

[Article] Diversity in Worship: Applying a Process for Artistic Multicultural Practices in Emerging Multiethnic Church Plants



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Diverse ethnic communities surround many churches in global metropolitan areas. These communities encompass different languages and cultural styles of art and music. Many churches, however, practice monocultural worship styles, with English as the dominant language and Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) as the dominant cultural style in the United States. Churches integrating multiple cultural artistic elements welcome people from various ethnicities and display a vision of heavenly worship and God's heart for the nations. Churches must adjust typical monocultural conceptions to integrate multiple cultures into church life. This article demonstrates a strong theological foundation for churches striving to incorporate artistic multicultural elements within services. After comparing four approaches to multicultural worship, I apply a process for developing multicultural artistic practices within smaller churches or new church plants. I focus here on examples from the United States, but many of the concepts may also apply, with modifications, for different cultures and countries.

Multicultural worship within North America is becoming increasingly necessary, especially as many cities become more diverse. All churches, even those less diverse, benefit from including multicultural worship practices. Churches practicing multicultural worship display the global nature of the church and increase their cultural sensitivity. Many examples and approaches from missiological, historical, and liturgical literature support the application of including multicultural artistic practices in the church. However, many churches may question how to appropriately implement multicultural elements within services. Other churches may argue they do not have the resources or time to implement multicultural worship. This article presents an approachable, gradual process for practicing multicultural worship in any context with the resources available.

As a worship team leader in a small church plant, even with cross-cultural artistic training, I found it intimidating to know how and when to introduce multicultural worship practices especially when I considered our small fifty-member church and three-to-six-person worship team. In the first few years, Impact Church, located in the Washington, DC, metro area, found itself growing in diversity. They began like most churches, with a monocultural worship style of typical CCM and modern hymns. After recognizing the diversity of the congregation and community, the church desired to represent and welcome the cultures and languages of their community within worship services. Impact Church began the process of implementing multicultural worship practices one step at a time, the basis for the approach explained in this article.

Theological and Cultural Foundations

What does Scripture say about the worship of the nations? Is it necessary for all churches to work toward developing multicultural worship in our church services? What is the relationship between culture, art, and

worship? I briefly answer these questions below, establishing a theological and cultural foundation for multicultural worship services.

Theological Basis for Multicultural Worship

Revelation 7:9–10 (ESV) provides the central vision of eternal multicultural worship: “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb . . . and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” In *Contextualizing the Faith*, A. Scott Moreau summarizes this passage, connecting its relevance to gospel contextualization on earth:

This wonderful picture is a simultaneous blend of uniformity . . . and diversity. . . . I imagine everyone speaking their first or heart language, but all of us understanding one another. This massive gathering of worshipers does not homogenize them: they retain their ancestral and linguistic frames of reference. But they are clearly unified in worship of God and Christ. I see this as a marvelous image characterizing contextualization. (2018, 2)

The picture of heaven is a vision of eternity but also a guide for believers living out God’s Kingdom on earth, as well as “the end goal toward which the church in mission should strive and move today” (Tizon 2018, 120). Though this passage does not prescribe a direct command for the current church, including multiple languages and cultures within worship practices displays this kingdom vision in the church and community.

Scripture makes clear God’s heart for the nations and his desire for all peoples to praise him. Many psalms combine God’s heart for the nations with singing. Psalm 67 says we are blessed so we may make God known among the nations. Verses three and four declare, “Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy.” Psalm 96:1 commands us to “sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth!” and verse three says, “declare his glory among the nations.” God commands us to sing his praise among the nations.

Sandra Maria Van Opstal states that “the primary reasons we should pursue multi-cultural worship, however, are neither pragmatic nor trends, but biblical community and mission” (2022, 23). Mission, making Christ known among the nations, should be the church’s identity and core focus directing how they live out their activities, including worship. Michael Goheen reminds us that “missions is the task of every congregation and of the whole church together taking the whole gospel to the whole world” (2014, 412). This mission often involves crossing geographical boundaries. However, the church must also cross cultural boundaries among the diverse peoples of the United States, especially in metropolitan areas.

Multiethnic Churches and Cultural Sensitivity

Churches growing more ethnically diverse must alter their services and activities to acknowledge and welcome people from multiple cultures. “The world is increasingly diverse, and the church has the opportunity to welcome worshipers. If we do not develop worship practices that resonate with a variety of people’s longings, we may lose more people” (Van Opstal 2022, 28).

A growing number of churches in the Western world recognize the need for multiethnic and multicultural ministry. Harvey Kwiyani, African missionary to the United States, notes that Western Christianity will continue growing culturally diverse as more people migrate to North America and Europe. This growth represents the need for multiple diverse voices speaking into Christian practice, where for example, African Christians contribute their

perspectives on theology and mission. Kwiyani also recognizes that “as the West becomes more culturally diverse—moving toward multiculturalism kicking and screaming—so shall Western Christianity” (2014, 134). Ideally, churches choose to welcome this burgeoning multiculturalism with open arms toward people of all nations and ethnicities, to emulate and demonstrate God’s heart for the nations seen in Scripture.

Soong-Chan Rah challenges churches to cultivate cross-cultural intelligence to understand and bridge the divide between the many cultures in services. Churches must “engage the surrounding culture, rather than reject and flee from it” (Rah 2010, 74). Gaining cross-cultural intelligence includes learning about the cultural expressions, worldviews, racial issues, and power dynamics in multiethnic contexts (Rah 2010). Multiethnic churches need to work through issues such as discrimination, politics, lack of hospitality, and cultural identity. Multicultural churches must also develop new theological tools, cross-cultural leadership models, and commit to mutual learning for authentic and effective missional partnerships among Christians from different cultures (Kwiyani 2014).

The scope of multicultural ministry is much broader than Sunday morning worship services, so churches must foster a vision for global worship in all aspects of church activities. Alongside adjusting worship practices, churches can pray for the community, learn about the cultures around them, start cross-cultural Bible studies, and practice hospitality to all peoples (Hawn 2013).

Foundations for Cultural Artistic Creativity in Worship

The Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture recognized four ways Christian worship relates to culture from a biblical and historical perspective. First, worship is transcultural; certain aspects of Christian liturgy from Scripture remain the same across cultures, providing global unity between churches. Second, worship is contextual, so it must be expressed through local cultural forms, critically chosen to convey the important message of the gospel. Third, worship is countercultural, transforming sinful aspects of culture contradictory to Scripture. Finally, worship is cross-cultural. Sharing music and art “across cultural barriers helps enrich the whole Church and strengthen the sense of the communion of the Church” (Farhadian 2007, 289).

Returning to the central vision of worship in heaven, “arts ministry provides a foretaste of the feast to come, a brief hint of our future existence in the City of Light, a place where beauty and celebration will be our chief goal and delight” (Bauer 2013, 293). Many worship practices contain artistic elements, accomplishing purposes such as providing a context for people to worship, proclaiming and interpreting Scripture in fresh engaging ways, producing a meaningful enactment of connecting with the body of Christ, and approaching the presence of God (Bauer 2013).

Jay Moon also recognizes the powerful effect of artistic forms in discipleship, reminding believers God has already placed artistic expressions within cultures that communicate deeply to heart issues. “Various genres in culture provide fertile ground for discipleship, including un-written forms of expression (oral literature), such as symbols, rituals, proverbs, stories, music, dance, and holistic means” (Moon 2017, 66). Artistic forms lend themselves to gospel contextualization within cultures, paving the way for cultural transformation. Forms like indigenous song, drama, dance, and visual art transmit Christian truth as oral theology in memorable and meaningful forms (Moreau 2018).

Multicultural Worship Approaches and Models

Churches desiring to integrate multicultural worship into services may draw from several helpful models and resources. I compared four resources: two sets of multiethnic worship models, an assessment tool, and development stages. I then synthesized these four resources into an applied process for churches to grow in multicultural worship practice. Comparing and contrasting these approaches demonstrate helpful guidelines, vision, and direction for multicultural worship ministry.

Ian Collinge's "Multicultural Worship Assessment Tool" offers a valuable beginning for a church seeking to move from monocultural to multicultural worship (Collinge 2013). His updated writing on intercultural worship recognizes six approaches to cultural diversity in worship (Collinge 2023). Churches may use the assessment and approaches to consider areas weak in diversity and acceptance of other cultures and then consider the best approach for their context. Table 1 summarizes the assessment and six approaches.

Table 1. Collinge's Multicultural Worship Assessment and Approaches (Collinge 2013; 2023).

1. Monocultural Inheritance: unity without diversity, assimilation. "Sing our songs"	2. Multi-Congregational Independence: diversity without unity, separate worship. "Sing your songs in your own groups"	3. Multicultural Inclusion: unity with invited diversity, rotational. "Sing your songs for us"	4. Intercultural Integration: unity with blended diversity. "Let's sing one another's songs"	5. Intercultural Innovation: unity with creative diversity, fusion. "Let's create/arrange songs together"	6. Intercultural Involvement: collaborative rotational. "You lead, we'll support, in turns"
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James Krabill notes that in many parts of Africa, churches historically went through six stages of music development before creating their own locally composed worship music. In many cases, churches began using music introduced by foreign missionaries. The six stages range from importation of completely Western songs to creation of indigenous music styles within worship. Krabill's development stages, although based on church music in Africa, align with Collinge's assessment tool to help churches evaluate their worship music diversity. I summarize Krabill's stages in table 2.

Worship Together in Your Church as in Heaven, by Josh Davis and Nikki Lerner, and *The Next Worship*, by Van Opstal, are key texts for any church or worship leader seeking guidance for multicultural worship. Each book presents four multicultural worship models as possibilities for use within church services. These models include practical ideas for encouraging multicultural worship and cross-cultural relationships within churches.

Table 2. Krabill's Six Stages of Music Development (Krabill 2008).

1. Importation: uses only "Western" genres	2. Adaptation: English songs translated to non-Western languages	3. Alteration: Western song modified with a different cultural style or language	4. Imitation: locally produced songs inspired by Western styles	5. Indigenization: locally produced in indigenous forms and styles	6. Internationalization: songs from the global faith family incorporated in life and worship of the church
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The four models in each book, while similar, include various strengths and weaknesses making each one appropriate for different contexts. Table 3 provides a comparison of the four different models in each book as they relate to each other. All churches should consider these resources when developing multicultural worship practices.

Table 3. Models of Multicultural Worship (Davis and Lerner 2015; Van Opstal 2022).

Davis and Lerner	Exhibit B—Static Main/Rotating Multiple Sides Model: same musical style and language, with one multilingual song added	Exhibit A—Rotating Main/Rotating Side Model: most of service in rotating style; one element in another style	Smorgasbord/Constant Blending Model: no one dominant cultural style; variety of musical genres and languages	New Cultural Space/Fusion Model: combines musical styles from different cultures created from your community
Van Opstal	Acknowledgment: dominant style with a hint of other styles	Collaborative Rotation: The leader(s) brings the cultural style and other components of the form	Blended: The equal representation of two or more styles	Fusion: Mixing styles or creating original music

Progression to Multicultural Maturity in Worship

I compared the above models, synthesized them, and applied an approach helpful for smaller churches: “Steps to Multicultural Maturity in Worship.” This process integrates many of the ideas from the approaches already mentioned, but it highlights the progressive nature of growing into a multicultural congregation over time. It goes beyond an assessment by providing practical steps to apply multicultural elements in services. It also allows for experimenting with different models while growing and developing over time, without needing to commit to only one approach. In addition, churches following these steps have freedom to begin with the resources available while continuing to take the next steps of maturity in multicultural artistic practices. I incorporate some similar terms from the original examples but use the term “artistic” in each step, challenging churches to think beyond music and song within worship services. In addition to the four models above, I also incorporated methodology from the Creating Local Arts Together (CLAT) process in each step (Schrag 2013; Schrag and Rowe 2020). I see the Steps to Multicultural Maturity as a step-by-step practical process to apply gradually over time rather than just an assessment or specific model to implement at once. This makes it more approachable for smaller churches or church plants with limited resources and people. Table 4 shows an overview of the applied process “Steps to Multicultural Maturity in Worship.”

Table 4. Steps to Multicultural Maturity in Worship.

1. Artistic Isolation: dominant or monocultural forms only	2. Artistic Awareness: separate services or occasional dominant style translation	3. Artistic Introduction: occasional multilingual elements in service	4. Artistic Inclusion: more multilingual elements added over time	5. Artistic Integration: multiple global artistic forms, languages used weekly	6. Intercultural Artistic Creation: new art created from diverse styles and languages
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Through this process, a church should be motivated to move from monocultural worship toward multicultural maturity, taking their next step to better display the heavenly vision of all nations united in worshipping God. If a pastor or worship leader chooses just one “model for multicultural worship,” they may become comfortable without ever growing in multicultural maturity. “Churches see this as the goal rather than a step toward deeper solidarity and mutuality” (Van Opstal 2022, 105). Leaders must choose an approach with vision and intentionality to move toward their goal, rather than picking a model that seems practical at the time (Van Opstal 2022). Table 5 compares the different models and approaches.¹

Step 1: Artistic Isolation

The starting point for many congregations is *artistic isolation*. Their worship services consist of a dominant cultural style or the same monocultural style every week in the dominant language. In the United States, this is the most likely default and the easiest option. Hopefully this article encourages churches to consider small steps to move beyond the default model. Monocultural church services in English may consist of traditional hymns or Contemporary Christian music (CCM) each week. Other monocultural examples include a majority African American church with English-language gospel music sung each week, or a Korean church with only Korean-language songs. Without realizing it, a church excludes cultural expressions from multiple people groups during worship and may inadvertently send the message that they are not hospitable to all people. “If one cultural expression of worship dominates, then the Sunday service does not feel welcoming” (Rah 2010, 170). Rah challenges this attitude, revealing that some people may even find monocultural worship services hostile and culturally insensitive (2010).

Some churches call themselves multiethnic with multiple ethnicities present in the service, but the worship only reflects the majority culture. David Anderson, pastor of Bridgeway Community Church states,

A church that has settled on one style of specialized or ethnic music as their mainstream is probably unicultural, not multicultural. Even if the church is multicolored, it may still be classified in style and substance as a white church or a black church. Multiple colors of skin within a church do not a multicultural church make! A vibrant multicultural church allows multiple cultures freedom of expression through a variety of art forms. (2004, 110)

¹ Note that the approaches and models may appear in different orders than originally written, for the purpose of comparison to similar models on the chart.

Table 5. Multicultural Worship Comparison Chart.

Collinge's Approaches	Krabill's Stages	Davis and Lerner Models	Van Opstal Models	Steps to Maturity
Monocultural Inheritance: unity without diversity, assimilation. "Sing our songs."	Importation: originate with "Western" genres			1. Artistic Isolation: Dominant monocultural style used every week in dominant language
Multi-Congregational Independence: diversity without unity. Distinct ethnic groups/churches worship separately. "Sing your songs in your groups."	Adaptation: English songs translated to non-Western languages			2. Artistic Awareness: Occasional translations of dominant culture songs to other language, or separate services for different language groups.
Multicultural Inclusion: unity with invited diversity, rotational. "Sing your songs to us."	Alteration: Western song-tune replaced or modified with a different cultural style or new text in different language	Exhibit B—Static Main/Rotating Multiple Sides Model: same musical style and language, with one multilingual song added	Acknowledgment: dominant style with a hint of other styles	3. Artistic Introduction: Multilingual element added to dominant language service on special occasions.
Intercultural Involvement: collaborate rotational. "You lead, we'll support, in turns."	Imitation: locally produced songs inspired by Western genre	Exhibit A—Rotating Main/Rotating Side Model: most of service in rotating style; one element in another style	Collaborative Rotation: The leader(s) brings the cultural style and other components of the form	4. Artistic Inclusion: Multilingual elements more frequent, indigenous songs in other languages added.
Intercultural Integration: unity with blended diversity. "Let's sing one another's songs."	Indigenization: locally produced in indigenous forms and styles	Smorgasbord/Constant Blending Model: no one dominant cultural style, variety of musical genres and languages	Blended: The equal representation of two or more styles	5. Artistic Integration: Incorporate multiple global music/art styles, songs, languages weekly in services
Intercultural Innovation: unity with creative diversity; fusion. "Let's create/arrange songs together."	Internationalization: songs from the global faith family incorporated in life and worship of the church	New Cultural Space/Fusion Model: combines musical styles from different cultures created from your community	Fusion: Mixing styles or creating original music	6. Intercultural Artistic Creation: Creating new songs and artistic elements with diverse styles and languages.

This first step involves a church acknowledging their cultural and artistic isolation, then they can begin to assess their practices and resources. Recognizing then assessing your church's dominant musical styles, cultural expressions, and languages within the service, moves the church toward the next step of awareness.

The first conversation in the Creating Local Arts Together (CLAT) method—Meet a Community and Its Arts—involves gathering information about languages, artistic preferences, and social habits of the community (Schrag 2013). This can be applied at the beginning stages in the multicultural worship context. As one example, performing a formal or informal survey related to culture, language, and artistic backgrounds of church members could provide new insight into the community. Including the surrounding neighborhoods and community in this discovery process will provide the church with an outward focus to consider people in their potential places of influence. This helps them discover the cultures, languages, and artistic resources available in the church and community, and provides opportunity for connection to the larger community.

At Impact Church, our services consisted of a monocultural worship style of typical CCM and modern hymns. However, we met in a culturally diverse neighborhood with families from many different nations surrounding the school where we met. We began to recognize the diverse languages and nationalities represented among our church members and visitors, including Spanish speakers, Korean, Chinese, and others.

Step 2: Artistic Awareness

Churches move from artistic isolation to *artistic awareness* when they recognize the nations and cultures in their community. Churches at this step are aware of the need for multicultural worship, and desire to welcome diverse ethnicities. One possibility is to hold separate services for each language group, or perhaps to translate parts of the service into other languages. This solution shows an awareness of different cultures and languages, but it keeps them separate, lacking true unity while sending the message “sing your songs in your own groups” (Collinge 2023, 132).

In certain contexts, groups may prefer to remain in their own ethnic church communities, especially first-generation immigrants. These ethnic church communities solidify cultural identity and help newer generations value cultural distinctives. For example, in the early twentieth century, an influx of Korean immigrants arriving in the United States started ethnically Korean churches. These churches became important social centers retaining Korean cultural identity and community in a new land (Pak et al. 2005). In the 1990s, many African immigrants started their own churches for similar reasons. They also started African churches in response to the struggles of racial discrimination, feeling unwelcome in American churches and unable to express their cultural styles of worship in Western congregations (Kwiyani 2014).

As English-speaking churches begin to recognize people from all nations and languages attending their churches and living in their neighborhoods, they must intentionally plan to cross cultural boundaries and welcome all ethnicities. Many services will continue to include a majority of English or the dominant language and art forms, but any church can take small steps to highlight other cultures within a service. Churches introducing diverse artistic cultural forms in worship show hospitality and affirm the numerous cultural identities of God's image bearers.

Churches and leaders walking toward multicultural maturity in this process must together consider their ultimate goals and purpose for introducing artistic multicultural elements into services and church life. One tool to use for this comes from the CLAT conversation: Specify Kingdom Goals (Schrag 2013; Schrag and Rowe 2020). In

this step, a church considers its strengths and challenges and chooses a goal to work toward as they pursue multicultural maturity. Some of these goals may include welcoming others into worship, affirming cultural identities, displaying unity of the global church, casting the heavenly vision of Revelation 7:9, expressing God’s creativity, teaching cultural empathy, and sharing good news to all peoples and languages.

As worship leader of Impact Church, together with my pastor, leadership team, and worship team, we began to consider the people from diverse cultures attending our church and present in the surrounding neighborhood. We recognized the value of that diversity and desired to welcome and affirm people from multiple cultural and linguistic backgrounds. We also wanted to display the unity of the global body of Christ and the vision of all peoples, languages, and nations worshipping God together. These goals and motivations moved us toward finding ways to introduce cultural and linguistic diversity into our services and church life.

Step 3: Artistic Introduction

To move further toward the goal of multicultural worship, a congregation may start with *artistic introduction*. This could involve adding a multilingual element to the dominant language service, perhaps on special occasions. “When you speak someone’s heart language, it communicates that you value that person” (Davis and Lerner 2015, 154). First, a congregation should consider the languages spoken in their church and community. Next, a church can begin including these languages in text or speech during a service. Davis and Lerner suggest introducing a variety of languages through a “Welcome” screen or sign, greeting times, Scripture reading, prayer, song lyrics on the screen (even if not sung in that language), or background music before and after service. These examples demonstrate a starting point for churches with small or limited resources; however, this step should also propel them to continue toward greater depth in their multicultural worship journey.

This step builds upon the information gathered in step one after surveying the languages and artistic resources present in the church and community. Continuing to apply the CLAT process at this stage involves conversation 3 of connecting the goals from step two to appropriate artistic forms. The examples above may be considered as possibilities for the initial artistic elements to introduce at this point, as they relate to the languages and art forms present in the church.

At Impact Church, the practical tools from Davis and Lerner provided clarity and encouragement for us to consider the languages, people, and resources in our church. So we moved into this step of artistic introduction by first introducing Scripture passages read in Spanish and Korean, the two most represented languages in our church besides English. Initially, we introduced multilingual elements only on special occasions, such as Christmas and Easter, or once every few months.

Step 4: Artistic Inclusion

After a church occasionally introduces multilingual elements in a service, their next step should move to *artistic inclusion* by adding more multicultural artistic elements over time. At this step, churches must include more intentional and frequent artistic multicultural elements rather than saving them only for special occasions. In addition to adding multilingual elements during the service through prayers, announcements, and Scripture readings, the congregation should also begin to include multilingual songs each month. Ideas from Davis and Lerner (2015, 148, 161–62) suggest the following ideas:

- Sing one word or phrase from a familiar song in a different language.
- Sing a verse in English and a verse in a different language.

- Sing a chorus or bridge in a different language each repetition.
- Sing a chorus simultaneously in different languages.
- Sing a medley with a familiar song and a global song portion.
- Sing a call-response song in a different language.
- Sing a global worship song in a language that connects to your community.²

Other ideas for introducing diverse cultural art forms include displaying global visual artwork to illustrate the sermon topic or showing videos of drama or dance from a global church. Consider the artistic talents and cultural backgrounds of the people in your congregation. Perhaps they can contribute examples from their home culture through visual art, poetry, dance, instruments, drama, or other forms.

The new multilingual song arrangements or artistic forms should be accessible, introduced gradually with adequate explanation as the church learns this practice (Collinge 2013). The best songs to introduce are original songs written in the language and musical style of the represented culture. Historically, in exporting Western Christianity globally, the trend was to take Western songs and translate them into other languages, many times ignoring indigenous instruments and song styles. However, using translated music presents many issues, may miscommunicate, and cannot be an effective long-term solution (Krabill 2008).

Learning songs in a foreign language and appreciating different cultural styles of art may be challenging, but it offers an opportunity to experience God's heart for the nations. "Studying worship in Christianity worldwide cultivates a living awareness of the breadth of God's activities over space" (Farhadian 2007, 284). Experiencing and learning global worship practices challenges the believer to consider how they may deepen their own worship practices. Schrag also provides helpful artistic analysis tools to assist in learning the art forms of different cultures as part of the CLAT process (Schrag 2013; Schrag and Rowe 2020). Learning global artistic styles should also help the believer reflect on God's work among peoples around the world to draw all people into authentic worship.

Impact Church practiced artistic inclusion by asking Spanish and Korean speakers for songs in their languages, beginning with simple choruses containing short lines and simple phrases. Even without a Spanish or Korean vocalist on our worship team, we invited a native speaker to coach us in proper pronunciation or to join the team as a guest vocalist for that specific song. We also learned new songs through the helpful resources of Proskuneo, from their multilingual song videos and chord charts.³

Each time we introduced a song in a language other than English, we explained the vision for multicultural worship, and taught the new phrases to the congregation first. The congregation, especially native Korean and Spanish speakers, always showed excitement during the multilingual songs. Planning the multilingual songs for worship sets always took significant time to find or arrange chord charts, learn and practice as a worship team, and then prepare correct slides with lyrics and translations. For these reasons, it was difficult to do more often than every few months. As our church and worship team grew more diverse, the pastor encouraged us to set an intentional goal of making it more regular. We began singing multilingual songs at least once or twice a month and began learning multilingual songs with more diverse musical styles. We also used a visual artistic form—henna

² Multilingual and global song resources (recordings, chord charts, PowerPoints, and so forth) can be found here: <https://proskuneo.org/>; <https://songs2serve.eu/songs>; <http://ethnos.us/resources/the-ethnos-project/>.

³ See <https://proskuneo.org/resources/song-library/> and <https://www.youtube.com/@ProskuneoMinistries>.

designs from India drawn on the hand and accompanied with Bible stories—in our local outreach and occasionally in the worship service.

Step 5: Artistic Integration

A natural progression for a church would be to start occasionally introducing simple multilingual elements, then include multilingual songs more regularly, and then move to *artistic integration*. A church at this step integrates multiple cultural artistic forms and languages in services each week. This step relates to Collinge’s fourth approach, “Intercultural Integration,” demonstrating unity with blended diversity where churches “sing one another’s songs together” (Collinge 2013, 440; 2023, 135). Similar to the Blended and Constant Blending models of multicultural worship, artistic integration includes an equal representation of two or more cultural music styles each week integrating a variety of elements and languages in the service and fellowship (Van Opstal 2022; Davis and Lerner 2015).

For this level of multicultural artistic integration to occur, a church should also incorporate diverse expressions, with instruments from different countries, global dance styles, drama, and displayed visual art in cultural styles (Davis and Lerner 2015). “These contextual ways of worship pave the way for authentic encounters with God; without them, worship can devolve into transcendent irrelevance” (Tizon 2018, 141). Integrating multiple art forms and cultural styles in worship provides an opportunity for everyone to worship from their heart and express the creativity God placed within all cultures.

Churches integrating multicultural art forms must practice cultural sensitivity to avoid possible cultural appropriation. Displaying cultural sensitivity involves taking a humble posture as a learner of culture, developing authentic relationships with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, choosing languages and cultures represented in the congregation and community, including native speakers in the planning stages, respectfully presenting the multicultural elements in worship through sharing the vision, and welcoming and praying for the cultures represented.

At Impact Church, we carefully considered all these issues and walked through the steps one at a time. We began at step one of recognizing and understanding our church community and its languages, cultures, and artistic resources. Then we carefully considered our kingdom centered goals to display unity and welcome people from diverse cultures. Before introducing multicultural elements into our services, we first built relationships together, invited input from people of various backgrounds, and included native speakers in our worship planning. We also invested additional time in learning multilingual songs, preparing appropriate multilingual Scriptures and lyrics, and incorporating diverse and multilingual graphics on the screen.

Step 6: Intercultural Artistic Creation

A church growing in multicultural maturity integrates art from many cultures, changes worship service structures to reflect diverse styles, practices hospitality with cultural sensitivity, and operates with diverse leadership (Davis and Lerner 2015). The sixth step of multicultural maturity in worship results in artistic input from multiple cultures, where *intercultural artistic creation* regularly occurs.

The term “intercultural” indicates a mutual exchange between cultures. Jay Moon advocates for intercultural discipleship, explaining that “an intercultural approach combines the strengths of various cultures over various time periods in order to overcome the limitations of individual cultures and generations” (2017, 3). Al Tizon also notes that “intercultural worship celebrates who God is and what God has done (and is doing) in the powerful

creativity of the Holy Spirit in the context of diverse cultures.” (2018, 141). In addition, Collinge explains “intercultural worship” as the outcome of sharing and fellowship between diverse cultures as they connect with God together (2023, 128). Because many cultural differences and behaviors emerge in multicultural contexts, Rah claims multiethnic churches may need to create or move toward a new third culture which “transcends existing norms” and develops an ability to include the “full spectrum of culture” (2010, 108).

Intercultural artistic creation relates to Krabill’s stage 6, or Internationalization, indicating cross-cultural music where churches incorporate musical styles and lyrics from the global church into their local worship. Krabill observes that “internationalization of music encounters holds great promise for the church because it moves us ever closer to that ultimate encounter described in Revelation 7:9–10” (2008, 75).

In this step, a multicultural church and worship team can begin creating new songs and artistic elements that reflect the diverse cultural styles and languages present in the church and community. The Creating Local Arts Together (CLAT) process should be applied more fully here, specifically focusing on step five sparking creativity (Schrag 2013). The church can discuss and discern a kingdom goal, choose an appropriate artistic form, and create something new together during a workshop or regular creative gatherings. If a church has been incorporating some of those CLAT tools along the way, as introduced in each step above, then they will be well prepared to understand the gifts and resources available to take this next step of creating new art together for the church and community.

This creativity may take shape in various ways. It can include new arrangements and instrumentation of songs reflecting diverse cultural styles or fusion of multiple languages and styles into a new artistic expression. It should also go beyond musical elements to include the creation of visual art, drama, and storytelling in languages and cultural styles represented in the community and integrated into church life and practice. A church can also host an event that provides opportunities for people to present their cultural art forms.

Artistic creativity may appear an impossible task for small, volunteer worship teams and church plants, but God is the One who gives the creativity. “The ongoing task of shepherding creativity throughout history is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Creative Spirit who stands astride history and makes all things new” (Bauer 2013, 165).

Implementation of Steps to Multicultural Maturity in Worship

These six steps help a congregation evaluate where they are in their multicultural worship journey. Then it serves to guide the church to next steps for growth in multicultural worship maturity. This process highlights the progressive nature of growth from one step to another, serving to lead churches closer toward displaying the heavenly worship vision of Revelation 7:9 here on earth.

Even with a model, tool, or approach for multicultural worship, there are many obstacles to overcome. Some of those obstacles include lack of awareness of the theological vision, lack of qualified people to lead, and lack of skills and resources (Bailey 2013). Even deeper obstacles exist, such as “ignorance of other cultures, preference for one’s own culture, fear of the different, and grave concern that certain practices different from one’s own are somehow sacrilegious. Intercultural worship requires intentionality, determination, and creativity” (Tizon 2018, 142).

“Artful worship” must be done in a spirit of celebration with excellence and understanding. This requires intentional planning by the leaders and worship team and involves developing habits of worship that can be understood or appreciated by all attending. Introducing multicultural artistic forms in worship services requires explanation of the vision from Scripture, and intentional teaching of multilingual and multicultural elements for the

congregation to learn and understand the new cultural forms and styles (Bauer 2013; Davis and Lerner 2015). The more languages, cultures, and artistic forms included in a service, the greater the potential difficulty of understanding for some; but it will also enrich the hospitality and global sensitivity of the congregation.

This approach to multicultural maturity in worship is a starting point, and the practical application may look different in each context. Davis and Lerner encourage leaders to look at the resources within their congregation and begin with one small step. Instead of being intimidated by the challenge of multicultural worship, leaders can take inventory of the languages, cultures, and art forms God has placed in their congregation, and start from there (Davis and Lerner 2015). It will be difficult and challenging, but as Kwiyani shares, “cultural diversity is always a great thing for Christianity. It looks risky, and most of the time it does not work out easily, but the freshness of life that it brings is worth the risk” (2014, 134).

Conclusion

There is a strong biblical basis for developing multicultural worship based on God’s heart for the nations and the heavenly vision of people from all cultures and languages worshiping God together. Christians display this Kingdom purpose on earth by crossing cultural boundaries within their churches and communities. Churches enrich their worship by creatively employing multiple artistic forms and cultural practices in their services. As churches take steps away from monocultural music and art, they begin to experience the richness of intercultural worship as they integrate global cultural styles in the life of the church. Hopefully, intercultural worship also develops the church members’ cultural sensitivity and intercultural competence as they unite with the global body of believers and express God’s heart for the nations. Intercultural artistic expression leads to a more welcoming environment where people from multiple ethnicities and languages worship together as a diverse church body.

A Korean American church and worship team member at Impact Church shared her reaction to singing Korean language songs in our multiethnic church. She said it showed an “intentionality that we do see you, we do hear you. It made me feel acknowledged or appreciated or seen. Giving people opportunity to sing in their native language is an act of love. It creates a sense of belonging.” Regarding her experience of coming into a predominantly English-speaking American church after attending Korean churches, she noted, “Coming into American church was uncomfortable. [Singing multilingual songs in worship] alleviates some of that anxiety.”⁴

Steps to Multicultural Maturity in Worship illustrates a helpful approach to employ when developing multicultural worship practices. Churches may use this as a guide to assess their current state of multicultural maturity, solidify their goal and vision, and take their next steps in multicultural worship. Practicing diverse multicultural worship celebrates the beauty and creativity God has placed within all cultures. Multicultural artistic expression helps the church welcome and affirm people from all ethnicities, as they pursue unity and intercultural exchange among the global body of Christ.

⁴ Anonymous, call with author, November 12, 2022.

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