

Even though every church ministry has unique challenges, there seems to be a threefold dimension inherent to the declining church in relationship to revitalizing or transitioning to becoming multi-cultural/multi-ethnic. In this path, a leader revitalizing a declining or transitioning church must (1) deal with the dysfunctions that led to the decline, (2) set a new vision with leaders who may not share the same multiethnic vision, or who may be hesitant due to their fears of the unfamiliar, (3) and educate the congregation to help them develop cultural intelligence before the church can become a welcoming environment for ethnic diversity.

These three factors affect the timeline of implementation of the multiethnic vision. In contrast, a church plant has the multiethnic vision built into the DNA of the church from inception, with a leadership team that shares the same vision from the start.

A ship and a kayak can both be turned around, but the adequate speed for the kayak can be catastrophic for the ship. In the same way, the speed of implementation can be best discerned by identifying the path that the church is navigating. Consequently, understanding the three different paths of becoming a multiethnic church (planting, transitioning, revitalizing) can provide church leaders with better discernment, facilitating a more patient attitude in the journey.

As it relates to Cornerstone, there are consistent patterns within the church that lean towards Cornerstone being more of a declining-revitalizing church than that of a church plant or transitioning church. All of this helps to honestly recognize the unique task before our church.

Adding to the unique situation present at Cornerstone is the tension surrounding multi-ethnic churches worldwide. Less than 3% of churches worldwide can be categorized as multi-ethnic/multi-cultural. Furthermore, we agree with researchers Emerson and Woo who affirm that multi-ethnic/multi-cultural churches work much like a magnet, attracting those who enjoy diversity while at the same time pushing those who prefer a homogeneous environment away. This is not intended as a negative statement, but a recognition of reality across the globe.

Never-the-less, at Cornerstone, we want to better emulate the beautiful diversity seen in Scripture where every tongue, tribe and nation has gathered together to worship the Triune God.

### **Summarizing the Context of the Early Church Reflected in Acts and the Epistles**

As one reads the later New Testament (Acts and the Epistles) with a socio-economic understanding of the ancient world, one can see the social context of the early church was shaped by a faulty set of beliefs (ethnocentrism and stereotyping), that led to a distorted perspective (prejudice and xenophobia), which resulted in excluding behaviors (discrimination and segregation). All of these factors threatened the first Christians as they struggled to embrace God's vision of inclusion.

Consequently, biblical theology instructed the church to have a **countercultural belief** (Christians are one new humanity), a **countercultural perspective** (Christians live as citizens of heaven), and a **countercultural behavior** (Christians practice hospitality). In this way, biblical theology equipped the church to face the destructive power of segregation.

Table 1.1. A Theological Framework to Counteract Segregation

COUNTERCULTURAL BELIEF	COUNTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE	COUNTERCULTURAL BEHAVIOR
Christians are one new humanity.	Christians live as citizens of heaven	Christians practice hospitality
“You and I are equals, adopted into God’s family and indwelled by the Holy Spirit.”	“You and I are citizens of heaven, and we will live together forever in diversity.”	“The stranger is my equal, and I love the stranger with God’s love.”

#### Four Key Components of a Multiethnic Church Model

In light of the brief analysis of the early church, four significant behaviors shape the ministry of a multiethnic church.

##### First Component: Counteract Segregation

The biblical multiethnic church counteracts segregation. If a church is located in a multiethnic society, it seems that God wants the church to embrace the multiethnic diversity of her context. Failing to do so can be dissonant with (1) the new humanity in the church, (2) the eternal perspective that transcends national identities, and (3) the practice of hospitality. Yet, embracing diversity is countercultural. One can observe this struggle beginning from Jerusalem to Antioch. Thus, the moment a church decides to embrace diversity, it has to prepare herself to counteract the human tendencies that can potentially bring fragmentation: regionalism, ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, xenophobia, discrimination and segregation.

##### Second Component: Cultivate an Identity of Inclusion

The biblical multiethnic church cultivates an identity of inclusion. Because inclusion is countercultural, the church has to proactively prepare the ground and plant the seed of inclusion in the hearts of people. One can observe that the apostles intentionally provided theological instruction to help Christians embrace their identity of inclusion, live with eternal perspective, and practice hospitality. In the same way, a multiethnic church will benefit from intentionally training people to engage in this theological reflection and practice. Because segregation is based on faulty beliefs, the church needs to counteract the underlying beliefs that feed segregation in order to be a healthy multiethnic congregation that loves the stranger. In light of the Pauline epistles, equipping the church to counteract segregation needs to be done preventively as well as correctively.

##### Third Component: Form a Multiethnic and Culturally Intelligent Leadership Team

The biblical multiethnic church forms a multiethnic and culturally intelligent leadership team. When the church in Jerusalem faced ethnic tensions, the church formed a team of multiethnic leaders who understood the culture of the community. At the same time, the first Jews who were willing to reach out to the Greeks in Antioch were Hellenist Jews. The first leader sent by Jerusalem to minister to the church in Antioch was Barnabas—a Hellenist Jew. Likewise, the leadership team of the church of Antioch was a

multiethnic and multicultural team. These events reveal the value of a leadership team that embodies and understands cultural diversity. Thus, if the church is to embrace ethnic and lingual diversity, it will benefit from having a leadership team that can engage effectively with that diversity.

### **Additional Component: Implement a Multilingual Platform**

The biblical multiethnic church implements a multilingual platform. Biblical analysis revealed that the social context of the New Testament was both multiethnic and multilingual. The early church did not attempt to assimilate all languages into one, but the church embraced multilingualism. Even though Greek remained the *lingua franca*, the Apostle Paul ministered in two languages, and Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John taught with a bilingual approach. Thus, if the church is located in a multilingual society, adopting a multilingual platform will expand her engaging capacity for ministry impact.

In summary, the rationale of a multiethnic church model is based on a ministry philosophy that is consonant with the new humanity in Christ, the heavenly citizenship, and the practice of hospitality instructed by the Apostles. As a result, when a church is located in a multiethnic and multilingual society, it will benefit from developing a ministry framework that includes *(1) counteracting segregation, (2) cultivating an identity of inclusion, (3) forming a multiethnic and culturally intelligent leadership team, and (4) implementing a multilingual platform, if necessary based on the church-neighborhood relationship.*

Each of these components works into Cornerstone's strategy of becoming multi-cultural as a witness to our broader community. Our leadership team recognizes that our strategy is broad and that multi-cultural/multi-ethnic development and outreach does not directly address the concerns of racial righteousness and reconciliation, in particular within those tensions particularly experienced between Black Americans and White Americans.

Our leadership also recognizes that we cannot change everything in our culture when it comes to racial reconciliation and righteousness, but we can do everything to change our part to negate racism in our church. Further, we believe in order to overcome deep cultural divides at Cornerstone, we must *intentionally educate ourselves on how to become good neighbors in both the private and public arenas of socially relevant Christianity.*

To those ends, we are working through a four-pronged strategy for revitalizing Cornerstone's witness in the community in relationship to affirming practiced Biblical diversity and pursuit of racial righteousness. The hope of this pursuit is that the reign of Christian racial segregation would find an end at Cornerstone and racial righteousness would transform our community. Even as Cornerstone predominately white, by God's grace, we can live out a gospel of racial reconciliation and justice.

The following outline illustrates Cornerstone's strategy to honor the Gospel in the work of racial righteousness. The outline is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather first steps in each of the four areas we have identified as necessary to move through as we seek to increase Gospel witness

### **1. Organizational Racial Righteousness**

- a. Develop and implement systems, policies and process that “level the playing field” for all persons pursuing Christian faith with Cornerstone
- b. Facilitate and strengthen authentic relationships and vital conversations where lives, churches and communities are transformed
- c. Establish a leadership team which develops necessary skills and awareness promoting intercultural competency within Cornerstone’s ministries
- d. Intentionally diversify leadership across all levels as opportunity to do so is available.
- e. Shape worship that moves beyond white mono-cultural practice.
- f. Identify, teach and promote Gospel practices that lead toward diversity in relationship with one another at all levels of ministry (kids to senior adults)

### **2. Kingdom Advancing Resourcing among Immigrant Peoples**

- a. Establish friendships with Immigrant Christian leaders
- b. Equip and facilitate leadership development for Immigrant Christian leaders through **Training Leaders International’s Diaspora Initiative**.
- c. Resource Cornerstone’s family of faith to love immigrant neighbors well through support provided by **From Scattered to Gathered**.
- d. Seek out church planting opportunities that match the demographic profile in the North West Metro (Currently Identified: Hmong, Hispanic and African church planting partners 2/28/2021)
- e. Develop resource relationships to help immigrant persons (i.e. visa services, legal services, etc. (i.e. Bethany Ringdal and **International Association for Refugees**))

### **3. Practicing Racial Righteousness with Domestic Minorities**

- a. Seek out and invite partnership with non-White, Christian faith communities to enact racial righteousness together
- b. Engage in neighborhood and community assessments to better understand our local community
- c. Develop relationships with local minority leaders and influencers to support causes that affirm Gospel principles
- d. Promote and engage in efforts to negate the effects of systemic racism in our community
- e. Seek opportunities to learn from neighbors of color how Cornerstone may best serve the community, in other words, practice listening well in order to learn well

### **4. Intentionally Discipling Cornerstone’s Family of Faith in Biblical Diversity and Racial Righteousness**

- a. Provide accessible resources for Cornerstone’s congregation to pursue racial discipleship
- b. Create space for Christian ministry leaders from minority and/or immigrant populations to preach or lead in worship
- c. Provide time for Christians of color to share stories about their life and faith

- d.** Promote and provide opportunities for Cornerstone's congregation to serve within ministry opportunities led by Christian minority leaders
- e.** Develop at least one preaching series per year that continues the cause of racial righteousness
- f.** Promote at least two Cornerstone U opportunities per year that develop greater personal awareness of racial righteousness
- g.** Engage opportunities that promote racial righteousness when the culture elicits such a response (i.e. "Praying for Justice" campaign throughout the Chauvin trial)