

## Multicultural Ministry

Word up. How we doing? Tired?

On Friday, I gave the most difficult speech of my life. I was best man at my mate's wedding. When he offered me the job I had mixed emotions. It is of course a great honour but its an honour you'd frankly rather not have. On reflection, I would counsel against taking the job. It didn't half ruin my meal. We were served a crab starter, some beautiful lamb, and then pineapple carpaccio and mango sorbet to finish. It tasted great, but it was difficult to enjoy it properly with stomach cramp.

After that, facing a church full of people who should have had another hour in bed is child's play. If you are feeling grumpy, spare a thought for Roman Piekarski. Roman is joint owner of the Cuckooland museum in Tabley, near Knutsford, wherever that is. Yesterday, he began adding an hour to his collection of 600 cuckoo clocks. He expects to finish forwarding the clocks on Monday." Mr Piekarski commented to the BBC that: "It's the world's largest collection of antique cuckoo clocks so will take all weekend. It's worthwhile and it wouldn't be right not to do it." It wouldn't be right not to do it? It sounds to me like the Mr Piekarski is a little cuckoo himself.

Anyway, later you'll thank yourself for getting up early. Because today we are starting a new journey together. At CJ's we have vision. It's a God-given vision of a Christ-centred, multicultural worldwide church. I dream of a church of all colours, classes and natures, every tribe and tongue and nation dancing in time to the beat of Jesus.

I am pleased to say the Lord has already blessed us with many cultures. Ralph's gonna help me out now. Ralph, how many nations in the house today? Given our size, we've got an amazing number of cultures in our people, but we're not the multi-cultural church we could be. I don't think we really know what role our cultures should play in the church. How should our cultures fit together? Culturally, I suspect CJ's is currently like a baby sister of Holy Trinity Brompton. But if you took a random 50 members of HTB I suspect you'd have less nations that we have here. I love HTB but culturally its pretty traditional, conservative, white and middle-classed. I believe CJ's is called to play a different tune.

But we recognise its going to be a challenge. We are not going to bring the glory of the nations into CJ's without some effort. That's why we call ourselves an intentionally multi-cultural church. We know God's purpose is to build a community of nations. We know every tribe and tongue and nation will be united in heaven. And we know his vision for CJ's is a church that reflects his diversity and reaches every one of the 173 nations in Islington. But we don't expect it just to happen.

The church is asleep. And I don't mean coz it lost an hour. The kind of church we've been settling for is dull. God is not dull! Last night I believe I shared a joke with the Lord. God made humour. He created all things. It is his nature to create. If we have his spirit in his we have something of his creativity. The church should be uniquely creative. Exciting, surprising, hilarious and fun.

How integrated are we really? Do the Jamaicans hang out mostly with the Jamaicans? Do the white kids hang out mostly with the white kids? I think we get on well and there's definitely some love in the house but how would things look if there were absolutely no walls between us. If everyone here was equal in your eyes? If any history between your nation and mine was forgiven? If I honoured your culture and helped it to flourish here?

We are gonna look at these questions over the next few weeks. We have the help of David Anderson on this journey. David runs a multi-cultural congregation in Maryland called Bridgeway Community Centre. His book, multicultural ministry, will help us consider the walls that divide us, how to do ministry together, how to combine our cultures into a thing of beauty for the Lord.

Today, I want to start this journey by giving you a picture. Budapest Phil. Can I have my readers please. They are going to read Paul's description of the church as body. But keep this picture of the orchestra in mind. I am going to use the pic of an orchestra to freshen up the Corinthians teaching.

**The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body.** I've got arms, legs, lungs, ribs, kidneys, a nervous system, an oesophageous and a small intestine. Our body has many parts but believe me its important these parts stay together. Apparently, if we unravelled your small intestine it would be ten times taller than you are. But trust me, you would not like us unravelling your intestine. And if we unravelled your intestine your body would no longer be a body.

If my body parts were scattered all over the floor they would all be there but they'd no longer be a body. The church is a body with many parts. In the same way, the church is an orchestra. There's a wind section, percussion, strings and brass but only together are they an orchestra. But taken together it is an orchestra.

**So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.**

The church is body of Christ. And Christ's body is just the same as ours. It has many parts. The parts are not the body of Christ on their own. They are only the body of Christ together. There are many parts, together they form the body of Christ.

Paul explains this follows from the unity of the spirit. We were all given the same Spirit. There is one Lord. He is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He lives in each of us by his Spirit. It doesn't matter if we had a religious upbringing, like the Jews. Or if we had a secular education, like the Greeks. Or if we've always worked in coal mine, like a slave. Or if we've run the coal mine. In the World, we are different but in Christ we are united. There is no difference between us because the same Lord lives in each of us. That is the consequence of the gospel for us. That we have been made the same, united in Christ. This should be our perspective.

The world may see a rich man, an immigrant, a sexy lady, someone with learning disability, a deaf guy... but in Christ's eyes, there is no difference between us who believe. We are

each an equal part of his body. The world loves to put people in boxes. It might call me public school boy, rich boy or white boy. But whatever box it puts me in, in Christ I am the same as all of you. One part of Christ's body.

Paul preached this message to the Corinthians, to the Galatians, to the Colossians and to the Romans. You can find it in all his letters.

He explained to the Galatians that they were part of one body because they were all sons of God. When we believe we are born again children born of God. We have a new identity. The world's boxes mean nothing. We are not divided by race, or upbringing, or our job, or our gender or even how long we have been Christian. We are one, there are no divisions. "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26-28)

Paul spoke about a church like ours saying "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all." (Colossians 3:11) At the time Paul wrote people used the word barbarian to refer to people who couldn't speak Greek. They were considered to be uncivilised. I suspect Julio is our only Greek speaking member. Paul says, Julio is not better than us because he speaks Greek. I am not going to ask if anyone has been circumcised! But Paul says, Julio is not a better Christian because he is ordained. Scythians were known for their brutality. We have been watching China's treatment of the Tibetan monks with horror. What seems most brutal is that the Chinese authorities are acting as if it is business as usual. Paul says, Chinese officials who put their trust in Christ are just the same as us.

In the World we will be put in boxes. But in Christ these dividing walls are broken. Christ transcends all barriers and unifies people from all cultures, races and nations. Such distinctions are no longer significant. Christ alone matters.

**Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.**

We have each become one part of the body of Christ. But we are different. We have different gifts and should play different parts. Preaching is one gift and one part of the body. If you say, because I am not a preacher I do not belong to the body, you will not for that reason cease to be part of the body. We each have a role to play in the body and each role is indispensable. If we were all preachers, where would evangelism be, where would intercession be, where would administration be?

But God has not made us all to play the same part. He has appointed us to play many different parts. And consider this amazing promise: God has arranged the parts in the body,

every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. God himself has given us gifts and brought us together, just as he wanted us to be.

An orchestra requires a number of core instruments to play all but the rarest of symphonic pieces. These core instruments are flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, trumpets, timpani percussion, violins, violas, cellos and double-basses. These instruments are essential. But an orchestra may also have an: English horn, bass clarinets, contrabassoon, trombone, bass trombone, tubas, snare drum, tenor drum, base drum, tenor drum, cymbal, triangle, wood block, tambourine, marimba, xylophone, glockenspiel, gong, tubular bells or a harp.

In this room, we have all the essential instruments. I think we have a few of the rarer instruments too. God has arranged the part of his body just as he wants. There are prophets in this room - God want us to hear his voice. There are intercessors in this room - God wants to come and heal our land. There are evangelists in this room - God wants us to reach the lost. There are worship leaders in this room - God wants us to glorify him in song and meet with him in the spirit. If you think you have no role, you are wrong. If you think you're not needed coz we already have some decent preachers, you are very wrong.

If all the parts of the body were the same, where would the body be? If there was nothing but ears, there would be no body. Just an eary situation! Are you seeing how God intends to use diversity to create unity. He made many different parts so he could put them together to form his body. God has arranged all the parts in his body just as he wanted them to be.

**The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.**

The eye cannot say to the hand "I don't need you!". The eye may see how good the chocolate brownie will taste – it doesn't need the hand for that - but without the hand it ain't gonna taste it!

We are each indispensable. We depend on each other. If our worship flourishes, the whole church will celebrate with the worship team. If our worship team is attacked by the devil, they stop working well together and there's illness in the team. We all suffer with them.

Some parts of my body are unpresentable. For this reason, I wear trousers. But the unpresentable parts of my body are essential. Where would I be without my rear end? And God has honoured the parts they are not on show. Its best that our services focus on worship and prayer and the word. But where would the church be if someone did not organise our finances. Our preachers and worship leaders need no special treatment but

scripture says God has give our administrators and intercessors special honour because they are less on show. He has done this so there will be no division between us.

**Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts.**

When God was building CJ's he appointed Julio to pioneer the work. Julio's team prayed and a prophetic vision was formed for our church. God has been using teachers to breakdown and communicate the vision for us. We have played different roles and its amazing how we have grown. We've gone from a string quartet to a full orchestra. In this room. We are not all the lead violin, we are not all the double bass, we are not all a flute or all a trombone. It would be terrible if we were. What could 85 trombones play, except a din!

Now it is time to start playing together! Every instrument, playing its part, in the amazing symphony the Lord has arranged us to play. The word "symphony" derives from Greek \_\_\_\_\_, meaning "sounding together". We are God's symphony, not his string concerto, he brings us together with different rythmns and with different timing.

**And now I will show you the most excellent way.**

**If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.**

**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.**

God composed the song we should play. His song is love. God is love. He made us so he could love us. He died for us to show his love for us. He left us on earth so we could show the world this love. Love one another, as have loved you so you are to love one another. He who loves lives in God and God in him. In this way his love is made complete among us. He who loves has fulfilled the law.

The most excellent way to play together is in love. We can have prophets and prayers and givers and preachers but without love we are have nothing. We've got the cymbal but it does not go TSSS it goes CLANG.

God is the composer and our great conductor. If we watch him and learn to recognise his gestures. He will direct us. He would show us when to play and when to let other play. He will help us play the difficult bits and he will show us when to build together into a crescendo.

God is calling his church to play his symphony of love to the world. He has arranged the orchestra just how he wanted it and he longs that we should become obedient to his conducting.

Many churches are hearing the call. Some are already flourishing in it.

I've told you about Bridgeway. There are 10 or so other churches like it described in this book. My favourite is Mosaic Church – Los Angeles - Erwin McManus Book: An unstoppable force – Name comes from diversity of their believers God and a reference to the broken fragments of humanity from which God is building his beautiful church

With God's help, we can build a church that is even more beautiful. We have the diversity. 173 nations in Islington. Probably 40 in this room. Love doesn't come naturally, it comes from God. We need to learn to love. We should fix our eyes on Jesus and the way he lived. If we know Jesus, we know love. And we need to practise love. It may not be easy. Unnatural things are often difficult. We may need to forgive each other and address the history between our respective cultures.

We are still creatures of the world. We think the way it thinks. We think men are stronger than women. The rich are better than the poor. The beautiful are the winners. Those in positions of authority are the most important. But these are all lies.

Its not easy to get free of worldly thinking. We can say all parts of the body are of equal importance but in our hearts its difficult not to think Julio is the most important person in the church. Actually, Jesus is the head of the church. Who is the most important person in our church? David. And Marta, and Jenny, and.... After Jesus, we are each the most important person in the church.

There are a construct of the enemy, designed to prevent us living in the way the Lord intended. If we are going to be transformed, we need our minds to be renewed. The bible tells us about a different way of living. A way of acceptance, reconciliation, equality, interdependence and belonging. By the word of God and the power of Jesus' name we can break down the walls that divide us. We need to allow the Word renew our minds if we are going to see our community transformed. We need a new way of thinking.

And, of course, there's an external dimension to our vision. Shortly before he died, Jesus said to his disciples: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another". The writer of Hebrews encourages us that since we are surrounded by such a cloud of witnesses we should through off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles and run with perseverance the race marked out for us. The World is watching, we

are surrounded by witnesses. What are we going to show them? A church entangled by sin and church divided by the same walls it is. Or a church dancing with diversity in unity?

We play God's symphony for our own pleasure and the Lord's pleasure but also for the watching world. For the streets, struggling with racial violence. For the Somali kid reaching for his knife, as a gang of asians come rushing at him. For the grieving parents and governors despairing as to how to stop the violence. For the skinheads moshing to the beat of the BNP and the muslim ready to die if it means killing an American. The message of reconciliation and equality are essential. You are no less because you come from Africa, no less because you were thrown out of school, no less because you are poor. The Lord invites everyone to join his orchestra and makes every part of his orchestra indispensable. The symphony cannot be played without you. The body is not a body without you.

And here's an amazing fact. Heaven is watching too. Paul tells us, in Ephesians 3, it was always the Lord's intent that the church should display the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. We are players on the Lord's stage. The world is watching and heaven is too. The angels are waiting in eager expectation to see the church fulfil its purpose. I have told you before that the Greek word for manifold is *polypoikiolos*. The word is also used to describe joseph's coat of many colours. God's design for the church is to display his many coloured wisdom to the world and his angels above.

Together we are God's orchestra. We have been put together to play the symphony of love the Lord has written. His purpose was fixed at the beginning but remains a mystery to men and even angels. The angels serve him without knowing how it all works out for good. The heavens are watching the church in great expectation. Sadly, the church doesn't always seem to know the tune its playing. We need to learn the tune and watch the conductor carefully until we are all 'sounding together' in love.

LETS REFLECT NOW ON THE WORD AS WE LISTEN TO A SONG

11 Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. 20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17

There is a place of blessing, a place where the anointing oil runs. In Jerusalem? Brethren  
Body, friends, joined together in the bond of the sp  
Father we join with the prayer of Jesus, as you are one so help us become one  
In this way we love Jesus  
Break down walls

Psalm 133 A song of ascents. Of David. 1 How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore

## Faithful 'crammed into churches'

**Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in London say restrictive planning regulations have left many worshippers crammed into small buildings.**

The denominations have seen rapid growth and an estimated 350 London churches want bigger premises.

A report by CAG Consultants said that a "huge unmet need for expansion" has been held back by lack of cultural awareness among planning authorities.



Evangelical and Pentecostal churches have been growing rapidly

Churches want rules changed to let them move to areas earmarked for employment.

### Degrees of desperation

Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in London - many of which have a majority of black members - have grown rapidly, Pentecostal churches by two-thirds in the last decade.

A survey of 22 of the 33 London Boroughs by CAG Consultants found that "a lack of knowledge about faith and cultural awareness" among planners had created a "substantial barrier to expansion".

BBC religious affairs correspondent Robert Pigott said that one property consultant specialising in churches told how he was acting for 350 in varying degrees of desperation to move.

The churches complain that planning regulations that discriminate against places of worship.