seemed right to him. Beginning on his second Sunday, he eliminated all intercultural elements from the service. He replaced African music with contemporary mainstream-American worship choruses and discontinued the weekly congregational prayer time led by the Sierra Leonean lay leader (who, along with others, started wearing tailored American suits more often than colorful African gowns). He eliminated both the "laying on

² The Hispanic veneration of Mary and other female religious figures, as well as the acceptance of women in political leadership, renders this assumption to be culturally counterintuitive.

of hands” element of the pastoral prayer, which had been especially meaningful to the Africans, and the effusive, ebullient African-style greeting time. These changes were huge—so jarring to many that someone asked, “Is he trying to turn us into a white church?” Many people (mostly African) drifted away, and others—wary of multiethnic worship—expressed satisfaction that the church was “returning to something more normal.”

Of course, the new pastor did not want to turn the church into a “white church.” He was navigating as a caring but bewildered newcomer toward what he hoped would eventually become a more polished fusion of multiple styles. But the church’s experience of sudden change—beyond the normal stretching and adjustment that any church should expect—serves well to illustrate the point: Who determines a local church’s identity? Amid such intercultural diversity, how can a common identity develop? Should MEC structure not guard against such potential trauma to ethnic and cultural identity? Despite the pastor-centric view of church identity in North America, this dilemma suggests that distributed power may be more important within the delicate balance of relationships in a MEC than in a monocultural church.

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the cohesion dilemma

The third dilemma, revealing a weakness in *cohesion* among the member congregations and pastors, emerged with a surface-level question: What does the arrival of a new senior pastor mean to the pastors of satellite congregations? In this denomination’s usual practice (which in many ways does not fit the realities of a MEC, whether heterogeneous, multicongregational, or blended), the retention of assistant pastors and staff depends upon the retention and will of the senior pastor. When the senior leaves, the employment of all others terminates, unless the new senior requests that they continue. In this church, however, in which each satellite congregation joined the church as a preformed unit with its own pastor, the usual practice would clearly not work, since the entire group would follow its pastor if he were forced to leave. Who must adapt to whom? It was clear to everyone that these pastors would remain in their positions unless the new senior expressly dismissed them.

Thus, the deeper question emerged: What are the bases, limits, and expectations of the senior pastor’s authority? Do the staff pastors truly accept such authority, or had they merely accepted Dan himself, who had personally recruited them into ministry, served and built relationships with them and their families, and carried the status of both experience and silver hair? A new pastor would likely have no such relational basis for authority. What—short of the

American remedy of firing for insubordination—would happen if the new pastor and the existing pastors were to experience conflict or disagreement?

A related question demanded honesty too bare and too raw to be voiced: Why are the satellite pastors here? Had their contentment stemmed from the freedom Dan had given them to manage their congregations independently? If they had remained at the church out of loyalty to Dan or his leadership style, their continuation was delicate, indeed, depending upon their acceptance of the new pastor—a dynamic which, though it affects any church during a leadership transfer, meant the possible migration not of individuals or families, but of entire congregations and a destabilization of the whole system.

More fundamentally in the dilemma of cohesion, do these pastors and groups know and love one another as mutual members of the body of Christ? Do they need each other, or do they perceive themselves merely as fellow renters of a common property, with merely contractual rights and little power? Are their social interconnections tight or loose, simple or multiplex? How would it affect the ministry of any one congregation if one (or all) of the others left? Would anyone miss them? One Hispanic congregation did leave during the transition, stating a discovery of better scheduling options elsewhere, though reasons were unclear (and staff were aware of tension with another Hispanic pastor). Because of infrequent interaction, the other congregations may not have even noticed their departure.

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the mission dilemma

Finally, the dilemmas of ownership, identity, and cohesion hint at a fourth crack in the sidewalk illuminated during the leadership transfer: weakness in the church's sense of shared, or cooperative, mission. The enormity of the task of finding the right pastor brought an exasperated sigh to the surface: Why go to all the trouble of being a MEC when defining and pursuing mission separately is so much easier?

A basic need for every church is mission itself. For a MEC, the need is not just for mission, but for interdependence to enable the mission. During the months of candidate interviews, the highest-ranking lay board member said privately,

One of the men spoke to me kind of sheepishly the other day about the pastor search. He's feeling a bit trapped because he doesn't want to hurt Dan or the Africans or anyone else. He's been here for years, and he has a great heart, but I think deep down he's kind of tired of dealing with the challenges. You and I want to see a multiethnic ministry, but not everyone does. Because it's hard. It complicates things. Some people are hoping that they'll get their smooth, predictable church back during this transition.

This comment stands in stark contrast to Dan's assessment of the extent of shared mission:

One of the Hispanic pastors stated his conviction about the shared mission so strongly that many of his givers left, and he had to take a massive cut in his salary. Another Hispanic pastor also struggled with people leaving and volunteered to go without pay. Despite these difficulties, he later gave me a thank-you gift for inviting him to serve at the church, and he offered to help me renovate my condo. An Indian pastor once said, "Pastor, I so appreciate the team spirit here." Even Sam, the Korean pastor who has been so uncooperative at times, chose to stay here when he had the opportunity to go elsewhere. This does not sound like a group of pastors who lack commitment to the vision, does it? Of course, not everyone has embraced the vision—but those didn't stay with the church very long.

94 The question about shared mission is this: When the cultural intrigue fades, do members have a sense of intercultural mission that is strong enough to help them persist through difficulties? Dan had successfully encouraged a spirit of inclusiveness: the discouraged man above would have never dreamed that he would attend church week after week for a decade with people who were so ethnically, educationally, and economically different from him—and the same is likely true of many members of other congregations. But amid struggles, just being a multiethnic body is neither a nourishing vision nor a direction-giving mission. What difference does the blended design make to the missional behavior of each pastor or congregation? What can they do together that they cannot do separately? The question of the depth of shared mission hit at the heart of the church's multiethnic existence.

This section has described the transfer of leadership through four dilemmas: ownership, identity, cohesion, and mission. Cross-cultural church-planting literature, a corpus not yet applied to the planting or development of MECs, suggests solutions.

correctives from missiology

Even though MECs have been flourishing since "disciples were first called Christians in Antioch,"³ they seem to be wholly new models to North American thinkers about church growth. Literature about them lacks the scholarly footing that directs related topics like church planting and church multiplication and contains scant reference to other, long-established models. As reflection on the case

³ Acts 11:26, NASB

study of leadership transfer at Dan's DC-area church shows, missiological principles—particularly those of three cross-cultural church-planting writers—provide extremely helpful, though indirect, insight into best practices for multiethnic ministry.

justification for multiple congregations

Opinion about whether a MEC should pursue a single, shared expression of diverse worship or allow multiple ethnicities to worship in segregated groups typically turns into absolutist rhetoric. Good reason for strong belief exists on both sides. Admittedly, multiplying congregations multiplies the complexities in each of the four dilemmas. But cross-cultural church planting literature suggests making room for both homogeneity and heterogeneity.

In *Church Planting Movements: How God Is Redeeming a Lost World*, David Garrison criticizes the North American penchant for focusing on enlarging centralized congregations. He says that compared to large, homogenous churches, smaller groups are better able to evangelize (by being intimate and natural), to multiply (by being mobile and organizationally flat), and to meet holistic needs (by being less costly). Though the parallel is not direct, this principle offers support for multicongregational models like those advocated by Josh Hunt⁴ and by Jerry Appleby⁵ and described by Manuel Ortiz.⁶ It implies that in resisting the urge to expand facilities and in empowering multiple groups, a MEC can multiply across town and even across quite distant horizons, as members leave to do evangelism in ways that are culturally and linguistically natural to them.

Some MEC writers (like Charles Foster⁷ and Mark DeYmaz⁸) disparage such configurations, believing that healthy integration cannot happen if believers meet in separate, homogenous groups. This aversion to multicongregational models stems from disdain for Donald McGavran's Homogenous Unit Principle, which they view as an excuse for segregation and racism. Unfortunately, in their zeal for integration, they miss the great importance that a homogenous congregation can have for first-generation immigrants, who need emotional support, yearn for a sense of home, and depend upon sympathetic help in learning how to survive (a view cautiously supported by George Yancey⁹). For bringing the Gospel to new immigrants or long-term residents who have not learned to speak English, a homogenous cultural unit is likely still the best way to get them in the door; from

⁴ Hunt, *Let It Grow*.

⁵ Appleby, *The Church Is in a Stew*.

⁶ Ortiz, *One New People*.

⁷ Foster, *Embracing Diversity*, 39–43.

⁸ DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church*, 62.

⁹ Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit*, 141.

there, pastors can holistically nurture them toward both host-culture competence and spiritual growth. MECs that wish to reach entire households—rather than just the members who are already comfortable in the dominant culture, like younger generations—must allow for both heterogeneity and homogeneity and will likely find multiple congregations to be necessary.

the facilitative approach of tom steffen

The most salient applications come from Tom Steffen, who has written consistently for two decades about the need for cross-cultural church planters to decentralize and deemphasize their own roles in a newly-birthing church so that national believers assume ownership quickly. Four of his books, which speak directly to missions practice, indirectly suggest new and uncomfortable ways of thinking about the development of healthy MECs.

96 First, in *Passing the Baton: Church Planting That Empowers*, Steffen provides a remedy for the dilemmas of identity and cohesion that surfaced at Dan's DC-area church. Steffen addresses a pervasive liability that he witnessed himself on the field: earnest missionaries who had been working in villages for thirty years without multiplying a single church. The analogous problem for the MEC, which is clear in the above case study, is the centrality of a senior pastor who cannot leave the work without disrupting the delicate and essential intercultural balance that makes the church what it is. Steffen urges missionary church planters to establish a guiding exit strategy, or to embrace a phase-out orientation, before they ever enter a culture. In following this principle, church planters avoid the temptation of withholding power and authority (and, thus, a sense of ownership and indigenous identity) from national believers. Rather than allowing the growing congregations to perceive the foreigners as being central to leadership and progress, the missionaries increasingly relinquish control and influence to the nationals, whom they are mentoring.

This principle runs exactly counter to how pastors lead churches in the United States, since few make plans for leaving before they arrive (and if they do, they never tell). But in keeping with Steffen's phase-out principle, MEC lead pastors should develop a strategy before the ministry begins for organizing church life around others of various ethnicities, rather than around themselves or others like them. Recently, a Caucasian pastor asked another Caucasian to join him in launching a new multiethnic church across town. The response? "No, Bob, I'm far too white to help you. If you want your church to be multiethnic in the future, you'd better make it multiethnic before you begin." Excellent advice. When lead pastors phase themselves out from the start, congregations learn to follow diverse

staff and pastors, cultural groups feel a sense of equality, and the staff pastors own a ministry that is culturally authentic and relevant.

In this case study, all congregations were held together by Dan himself, standing at the hub of a wheel comprised of separate spokes. The pastors and congregations were unfamiliar with one another, having worked in subordination to the senior pastor but without the necessity of ongoing cooperation with one another (with the exception of annual events initiated by Dan and overseen by Caucasian staff). When Dan left, their cohesiveness as a larger body and even their identity as a MEC became uncertain. Steffen's phase-out principle would have nudged Dan to the rim of the wheel sooner—and other staff and pastors (the spokes) to a point of interdependence at the visible center. Dan's job would have been to keep the wheel spinning, preferably on bumpy ground. Pastors should ask themselves, "If I were to disappear tomorrow, would my church lose its identity, or are the other leaders respected, visible, and experienced enough within this body to continue the ministry without disruption? Is my influence decreasing so that theirs may increase?" District leaders should ask similar questions to evaluate a MEC's stability, possibly even supplying a facilitative pastor to serve more than one church at a time.

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Second, for the dilemmas of ownership and fragmented mission, the MEC may borrow helpful principles from Steffen's *Reconnecting God's Story to Ministry*, which suggests narrative as an ameliorator of intercultural barriers to communicating the Gospel. In this case study, Steffen's approach to narrative could help in three ways. One, a methodology encompassing chronological Bible teaching could challenge any false sense of ownership among original members and help to keep mission central, reinforcing the human problem, God's inclusive redemptive plan, and the now-and-not-yet kingdom banquet promise of Revelations.¹⁰ Two, deliberate effort to bring people of different ethnicities together around the sharing of personal faith stories could strengthen relationships of trust and familiarity among them, helping them to experience God's inclusive mission for themselves. Increased trust could produce both the willingness to share power and resources in those who are accustomed to ownership, and the confidence to participate in voting and decision-making in those who are not. Three, narrative could contribute to the mission's missing aspect of being shared or cooperative if all congregations work to articulate a story of their corporate growth toward mutuality.¹¹

¹⁰ See Anderson's *Multicultural Ministry* for multiple references to banquet imagery; see also the first chapters of DeYmaz's *Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church* for discussion of biblical foundations for the MEC.

¹¹ See Hopewell's *Congregation* and Steffen's "Congregational Character" regarding the value of corporate storytelling.

A third indirect application of a church-planting principle comes from Rundle and Steffen's *Great Commission Companies*, which affirms the missional effectiveness of good business when it is conducted by believers who are committed to evangelism and discipleship. What does a book about business have to do with the MEC? It reminds church workers, especially in an intercultural context, that all gifts and abilities, when directed intentionally and with excellence toward eternal results, can bring people to Christ. Just as businesspeople build bridges in secular culture by connecting with coworkers and clients around conference tables, MEC pastors can build bridges of trust and discipleship among diverse people by creating opportunities for them to work together.

A vibrant MEC in Los Angeles exemplifies this principle. Gerardo Marti says that Mosaic has furthered community and evangelism by creating needs for diverse people to refine their abilities collaboratively—from sculpting or writing to engineering or logistical planning. Skilled volunteers design and execute every event at the church, forging unity in small groups primarily around shared abilities rather than around lessons on reconciliation. Shared work has the secondary benefit of reducing the need for the church to pay numerous staff salaries in order to make a growing ministry exciting.¹²

In the spirit of Rundle and Steffen and with the example of Mosaic, the MEC in this case study could unite separate congregations and pastors through shared projects and productive, inclusive activity. The new pastor could organize church life not around teaching and preaching—areas in which people naturally prefer the comfort of their own culture, rhetorical style, and language—but around frequent, cooperative, missional efforts requiring myriad gifts and abilities. He could work with the multiethnic pastoral team to rotate responsibility for directing these events among all congregations.

Dan explained that he did encourage cooperation among the pastors and congregations:

We planned jointly about areas in which we could cooperate. We had a planning retreat several years ago, and all the pastors attended except for [one]. We all agreed to have an annual combined service . . . and that each congregation would have some kind of outreach effort once per month and that everyone would help with the annual Hanging of the Greens service at Christmas time. We all agreed that we needed a bigger facility and would start praying and giving to make it happen. We also agreed that one of the campuses needed extensive renovation, and we divided up the tasks that needed to be done. . . . It was all a great team effort.

¹² Marti, *A Mosaic of Believers*.

Dan had succeeded at building warm rapport, trust, and loyalty among the pastors, who were welcoming of his inclusive vision. But cooperation was initiated and directed by Dan and in most cases, limited to the pastoral team.

Finally, Steffen presents the most valuable principles with indirect applications to the MEC in a book to be released in late 2010, *Beyond Pioneer Church Multiplication: The Facilitator Era*.¹³ The distinction between pioneering and facilitation which he expands in this book (first mentioned in *Great Commission Companies*) encompasses the foregoing principles well. Throughout missions history, Steffen says, a pioneer mentality has prevailed. Pioneers embark on a church-planting venture among unreached people, develop deep bonds, and nurture new believers every step of the way for as long as it takes, until a new church achieves well-known benchmarks. Most pastors in the United States assume this pioneering mentality, planning to stay at a church until the Spirit (or circumstances) leads elsewhere. The assistant pastor in this case study recently commented, “I am a firm believer in long-term ministry at one church,” revealing the outlook of a typical pioneer.

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Facilitation, Steffen says, is a swift new breeze blowing into the missions world. Missionaries and sending churches are departing from the pioneering practices of past centuries and are seeking to work among already-reached peoples to strengthen existing ministries. Rather than moving in to stay, those who go expect to make meaningful contributions through specialized skills and then leave. Steffen cites Rick Warren as an early change agent in the shift from pioneering to facilitation, and he provides numerous case studies illustrating facilitative approaches. Facilitators, unlike pioneers, embody Steffen’s earlier principles of arriving with a power-shedding exit strategy, mobilizing believers with skills other than those typically associated with professional ministry, and activating the latent missional potential of an existing body of believers to reach their cultural and linguistic neighbors.

It is perhaps the combination of Steffen’s concepts of facilitation and near-culture access—concentrating efforts more on people in closer cultural contexts than on those in the far ends of the earth—that speak most strongly to best practices for the MEC. Is it possible that MEC senior pastors should view themselves increasingly as short-term facilitators, rather than as long-term pioneers? As the outside person keeping the wheel turning, Dan would have moved behind the scenes very quickly—from hub to rim, control to influence, directing to facilitating. He would have shepherded the pastors rather than the members,

¹³ Available in late 2010. Published by Wipf and Stock, 199 West 8th Avenue, Suite #3, Eugene, OR 97401. Ordering phone: (541) 344-1528.

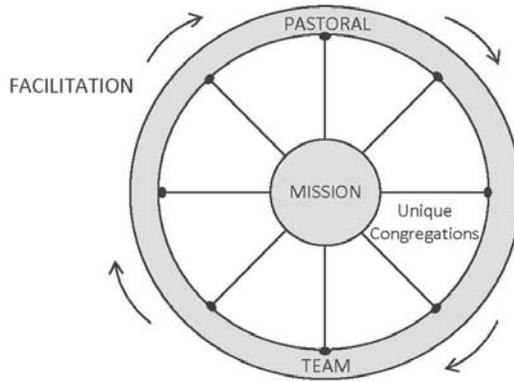


Figure 1

The facilitation wheel shows mission as the center of the MEC and the facilitative pastor as a semi-outsider.

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making sure that the team was healthy, collaborative, and visible to the multiple congregations. Then, when he left, the wheel would have continued to spin, and a new pastor—if needed at all by that point—would have stepped in unobtrusively to pick up the job of facilitating the team effort.

Figure 1 illustrates this facilitative concept at work in the MEC. At the center, cooperative mission may be realized as interdependence in Christian education, community outreach, or heterogeneous worship services (especially those that reach 1.5 or second generation immigrants). It is within this missional collaboration that distinct congregations—each a separate spoke on the wheel—build relationships with one another. At the outside of the wheel are the pastors of each congregation, united in the rim as a team of equals. The facilitative pastor, who serves outside the rim itself, helps the team learn to function in mutual trust and keeps the wheel turning, his/her own role diminishing over time. Like the tire on a bicycle, a smoothly spinning facilitation wheel blurs the visibility of individual spokes: the strength and uniqueness of each homogenous congregation continues, but the focus moves to interdependence in mission.

The notion of a church led by a team of pastors rather than by one permanent senior will surely rub some Americans the wrong way, especially given the widespread acceptance of Western business models for informing church design. But Steffen's definition of levels of cultural distance in church planting identifies the MEC as an extremely valuable missiological venue—one much more cost-effective and possibly more fruitful than overseas missions endeavors (which is not to imply that the latter should be abandoned). The MEC is the modern-day Antioch, positioned to make globalization work for kingdom purposes, as immigrants flow into churches and back out again, carrying the Gospel to their

own faraway people. Is the North American church willing to attempt different leadership models in order to draw them in?

conclusion

For multiethnic, multicongregational churches to be at least stable and at best healthily multiplying, they must address the four quiet dilemmas that awoke in Dan's church during a time of transition, and they must heed the correctives suggested by cross-cultural church-planting literature.

1. The ownership dilemma: How can a multiethnic church achieve genuine mutuality among varied cultural groups? Chronological Bible teaching corrects the heart so that all feel welcome to participate as equals in God's plan.
2. The identity dilemma: Within a local church, how deeply do individual pastors and congregations need to agree on matters of governance and doctrine, and how can non-negotiables be best communicated? Sustainable relationships of familiarity and trust among diverse members and congregations promote understanding and prevent division regarding intercultural uniqueness.
3. The cohesion dilemma: How should power and authority be distributed so that cohesiveness can be assured? A facilitative pastor creates needs for cooperation among equals, making him- or herself peripheral so that leadership transfer is non-disruptive.
4. The mission dilemma: How can a church make missional synergy meaningful to members? Frequent, ongoing, cooperative missional efforts among all congregations help diverse members keep sight of why they need one another in reaching the world.

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The four dilemmas and their correctives point to interdependence as a core value in the MEC.

Further research will continue to tie MEC thinking to the scholarship of other fields. A forthcoming article will provide deeper reflection about this case study through the lens of popularly-accepted leadership literature and will propose new metaphors to describe relationships in the MEC.¹⁴ A later article will offer practical suggestions for congregational education about intercultural dynamics.¹⁵

After all, the multiethnic church should be at least as adaptable amid leadership transfer as the local McDonald's.

¹⁴ Drury, "Leading the Multiethnic Church: Help from New Metaphors and *The Leadership Challenge*," in *GCRJ*, forthcoming.

¹⁵ Drury, "Confounded by Culture? Educating Leaders and Congregations in the Multiethnic Church," unpublished manuscript.

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