

**The Baptist Union of Great Britain
Faith and Unity Department**

THE JOURNEY

This document was sent to Council in March 2011 and unanimously approved.

INTRODUCTION

Diversity is the Lord's mark of creative ingenuity. It should bring us joy, vitality, excitement and rewarding challenges. Sadly, through sin, humanity has misused and abused this wonderful God given diversity. Humanity is united by its propensity to divide.

Thankfully through Christ we witness God reversing the effects of our sinfulness. As Christians we are called to work with God to see the kingdom come and God's will be done in a manner that reflects the heavenly picture of every nation, tribe, people and language living and worshipping together, on earth as in heaven.

To achieve this goal we must address and overcome the sin of racism, which the Baptist Union of Great Britain fully recognizes to be present among individual Baptists, our churches, associations, colleges, central offices and structures. This will be painful. Yet, as we do so and embrace the riches that each brings, not only will the Baptist family be enriched, but we will also be empowered to proclaim the gospel of reconciliation and renewal to a divided and broken world with credibility, because we will be seen to practice what we preach.

Recommendation: The Baptist Union of Great Britain wholeheartedly endorses the report's recommendations as ones that will lead us to become the people that God wants us to be for God's honour and glory.

DEFINITION

The word 'multicultural' is used throughout the recommendations that follow. It is a word that has been under intense scrutiny, with some in public life openly questioning whether it is appropriate to pursue the goal of a multicultural society. Thus it is important to be clear what is meant by the use of this term.

The basic premise is that there is only one race – the human race. This is true both biologically and biblically. The human race is expressed in various 'ethnicities' that are in turn expressed through various 'cultures'. A 'culture' is the whole way of life of a people, and therefore it has many different dimensions. Language, gender, class, age, and religious practice, all play a part in shaping culture.

The word 'multicultural' is being used as a way of talking about diverse and distinct cultures living together and learning to interact with one another. It is not about each culture living separately, so creating self-contained ghettos. It is about valuing diversity, and recognising and respecting the contributions that can be made by different cultures to each other. It is not about each culture claiming a right to be accepted uncritically. It is about all cultures engaging in critical dialogue with each other, so that all can contribute to the building of community and a cohesive society.

Our conviction is that cultural diversity is a gift of God. Our churches need to strive to be multicultural so as to reflect the rich, grace-filled patterns that are part of our world and our society. And all our different cultural norms and practices need to be examined and challenged in the light of the gospel lived out in the life of Jesus.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Building Multicultural Congregations

Council calls upon the Faith and Unity Executive to listen and work with churches that desire to become multicultural and to gain an understanding of, and engagement with, the 'world church'. This will involve:

- a) The commissioning of research that will guide the planting and development of effective multicultural congregations.
- b) The development of resources to encourage culturally diverse worship.
- c) The development of resources that encourage congregations to welcome the stranger (Lev 19:33-34), including asylum seekers and refugees.
- d) The development of resources to assist understanding of, and engagement with, the diversity of Christian churches throughout the world.
- e) The development of multicultural theological resources to equip churches in their journey

In many multicultural inner-city communities the dominant expressions of church are struggling white and elderly congregations, declining in numbers and energy and often burdened by trying to maintain premises that are no longer fit for purpose, and vibrant young black-led congregations, often growing in numbers and sometimes struggling to find anywhere suitable to meet. There are encouraging examples of sharing facilities and of mixed congregations, but to a significant degree the churches reflect and reinforce ethnic division. Most of the growing congregations are unable to reach out effectively beyond their own ethnic constituency. Various strategies are required to address this situation. One of these may be the formation of multicultural church planting teams, commissioned to plant multicultural churches and modelling from the outset the multicultural communities they are planting. This strategy is under discussion within Urban Expression and with BMS World Mission.

These recommendations will take these plans forward. They will identify Baptists able to carry out the necessary research, pilot multicultural approaches to congregational planting, develop practical strategies and resources based on new and alternative approaches, work closely with the Mission Department, Associations, Colleges and churches, and develop and encourage partnerships with other appropriate organisations. Work already done on the sharing of buildings (see BUC Guidelines C5) will provide background guidance.

2. Training

Council calls upon the Faith and Unity Executive to listen and work with Colleges, Associations, and churches in developing effective multicultural training patterns to include:

- a) Programmes that are consistent with the needs of the particular Associations and the churches within them, the different Colleges, and Baptist House.
- b) A programme for ministerial formation and training in cross cultural understanding and communication.
- c) A programme for leaders of churches attempting to become more fully multicultural.

There is already significant experience of providing racial justice training within BUGB. Opportunity to participate in the 'We Belong' programme has been offered to all ministers over recent years, and the Colleges seek to provide students with the necessary training during their years of formation. Yet it is clear that this has been of limited value due to the very different and complex situations that Associations and churches find themselves in. A much greater responsiveness to particular agendas is needed.

The recommendations will be carried through by the Racial Justice Coordinator and the Racial Justice Group, working in close collaboration with Regional Teams, Colleges and church leaders, to ensure that all training is adaptable and meets the needs of their target audience. The 'We Belong' programme will continue to be revised, developed and extended as required. One particular way forward will be to resource and encourage the development of BME leadership within churches.

3. Multicultural Events

Council calls upon the Faith and Unity Executive to listen and work with Association teams and Baptist House in organising, shaping and participating in events that will reinforce the importance of cultural diversity. These will include:

- a) The Gathering event to happen regionally as well as nationally.
- b) A diverse range of celebratory multicultural events in Associations, Colleges and churches.

Different events have proved an effective way of enabling people to experience the value of being in a multicultural environment. As well as national events, there have been individual Associations and Colleges that have held events of significance, often with a particular focus, that provide models of best practice.

These recommendations aim to build on what continues to take place at present. They recognise that The Gathering has been predominantly London-focussed, and steps need to be taken to replicate this in other parts of the country, working in close collaboration with Associations. The planned events would aim to address such identified needs as lack of awareness, the presence of different ethnic communities, identification and encouragement of BME leaders around the country, the telling of stories, and the importance of empowerment issues.

4. Establishing Culturally Inclusive Structures

Council calls upon the Faith and Unity Executive to listen and work intentionally with all those involved in Baptist life to develop structures that are owned by representatives from both minority and majority cultures. This will include:

- a) Encouraging the presence and implementation of Equal Opportunity Policies throughout BUGB, particularly as they affect race and culture.
- b) Ensuring appropriate BME representation and involvement in BUGB Council, all committees, and other meetings and gatherings. Co-option policies should be used to provide an ethnic balance.
- c) Identify the challenges and address the issues that prevent full participation in BUGB Council and committee meetings.

The audit of Colleges, Association and Baptist House uncovered many examples of good practice. These included, not only the presence of policy statements on equal opportunities and genuine attempts to ensure diversity of representation, but also imaginative ways of making sure these proved effective ways of building multicultural awareness and engagement. However, there is still a significant way to go if structures are to be fully inclusive.

These recommendations will involve research as to the reasons why inclusion is achieved or why it is lacking, including identifying and disseminating models of good practice. Work will take place with Colleges and Associations to identify where a BME presence is lacking and how this can be addressed. Council co-options will be looked at, as well as the ways in which business takes place within the committees and executives of BUGB. Creative relationship building at all levels will be vital. Throughout the structures, the modelling of inclusive

leadership has been seen as a key concern, and so exploring patterns of multicultural leadership must be a priority.

5. Youth Leadership

Council calls upon the Faith and Unity Executive to work with Associations and churches in facilitating the development of the leadership skills of BME young people. This will include:

- a) Ensuring appropriate BME representation in any task group or working group set up to look at issues regarding children and young people.
- b) Developing new initiatives with an emphasis on equipping churches, youth workers and ministers to identify and nurture leadership skills in BME young people.

The Mission Department is already doing important work on issues around children's and youth work development. Similarly the Racial Justice Committee have taken significant initiatives, particularly in working with the Ascension Trust on issues around gang culture.

These recommendations will look to work with the Mission Department to ensure outcomes of work with young people include a BME dimension. Connections will be made in order to seek to bring various pieces of work together, and to identify and respond to the particular issues and concerns faced by BME young people.

6. Baptist House

Council calls upon the Faith and Unity Executive to work with the staff at Baptist House to:

- a) Examine all BUGB structures and relationships to ensure they reflect a full commitment to being a multicultural Union.
- b) Ensure that all staff working for BUGB receive appropriate training in issues of racial equality.
- c) Ensure that publicity, communications and resources prepared by Baptist House on behalf of BUGB continue to reflect a commitment to racial equality.

The location of Baptist House offers limited opportunities to employ staff from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and this is a weakness that cannot easily be addressed. This highlights the need for an increased awareness of this lack, and the steps required to address it.

The recommendations require that a careful audit takes place of Baptist House, to identify the steps needed to ensure all aspects of the work reflect a commitment to an inclusive agenda. Regular race equality training must be a priority for all who work at Baptist House, and others who occupy key positions within the structures. Intentional opportunities need to be created for multicultural encounters for staff.

CONCLUSION

It will take time to follow through on the various recommendations outlined above. It will be the responsibility of the Racial Justice Group, supported and guided by the Faith and Unity Executive, to determine priorities, timeline and budget, and to ensure the delivery of the various pieces of work agreed by Council.

The implementation and adoption of each of the six recommendations will lead to a radical shift in attitude, behaviour and culture, and give the tools to Associations, Colleges and churches to take crucial steps forward in building of a multicultural Union.

*Faith and Unity Department
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