

# Unity in Diversity



<b>Contents</b>	PAGE
<b>Leader's Guide</b> .....	2
<b>Bible Study</b> A CHURCH FOR ALL PEOPLE <i>by E. V. Hill</i> .....	3
<b>Interview</b> BUILDING A CHURCH OF DIVERSITY <i>interview with Charles Lyons</i> .....	4-5
<b>Assessments</b> TUNING IN TO NEW PEOPLE <i>by Kori Leaman-Miller</i> .....	6
WELCOMING SINGLES IN THE FAMILY <i>by Susan Nikaido</i> .....	7-8
<b>Case Study</b> WORSHIPING WITH THE HOMELESS <i>by Steve Tomlinson</i> .....	9
<b>Devotionals</b> GOD'S GIFT OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY <i>by Regina Shands Stoltzfus</i> .....	10
THE GIVE AND TAKE OF TOGETHERNESS <i>by Anne Ortlund</i> .....	11
<b>How-To Articles</b> EDUCATIONAL DIFFERENCES ON THE BOARD <i>by Larry Osborne</i> .....	12
BUILDING MULTICULTURAL UNDERSTANDING <i>by William Fraher Abernathy</i> .....	13
BRIDGING THE GENERATION GAP <i>by Erik Johnson</i> .....	14
FROM DAMAGED SOULS TO TREASURED FAMILY <i>by Gordon MacDonald</i> .....	15
<b>Activity</b> BALANCING ON A CULTURAL TIGHTROPE <i>by Jim Townsend</i> .....	16
<b>Resources</b> FURTHER EXPLORATION.....	17
<b>Retreat Plan</b> .....	18



## Leader's Guide

*How to use "Unity in Diversity" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.*

Welcome to *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training*. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of *Leadership Resources at Christianity Today International*, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

*BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS* is not just another program. Each theme contains materials on the topic you choose—no tedious program to follow. The materials work when you want, where you want, and the way you want them to. They're completely flexible and easy to use.

You probably already have regularly scheduled meetings with board members or with other committees or groups of leaders. *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS* fits easily into what you're already doing. Here's how to use *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS* at the beginning of a board meeting or committee meeting:

**1. Select a learning tool.** In this theme of "Unity in Diversity," you'll find multiple types of handouts from which to choose:

- ◆ Bible study
- ◆ case study
- ◆ activity
- ◆ interview
- ◆ devotionals
- ◆ recommended resources
- ◆ assessment tools
- ◆ how-to articles

**2. Select a handout.** Suppose, for example, you want your board to learn from other churches that have become more diverse. You could select the interview with Charles Lyons, "Building a Church of Diversity" (pp. 4–5), or the case study, "Worshipping with the Homeless" (p. 9). Select the one that best fits what you want to accomplish.

**3. Photocopy the handout.** Let's say you selected "Building a Church of Diversity." Photocopy as many copies as you need—you do not need to ask for permission to photocopy any material from *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS* (as long as you are using the material in a church or educational setting and are not charging for it).

**4. Prepare for the discussion.** We recommend you read the Scripture passages and identify key discussion questions. How will you apply the principles to specific decisions your church is making?

**5. Lead the discussion.** Most handouts can be read within 5 minutes. After you have allowed time for reading, begin the discussion by asking one of the provided questions. Be ready to move the discussion to specific issues your church is facing.

Most *BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS* handouts can be discussed in 15 or 20 minutes (except the Bible study, which may take longer). Your board, committee, or team will still have plenty of time to discuss its agenda.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at [www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com](http://www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com).

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## A Church for All People

*Authentic worship translates to all cultures.*

Acts 2:1–47

### Read

Peter, in preaching the first sermon after the Pentecost, preached to a cross-cultural crowd, as the Scriptures attest: "...Jews from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5b). Obviously he spoke effectively to the people of many nations and tongues, for "about three thousand were added to their number that day" (Acts 2:41).

♦ *Read Acts 2:1–16, 36–41.*

### Reflect

Cross-cultural worship is and will be more and more in demand as our world becomes progressively culturally diverse. Our cities are ever increasing in population with the people of the world. Most come having been exposed to various religions and sundry practices of Christianity. They don't fit snugly into the Christian stereotype, and even the stereotype today is hardly singular. Churches are filled with dissimilar people with multiple experiences and expectations.

♦ *What is the significance of many nationalities hearing the same message in verses 4–12?*

Some people also arrive at church with a preconceived worship ideal—a style they experienced in the past that they want to rediscover. They search in vain to find a duplicate in their new world. Tragically, many churches try to imitate other, more "successful" churches. Though these imitators may become popular, they often lose their authenticity.

♦ *What can verses 38–41 teach us about spiritual authenticity?*

The conveyance of the message to the ears of people depends upon voice and language, but the conveyance of the message to the heart depends upon the Holy Spirit's response to our prayers. Cross-cultural barriers can look overwhelming from purely a communications standpoint. But the God who made cultures knows how to pierce them effectively with his message and, through his messengers, to the cultures.

♦ *Verse 42 says the believers devoted themselves to prayer. How can prayer help us break through cultural barriers?*

For the most part, people have an elementary understanding of the Word of God. Therefore, the more simple and unencumbered the message, the more effective it can be. It may not seem impressive, but it is much more likely to be received.

Communicating the Word of God to a wide range of people is a difficult task, but it is made easier as we stick to the basic, powerful message. The slow, simple delivery of the Word of God may well soak into the soul like a slow, soaking rain is absorbed into soil, without runoff or waste.

♦ *How did Peter keep his message simple in verses 14–36?*

—E. V. HILL. Adapted from *Leadership Handbooks of Practical Theology: Word and Worship* (Baker Book House, 1992), vol. 1. Used with permission.

### Discuss

1. Tell about a time when God answered your prayer for church unity or growth.
2. What is one thing we do in our worship service that is authentic to our congregation?
3. How do we communicate the gospel so everyone can grasp it? (For example, in our church bulletin, in a leaflet in the foyer, spoken regularly in service, etc.)



## Building a Church of Diversity

*Cross-cultural ministry is not an option.*

Acts 1:8

*Charles Lyons is pastor of Armitage Baptist Church in inner-city Chicago. In his 29 years there, the church has grown from a handful of Appalachian whites to a cosmopolitan congregation of 40-plus nationalities.*

### **BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: How did your church grow in diversity?**

When I was a teenager, God planted in my heart a vision of a church where all people would be welcome and comfortable. So when I came to this congregation, we developed the mentality to reach anybody, anywhere, any way we could.

I had no master plan. This is the result of God's doing. But we also have enabled this to happen. You can thwart God's will. We have avoided that by getting out of God's way.

I became aware of things that made a welcoming congregation. I tried to be sensitive to things that would be culturally relevant. Music is a huge thing. "Sing hymn #379, stand on the third verse, sit down and read the announcements, pray, stand up, do this song"—I knew that style would not fly in this setting. That's the style I grew up with, but I tried to minimize elements that would get in the way of a cross-cultural worship experience.

In an urban culture, people are big on party, on celebration. There's a freer approach to things and a focus on celebration, which the black church has mastered. That's why the black church has thrived in the face of hostility and oppression. Celebration is attractive; it has power.

Our church is now from 40 to 45 percent Hispanic, and there is a strong black presence. In our youth group, out of 15–20 kids in the core leadership group, two are Anglo. In the larger congregation there's a stronger Anglo presence, but there's also an Asian presence, as well as a group of international people. On Sunday morning we look like the United Nations.

### **Is a celebratory worship service the key to a diverse congregation?**

No one thing makes or breaks this. The celebration-type worship is an important component, but there's no way you can capture this in a simple technique. It starts with a vision that is rooted in biblical truth. Then it takes laborious, long-term work toward that vision. Since the worship experience is where everybody comes together, that's the most obvious piece you have to work with, and since music is a huge part of that, it factors in and is most easily identified.

Last Sunday morning we ended with a salsa number. We do Spanish, we do Swahili, we do gospel, we do hymns. So if you come, there is something that gets close to what is common to you. That's a way of affirming and celebrating your presence, recognizing you're here.

You can't drag people to church, but you can try to remove barriers that keep them from coming, and you can remove things that might keep them from returning.

### **With all the challenges churches face, why should every church strive to be more diverse?**

In Acts 1:8, Jesus was speaking to the first church in embryonic form. He expects each church to be supernaturally impactful—locally, regionally, cross-culturally, and globally. Cross-cultural is not an option.

We have been driven by the church-growth gurus. White people study everything. Instead of smelling the rose, we analyze the rose. So we studied growing churches, and we found that growing churches were in



**CHARLES LYONS**

*"Love is the great cross-cultural power. If I love you, I will do whatever I can to build a bridge to you."*



## Building a Church of Diversity *continued*

suburbs and they were all white. So the gurus said, “Churches grow homogenously.” We allowed the studies to dictate to us our strategy, and all the while we called ourselves Bible people. But if you’re Bible people, you let the Bible determine what you believe and how you go about what you’re doing, not trends and studies.

The first church in Jerusalem was ethnically diverse; they all adhered to the Jewish faith, but they weren’t all Jews by birth. They had all these proselytes, and by Acts 13 in Antioch they had a cross-cultural pastoral team. The model for the New Testament church is *all people*: we’re here for them; we’re not here for us. So the music I like is irrelevant. If I invite you over for dinner, and I know you’re from culture X, I am going to try to create an atmosphere in my home that welcomes you.

This is not about technique. It’s about vision, it’s about biblical truth, and it’s about heart. Love is the great cross-cultural power. If I love you, I will do whatever I can to build a bridge to you. That means I get out of my comfort zone. That means I will celebrate your culture, and I will not try to act like my way is the only way or the right way.

### **Many churches wonder, *We’re living in a homogenous area; how do we reach out to different people?***

The inner-city reality of 25 years ago is becoming everybody’s reality. The way the city goes is the way society goes. So the diversity of the city is now fast becoming the diversity of the suburbs and beyond. It may not be a tidal wave, but it’s happening. You have large Asian and Hispanic communities in the suburbs now. They may not live on your block; they may be in the seedy apartment complex up the highway. If we develop an eye to see beyond our world, that’s the beginning of the journey. We need to think, *Where can I find somebody who’s not like me, just to love and reach out to?*

Churches need to analyze who is around them. It may not be a racial difference. You may have a big fancy white church where white trash doesn’t feel welcome. What can that church do to love everybody and create an atmosphere where people will feel welcome? The approach will vary. That’s why I say it’s not about technique; it starts with vision, biblical truth, and your heart.

Do I believe it’s my biblical mandate to reach out of my comfort zone, out of my little socio-economic cubicle? Or do I think it’s an option: “Some people do that, but I’m not called to that”? That mindset is saying you’re not going to go to Samaria; you’re still beating that path around Samaria. On what biblical grounds are you doing that? This is a theological issue.

### **What have you learned about reaching beyond your comfort zone?**

I could fill books about what we’ve learned. God loves everybody; sinners are sinners and saints are saints, it doesn’t matter where they came from. There’s a vibrancy and a dynamic in a cross-cultural congregation that is hard to match in a monochromatic crowd. It brings a spirit and an excitement that’s hard to beat.

As soon as you look at us, you see our diversity; we don’t have to say anything. When a kid gets killed in a gang shooting and we go out on the corner and hold a prayer vigil, that is the real Rainbow Coalition. We don’t have to say anything. Everybody who sees us sees the family of God as God intends it to be. A cross-cultural congregation is a witness by the way it looks. All we do is show up and we’re a witness. It’s powerful. It’s hard to overstate the impact.

### **Discuss**

1. Tell about an experience you had with someone from another culture. What did you learn?
2. Whom in our community are we overlooking? How can we reach out to them?
3. What specific aspects of our worship can we adjust to make visitors feel more welcome?



## Tuning in to New People

*We need to hear our people to be able to minister to them.*

Isaiah 65:24

*If we want new people to feel comfortable in our church, we need to let them know we acknowledge them and care about their needs and concerns. In other words, we need to listen to them. Listening is not a natural ability; it is something we learn and relearn all of our lives.*

### Create the Space

Active listening is an exclusive activity. We can't do it well with minds absorbed with other thoughts. We need to stop what we are doing and focus on the other person.

*How am I at deliberately choosing to listen to others? (circle one)*

I do well                      I'm all right                      I could do better

### Hear the Other Person

As we practice active listening and staying in the moment, we begin to hear not only what people are saying but what they are *trying* to say. This requires noticing a person's body language and what they are omitting as well as what they are saying.

*How am I at understanding the essence of what another is trying to say?*

I do well                      I'm all right                      I could do better

### Wait for a Response

One way to create space for listening is to do nothing—to wait. If we are willing to try it, we will find that waiting in silence can apply its own gentle pressure to the other person. Asking an open-ended question and then simply waiting for a response can provide the space needed for a new insight to appear.

*How am I at waiting for someone to open up—even when it may be awkward?*

I do well                      I'm all right                      I could do better

### Paraphrase

Paraphrasing simply means to put the speaker's thoughts into your own words, to make sure you understand them. It is important that this doesn't come across as a technique rather than genuine interest. When done well, paraphrasing is highly effective.

*How am I at paraphrasing what someone is trying to tell me?*

I do well                      I'm all right                      I could do better

### Ask Questions

Asking questions increases our understanding and indicates our interest in another person. We can ask questions to clarify, to help define a problem more precisely, or to encourage someone to delve more deeply into an issue.

*How am I at asking perceptive questions?*

I do well                      I'm all right                      I could do better

### Use Appropriate Body Language

All the silence, paraphrasing, and questioning in the world will not communicate an active listening attitude if your body delivers a different message. Nods, eye contact, and physically facing a person are ways of creating space for communication to happen.

*How am I at conveying my interest through body language?*

I do well                      I'm all right                      I could do better

Douglas Steer wrote, "To 'listen' another's soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another." When we empty our cups to listen to another, we experience that mysterious moment that has the power to transform relationships.

—KORI LEAMAN-MILLER. Adapted from *Making Peace With Conflict* (Herald Press, 1999). Used with permission.

### Discuss

1. Tell about a time you felt listened to.
2. What keeps us from listening well?
3. Are some people or groups of people not listened to in our church? How can we keep this from happening?



## Welcoming Singles in the Family

*Do we recognize those outside a traditional family unit?*

1 Corinthians 7:17

*At the beginning of the 20th century, about 95 percent of the adult population in America was married. Divorce was nearly unheard of, and those who were widowed remarried quickly. Being single was by far the exception.*

*Today, about 45 percent of adults have never married or are divorced, widowed, or separated. One in four adults has never married.*

*Many churches have been slow to recognize this demographic change. Is our church one of them, or are we giving consideration and support to this growing segment of our society? In taking this quiz, give our church points if we do the following:*

Many sermon illustrations, examples, and applications apply to unmarried adults as well as couples (e.g., "Ask your spouse <i>or</i> roommate...").	15 pts	
During announcements, "families and individuals" or similar wording is used, not just "families," when referring to households in the congregation.	10 pts	
The speaker at our last women's retreat acknowledged that not all women there were wives and mothers.	10 pts	
The speaker at our last men's retreat acknowledged that not all men there were husbands and fathers.	10 pts	
We have had sermons or classes on the biblical view of singleness.	25 pts	
We offer a singles' ministry, small group, or Sunday school class.	10 pts	
At least one small group contains both singles and couples.	10 pts	
Children's Sunday school teachers are trained to acknowledge that not all children are living with both parents.	15 pts	
The proportion of single adults in our congregation is similar to that in our community (45 percent for the United States as a whole, higher in urban areas, lower in rural areas).	25 pts	
Add 5 points for <i>each</i> single pastor, elder, Sunday school teacher, and ministry leader.	5 pts each	
Add 5 points for <i>each</i> adult Sunday school class that is <i>not</i> a "couples only" class or focused on marriage and parenting issues.	5 pts each	
<b>Total</b>		
<b>Subtract</b> points if any of the following are true:		
All women's ministry activities meet during the weekday, when most single women are at work.	-20 pts	
We had two or more sermon series on marriage or parenting in the last year. (These may say to singles, "This church is for couples.")	-10 pts	
Subtract 5 points for each activity in our bulletin labeled "family" (family picnic, family hymn-sing, etc.), if it is not exclusively for families.	-5 pts each	
<b>Final Score</b>		



## Welcoming Singles in the Family *continued*

### **100 or more points**

Congratulations! Our church is practicing a positive, biblical attitude toward unmarried adults. It's likely that singles in our congregation feel loved and valued.

### **55–95 points**

Our church is generally a welcoming place for singles, but we still have room for improvement. We could ask single adults in our congregation—never-married, divorced, and widowed—how we can help them feel more included.

### **50 points or less**

We may be accidentally communicating to singles, “You don’t belong here!” We could discuss how our congregation could better minister to unmarried adults.

—SUSAN NIKAIDO. Adapted from “How Singles-friendly Is Your Church?” *Discipleship Journal* (NavPress.com). Used with permission.

### **Discuss**

1. In what ways is singleness a gift (1 Cor. 7:7)? In what ways is it a challenge?
2. In what unique ways can singles minister in our church?
3. What two specific things can we do as a church to be more welcoming to singles?





## Worshiping with the Homeless

*When ministry threatens safety.*

Matthew 25:35–40

**The Case** About three years ago, a man in our church wondered if there wasn't something we could do for the homeless in our community. He began driving to the shelter each Sunday, offering a ride to anyone who wanted to come to church. No board or committee discussed this in advance. There were no strategic planning sessions, just new faces showing up.

Eventually conversations were rife among board members and the laity, all of which began, "I love that we are ministering to the homeless, but..." "I had to walk through some rough-looking smokers to get into the building!" "We don't know their backgrounds, and what about the safety of our children?" "The whole back of the church smells like a urinal."

We found ourselves dealing with constant requests for money, medical emergencies, fights breaking out, bathroom-sink bathing, and more. The "Compassion Ministry" became a primary topic at board and staff meetings. How could we both protect the dignity of each guest from the shelter and provide for the safety and well-being of everyone?

### What Would You Do?

- ◆ How would you deal with delicate issues such as money and hygiene without offending anyone's dignity?
- ◆ What steps could be taken to ensure everyone's safety?

### What Happened

We took some practical steps. We added fans and improved ventilation in various classrooms. We developed a consistent standard for distributing resources from our benevolence fund. We now have a policy that allows only parents and their children in the children's wings of the church. The ushers take regular security patrols through the building and restrooms.

The most important change, though, was appointing hosts for the homeless. These individuals warmly greet the men and women as they emerge from the van, offer coffee, and review the ground rules.

Working with hurting people will always present a challenge, but the rewards are great. So far more than fifty men and women have come to Christ through this ministry.

One young woman from a hurting marriage told me, "I knew this was a church I could call home when I noticed the person next to me was homeless. This is a place where broken and hurting people can come and belong."

—STEVE TOMLINSON

### Discuss

1. How would you react to a homeless person sitting next to you in church?
2. What can we do as a board to promote flexibility and support for a homeless program?
3. How would our church benefit from ministering to such broken people?



## God's Gift of Cultural Diversity

*God accepts people from every nation.*

Acts 10:1–48

**Read** “Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right’” (Acts 10:34–35).

**Comprehend** Because churches are not buildings but people, they are constantly shifting and changing. Though Christ, the foundation, remains the same from generation to generation, the church makes adjustments to reflect the times and the people of the moment. We are currently undergoing one of those shifts as congregations recognize the need to live out the inclusive message of the gospel and become places where there truly is “no male or female, no Jew or Greek.”

But those changes do not come easily. Our approaches to cultural diversity and inclusiveness in the church have tended to be all-or-nothing propositions. Either we seek to melt differences into a tasteless stew (or one that tastes only of the dominant culture), or we segregate ourselves. In addition, institutions by their very nature tend to resist change. Institutions are in the business of staying the same. That’s what we mean when we say an idea or a project has become “institutionalized”; it has become an immovable, unchangeable part of the whole.

This idea of changing the face of the church is not new; it has been grappled with since the church’s infancy. One such accounting is in the tenth chapter of Acts. In this chapter, Cornelius has a vision of an angel, and Peter has a dream about food. Tired and hungry, Peter ascends a rooftop to pray. He falls into a trance and has a vision of “all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth and birds of the air” (Acts 10:12).

“Eat, Peter,” a voice urges. But Peter is a good Jewish boy, a follower of God’s law as he understands it, and recognizes some of the food as unclean—food he must not eat. “By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.” The reply? “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.”

This is an entirely new concept for Peter. Things are not as he has supposed. The laws handed down from generation to generation have suddenly and radically changed. Although Peter is perplexed at first about the meaning of the vision, things in time become clear. The Spirit tells Peter three men are looking for him and says to go to them without misgivings. They are the men sent by Cornelius.

The lesson for Peter, of course, is that the Jesus he is preaching is not just for the Jews—people like him. God is bigger than Peter ever imagined, and God’s family includes those the Jews have deemed “unclean.”

Many years later, we still hold ideas about who is clean (us) and who is unclean (them). Often that’s based on cultural background. We still struggle with what it means to be the whole family of God amid diversity. Yet diversity is God’s gift to us.

—REGINA SHANDS STOLTZFUS. Adapted from *Making Peace with Conflict* (Herald Press, 1999). Used with permission.

**Discuss**

1. Have you ever felt like an outsider? What was that experience like?
2. If someone from an “unclean” group came to our church, what would happen?
3. How can our church better communicate the message that Christ is for everyone?

**Pray** Ask the Lord to open your eyes to subtle cultural prejudice.



## The Give and Take of Togetherness

*For the church to safely move forward, it needs both “progressives” and “conservatives.”*

Exodus 15:22–27; John 11:51–52

**Read** “Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one” (John 11:51–52).

**Comprehend** When God deals with people he does it in *togetherness*. The children of Israel moved *together* across the wilderness. That wasn’t always easy. The young, vigorous ones probably wanted to go twice the pace. The young mothers with babies and toddlers needed to take it easy. The oldest probably never wanted to move at all.

It took a lot of give and take, a lot of consideration for the condition of the other fellow, a lot of accommodating. But when it was all over, except for those who died along the way, they all got from here to there—together. They all obeyed the sight of cloud and fire, the sound of trumpets. They grumbled and were punished together, but together they also saw waters part, rods bud, and fire come out of heaven. They knew each other well. They did it all together.

The pagan deity Janus was two-faced: one face looked forward, and the other looked back. A congregation will become two-faced when the conservatives attend the one consistently “straight” service while the “progressives” experiment with the latest in contemporary.

No, no! Put elements of both old and new in whatever the people experience, but pace your people to go forward experiencing everything together.

Some older ones will grumble. Some younger ones will want to cavort more. Expect both reactions and help both groups to be considerate of each other’s feelings.

Give the people the feeling when it’s all over that they grumbled and endured together, but they saw some glory together too. Together they lost some of the old, and together they gained some of the new; but they all were a body together—conservatives and progressives struggling to put it together—together!

After all, every car must have both gas and brakes. That’s the very way it gets from here to there.

—ANNE ORTLUND. Adapted from *Up with Worship: How to Quit Playing Church* (Broadman & Holman, 2001). Used with permission.

- Discuss**
1. Read Exodus 15:22–27. How would going through these bad and good experiences help to bring the Israelites together?
  2. Do you agree that churches should “put elements of both old and new in whatever the people experience”? Why or why not?
  3. In what specific ways could our church keep people moving together?

**Pray** Ask the Lord for patience, forbearance, and love to walk with others in God’s family.



## Educational Differences on the Board

*How to close the gap.*

Ephesians 4:11–13

When Tim joined the church board, he looked forward to working with the other members. He had had extensive ministry training, and even though he'd heard his share of war stories about church boards, he figured his church would be different. As long as good people were elected, he saw no reason why his board couldn't work together famously.

But a year later, Tim wasn't so sure. Instead of partners in ministry, the board members seemed like adversaries. It no longer surprised him when even his best ideas were rejected outright. Sometimes he wondered if the other board members understood ministry at all.

Odds are, they didn't.

They were sharp people and good leaders, but no one had trained them for their role. They had never been exposed to the unique principles and requirements of leading a spiritual and volunteer organization like the church.

Tim's ministry training and their lack of it caused them to view issues from radically different perspectives. They were suffering from what I call "educational separation."

When Tim told me about his predicament, I understood. I had faced a similar situation earlier in my church.

### Set up on-the-job training

Searching for some way to close the educational gap, I decided to set up an on-the-job training program to expose board members to insights and principles taught in Bible school.

Almost immediately, the gap in perceptions of ministry began to close. Even when they disagreed, they had an easier time understanding and appreciating each other's viewpoint. Most important, they made better-informed and wiser decisions.

### Teach practical theology

Over the years, we tackled a variety of subjects: church growth, educational theory, group dynamics, and management styles. Instead of focusing on the standard biblical and doctrinal themes, we zeroed in on practical theology.

Ephesians 4:11–13 articulates the importance of every member of the Christian body being fully equipped to do the work of the ministry. Training the board in practical application is one of the most effective ways to increase its unity and efficiency.

—LARRY OSBORNE. Adapted from "Equipping the Saints to Lead," *Growing Your Church Through Training and Motivation*, Marshall Shelley, ed. (Bethany House Publishers, a division of Baker Book Company, 1997). Used with permission.

### Discuss

1. How much have you "been exposed to the unique principles and requirements of leading a spiritual and volunteer organization like the church"?
2. What does Ephesians 4:11–13 say to our situation, as we try to build up the church?
3. What kind of training would help our leaders understand their role?



## Building Multicultural Understanding

*3 steps to racial reconciliation.*

Revelation 7:9

*The cry for racial justice was not heard during my youth in Virginia. Where I lived, the population was close to 50 percent black. We engaged in the typical segregationist practices of that day in our schools, theaters, and neighborhoods.*

*Not until much later did I realize God was working on my heart concerning the race issue. Eventually I felt called to multiracial ministry, where I came to a new appreciation of the sovereignty of God as celebrated in black congregations.*

*My convictions turned to action as my wife and I became the first white members of a local black church. Here's what we learned:*

1. **Develop relationships.** Healthy cross-cultural ministry comes about through developing relationships. Those relationships can only come about with the passage of time and with time spent together.  
Relationships across racial lines must be based on understanding and empathy. Guilt and pity are the worst possible grounds for such relationships. Go in humility, be willing to learn, earn trust, give it time—and relationships will develop.
2. **Avoid taking charge.** The dominant culture has to avoid taking charge. Whites especially are prone to doing that. We also must avoid the perception that we are going in to help. Rather, we should understand how we can be helped by our ethnic brothers and sisters.
3. **Genuinely appreciate other cultures.** Whites must come to genuinely appreciate other church traditions and expressions of worship and ministry. The white way is not always the right way.  
Early on I realized I needed to develop an understanding and appreciation for African-American history and culture. One way I did this was to read books like *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, or the biography of the late Medgar Evers by his wife, Myrlie, or the writings of evangelicals like Tom Skinner and John Perkins.

As Christ's ambassadors, we must be faithful to expose racial insensitivity and disrespect when we see it; to challenge racial stereotyping in conversations, in jokes, and in sermon illustrations; to speak against racial injustice wherever we find it; and to take action to make racial reconciliation a reality whenever possible.

—WILLIAM FRAHER ABERNATHY

### Discuss

1. What experience have you had with racial prejudice?
2. What can we do to foster understanding in our church of other cultures?
3. How can we develop relationships with people of other cultures and make them feel welcome in our church?



## Bridging the Generation Gap

*The power of blended small groups.*

Romans 15:5-6, Psalm 133:1

*Dan Ruiter embodies the term baby buster. Single and 23, he plays jazz trombone, sports a goatee and bleached hair, and wears a leather jacket and chaps when he rides his Suzuki 850 GS motorcycle. And, oh yes, he attends a small-group Bible study with people in their fifties and older.*

*“My parents split up when I was 16,” Dan explains. “My dad was a workaholic and did not discipline me. So when our church offered blended small groups, I signed up, because older folks know what’s up. On my very first visit, I told the group, ‘I’m looking for a mentor.’” He found Charles Bartlett, a retired law-enforcement officer.*

*Dan and Charles represent what is becoming a renewed interest in many churches—trans-generational ministry. Many pastors are realizing the need to bring the wisdom of gray-haired saints together with the spiritual hunger of frosted-haired busters. Here’s how three churches blend the generations.*

**1. Uncover common goals.** Pastor George Bedloin of Northwest Baptist Church in Bellingham, Washington, says, “One step in breaking down barriers between young and old is bringing them together to work on common goals that address each other’s values. The young folks valued their growing families and the older folks valued their historic church facility. We combined both values into one goal—we remodeled the nursery!”

“The highlight of the year comes in early summer. Because young and old share a commitment to service, we send a work team of 70 to 80 individuals to a Bible camp for a weekend. They work side-by-side getting the place ready for camp programs. It’s a true ‘Kodak moment’ when you see seasoned tradesmen coaching younger apprentices, serving the Lord together.”

**2. Keep the family together.** Wellspring Christian Fellowship of Lynden, Washington, matches young and old in growth groups.

“Between 15 and 20 people of all ages meet weekly in homes for worship,” founding pastor Dan Smythe explains. “People choose our church because they can be with their children in ministry settings.”

Children and teens meet with the adults during group meetings for relationship-building icebreakers, worship, and prayer times. When the children are excused for their own Bible study, a different set of adults leads them each week in another room.

**3. Godparents for grownups.** Many of the people of First Baptist Church of Ephrata, Washington, wanted a closer walk with God. It started in a weekend workshop led by church-renewal expert Richard Bergstrom.

As Bergstrom described the process, “People talked, and at a depth beyond the superficial. It naturally led younger attendees to consider the values of age and experience. What better mentor than one who’s been there?”

—ERIK JOHNSON

### Discuss

1. Tell about a positive experience you had with someone much older or much younger than you.
2. What events or ministries in our church help different ages come together?
3. What strategies would break down generational walls within our congregation?



## From Damaged Souls to Treasured Family

*God has the power to transform hurting people into a vital church family.*

Titus 3:3–5

To seize upon one of our Lord's favorite metaphors, the fish business these days is not as simple as it once seemed. The human fish now come out of outrageously polluted cultural waters, and they bring all the effects of their pollutedness with them.

Widespread family and community breakdown are resulting in spiritual and psychological devastation. A new generation longs for community but hasn't been raised in one. These people possess few basic emotional and spiritual skills: the ability to trust; a basic sense of self-confidence; the capacity to engage in conflict in a civil manner.

What happens when such people populate a congregation? How do they become productive disciples of Jesus?

The word re-parenting comes to mind. It suggests a thorough renovation of one's life in line with Paul's strong words: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." He is re-birthed. And if re-birthed, then also re-parented. This process obviously begins with the Holy Spirit, but we also must recognize that change does not come out of thin air.

### How to "re-parent" church members

1. *Recognize the need for a deliberate process* to help new or struggling Christians reach the fullness of their spiritual potential.
2. *Make this process selective and structured.* Pick people deliberately and tell them why you've picked them. Set standards to ensure commitment and progress. Tell them, "Don't get involved unless you're committed to being here on time, prepared, and able to stay for the duration of the meeting."
3. *Teach people to express themselves and to think constructively.* Look for ways to help them understand themselves and others. Assign books and articles about character. Biographies are a good resource for this.
4. *Teach people spiritual disciplines.* Teach and practice prayer, reading and memorizing Scripture, serving, and giving.
5. *Affirm as well as rebuke.* Only when there is clear candor can change happen.
6. *Ensure the collective support of the church family.* Reparenting is done best not by just one or two people but by an entire spiritual community.

Social skills and marks of personal development normally are set in place by family and community. When family and community break down, such skills are never developed. Fortunately, this is where the church family can step in and transform lives.

—GORDON MACDONALD

### Discuss

1. Describe a transforming spiritual experience you had through a small group.
2. How could a "re-parenting class" build up our church family and promote unity?
3. What steps can we take today to create this kind of discipleship training?



## Balancing on a Cultural Tightrope

*Understanding one another's differences.*

Romans 14:1–8

*Brent was a Caucasian Christian attending a metropolitan church where Asians composed the dominant sector. A controversial issue arose that called for a decision by church leaders. After some discussion the elderly Korean patriarch offered his verdict on the subject. Brent asked the leader's son what his view was. A hush fell over the group, and Brent realized instinctively he had done something amiss. He subsequently learned that in many Asian cultures the eldest member's conclusion is virtually regarded as law, and no one younger would think of deviating from that. Brent had wrongly assumed that since this was a church group in America, everyone would be allowed an equal vote in settling the issue.*

This case demonstrates how cultural differences can create divisions if they are not properly understood. Use the following activities to increase your group's cultural understanding.

1. Have three individuals pretend they are from the ethnic heritage of their grandparents. Ask each of them to give a short presentation borrowing the phrases, oddities, and other cultural giveaways from their grandparents' background. Then have the rest of the group guess the person's background. Discuss how that background might play itself out in local church life.
2. If you have people present from another culture, ask them to share some of the amusements, trials, and reactions they have experienced in American life. Ask each person how the church might be of greater help to recent immigrants.
3. Divide the group into four teams. Provide 5–10 playing-card-sized slips of paper for each team. Have them write a question on each card (as if made up for a board game). The questions should ask something about another culture, such as: what kind of food might you eat that you wouldn't ordinarily find on American tables? Or: what are your culture's unique wedding customs? Then ask each team to take on the identity of another culture and answer the questions from another team.

—JIM TOWNSEND

### Discuss

1. What one thing have you learned from these activities?
2. What obstacles do immigrants face when they come to America? When they come to church?
3. What is something from your background or culture that affects how you experience church?





## Further Exploration

**Building Unity in the Church of the New Millennium**, *Dwight Perry, editor*. This collection of articles helps ministry leaders promote unity among those of different races, classes, and genders within the church. The message: to love as Christ commanded, the church must learn to incorporate, reach out to, and become unified with the people of God's whole kingdom (Moody Publishers, 2002; ISBN 080241589X).

**God's Dream Team: A Call to Unity**, *by Tommy Tenney*. This book expands upon Jesus' final plea for the unity of the church and how that prayer may be answered today (Regal Books, 1999; ISBN 0830723846).

**Growing Your Church Through Training and Motivation**, *Marshall Shelley, editor*. From recruiting volunteers to working with a board, this book explores how you can most effectively equip and encourage your congregation for the work of ministry (Bethany House Publishers, 1997; ISBN 1556619677).

**Making Peace with Conflict**, *Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Lawrence Ressler, editors*. A practical guide to understanding conflict. Using biblical principles, over twenty authors tell of lessons taught by walking conflict's holy ground (Herald Press, 1999; ISBN 0836191277).

**Talking About Cultural Diversity in Your Church: Gifts and Challenges** *by Michael V. Angrosino*. This book encourages readers to be aware of their cultural assumptions and highlights skills for communicating between cultures (Altamira Press, 2001; ISBN 0759101795).

**Transforming Leadership: Jesus' Way of Creating Vision, Shaping Values, and Empowering Change**, *by Leighton Ford*. Combining a fresh examination of Jesus' ministry with the insights of recent discussions on leadership, Leighton Ford challenges readers to become transformational leaders on the job, in the church, and in the public arena (Intervarsity Press, 1993; ISBN 0830816526).

**Up with Worship** *by Anne Ortlund*. This book tackles issues of worship head-on by giving how-to instructions for different worship elements (Broadman & Holman, 2001; ISBN 0805424601).



## Retreat Plan

*How to create a weekend retreat on the theme of “Unity in Diversity”*

*BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS expands easily into a retreat format. Here is a sample retreat schedule you may follow for the “Unity in Diversity” theme. The purpose of this retreat is to cultivate a vision for reaching out to all people in the church.*

### Friday Evening

◆ 8–8:45 P.M. **Opening Session:** Hand out copies of “Building a Church of Diversity,” the interview with Charles Lyons on pages 4-5, and allow time for each person to read it. Then form groups of three or four. Have each group discuss the questions at the end of the interview. Reconvene for the last 20 minutes and have the groups share their comments and consider what that may mean for the church.

◆ 9–9:45 P.M. **Bible Study:** Close the evening with “A Church for All People,” the Bible study on page 3. Photocopy and pass out the study, or use the handout as your notes.

### Saturday Morning

◆ 9–9:45 A.M. **Devotional:** Set the tone for the day by handing out (or presenting) “God’s Gift of Cultural Diversity” (p. 10) and discussing the questions at the bottom of the page.

◆ 10–11:00 A.M. **Activity:** Use the activity “Balancing on a Cultural Tightrope” on page 16 to gain a perspective of other cultures.

◆ 11:15–NOON. **Assessment:** Hand out “Welcoming Singles in the Family,” the assessment on pages 7-8, to each participant. After everyone has read and completed the assessment, have them discuss how to make singles feel at home in the church.

◆ NOON. Lunch

### Saturday Afternoon

◆ 1–2 P.M. **Final Group Session:** Close the retreat with the case study “Worshiping with the Homeless” on page 9. Have each person spend some time alone to quietly read and respond to the questions on the handout. Have the group come together to share what God has taught them. Then pray together, asking God for guidance and wisdom as you take new steps together.

You can create similar retreat plans for any of the other BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS themes. Simply determine what you want to accomplish and select the handouts that support your objectives.