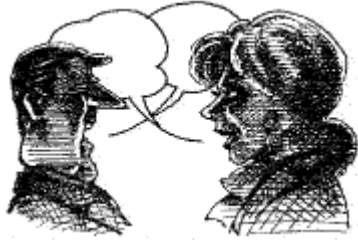


## Cross Cultural Ministry

### Instructor: Rex Deckard



### Introduction

In this lesson we will talk about the nature of cultural groups, overcoming fears and anxieties, practical strategies for building relationships, ways to analyze the sub-cultures within your community, and three models for cross-cultural ministry in the local church. We will then look at common misunderstandings or misconceptions that happen when we cross cultural lines, and we will visit with a panel to help us understand ways to bridge the gaps.

### Games

The following are two brief games that may help to get the class thinking about cultural differences and similarities.

#### Hello in Different Languages

The goal of this activity is to heighten cross-cultural awareness, celebrate cross-cultural knowledge, and to say "hello" in many different languages.

This can be used a fun, warm-up, get-to-know-you activity with a cross-cultural theme.

Within a group, you may be surprised how much knowledge there is of different languages for basic phrases.

Optional: Ask participants to see if they can guess how many people there are in the world and how many different languages are spoken. (There are ~2800 languages and ~6 billion people. If an equal number of people spoke each language that would be 2 million people per language. You might relate this to local city/town size.)

Challenge the group to come up with as many different languages for "hello" as possible. When somebody volunteers (e.g., Bonjour!), make sure they say it or repeat it clearly for the rest of the group who then repeat.

Optional: Before people start making suggestions, ask the group to have a guess how many collective languages the group will be able to come up with. Don't allow discussion - just do a quick whip around each person's guess and take a rough average - that's the group's estimate.

#### Brief description:

This is a fun, warm-up, cross-cultural activity. The group tries to come up the word(s) for "hello" in as many different languages as possible.

#### The Story of Your Name

What's in a name? More than we often realize.

This is an interesting, novel way for people to introduce themselves to others, especially in ethnically diverse groups.

Ensure that an appropriate group atmosphere is established in which people have already done some initial warm-up activities and name games.

Ask participants to turn to a partner and explain what your name means (if anything) and where it comes from.

Most people reveal a surprising amount of interesting information about where their name comes from and what it means.

The greater the ethnic and cultural diversity in the group, the better this exercise tends to work.

**Brief description:**

Where does your name come from? Share the story of where your name comes from and what your name means. Everyone's name has a surprisingly interesting origin and this activity helps to build intercultural respect and understanding.

God must love a variety of colors, shapes and sizes. Even in the world of plants you may have the same species but tremendous variation within that species. Consider roses—some are tall, some leafy, others with a profusion of flowers, while other are on vines. God is not the God of an assembly line, but the God that created every snowflake and leaf to be different. If there is cultural diversity in our world, it is because God intended it to be so.

God made each of us different and He loves us for our uniqueness. There are young and old, male and female, and people from every nation, tribe and tongue. Our churches must reflect the creation of God.

Cultural diversity in its most obvious forms of language became a part of society by an act of God when He scattered the people at the Tower of Babel. When the Tower was being built, the people gathered in one place, although God had wanted them to scatter to populate the earth. As they scattered because of their language differences, they also developed diverse customs that suited the regions they found themselves migrating to. Over time, many of these cultures united, and divided, creating an endless cycle of cultural change. Almost no culture is static or unchanging. Virtually every culture you may see in the world today didn't exist in its current form a few hundred years ago- and in some cases less than a hundred years ago. In the same way, very few cultures today will be the same in the future.

Anthropologists and sociologists have observed some important characteristics of cultures- things that they have in common, and things that are different. For example, cultures vary in their attitude toward time, toward property, how they share resources, how family and community are defined, in division of labor between the sexes, in how they teach their children, how they play, and in how they communicate. Not understanding some of these differences is what often leads to conflict or anxiety when we, as Apostolic leaders, try to reach out to a different culture group.

One common area is the different perceptions of time. One pastor who was reaching out to a particular group said, *"I had to learn that when they said, 'We'll come to see you Tuesday,' it could mean **any** Tuesday."*

As we explore ministering across the cultural divide, there are 3 or 4 basic ways that people differ:

**Racially** – these are largely biological differences of size, color, hair, and body shape.

**Culturally** – Within a racial group or between racial groups there can be many sub-cultures that draw from a region a person originates from as well as social, economic, and educational differences. For example, in the United States you may have a Cajun, a New

Englander or a Texas cowboy that share a common race and language, but are diverse in many other ways.

**Linguistically**-God gave men a variety of languages at Babel, and those languages have continued to evolve. For example, English is a blend of German, French and Latin languages, along with other influences.

It is critically important that we learn some basic concepts about cross cultural ministry, if we are to be effective in this generation. Jesus commanded us to “go into all the world...” but sometimes that world surrounds us in our own back yard. This provides opportunities like we have never imagined before.

Today, God has orchestrated mass immigration into North America so that every language and culture of the world can hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Over one million people a year are coming to North America to live. Most of them are coming from Third World countries, the **very same countries we labor to take the Gospel into through our overseas Foreign Missions program!**

On the Day of Pentecost- the birthday of the Church- a huge multicultural crowd gathered to hear the message of the Apostle Peter. Though they came from various lands and had different languages, they had a common hunger for an experience with God that united them. Just as tongues at the tower of Babel divided them, tongues at Pentecost united them!

Cross cultural ministry is not a new thing, even in modern times. In the past century and a half in America, people migrated from Italy, Poland, Germany, Asia, and diverse places throughout the world. Often they would form a German Lutheran or Danish Methodist, or Polish Catholic church in their first generation, just as we see many ethnically segregated churches yet today. This was an island of familiar territory for these immigrants to come and find refuge. Invariably, within one generation these Lutheran, Methodist, and Catholic churches were either merged with congregations from the dominant culture, closed entirely or evolved into the dominant culture as these immigrants and their children and grandchildren settled into their new home. This was not good, or bad, either one- it is just what naturally happened.

For Pentecostals, Azusa Street and the early Pentecostal revivals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were tremendous multicultural celebrations that brought people of diverse cultures together to a common faith. However, through the subsequent decades we didn't always maintain those roots, and there is a danger that, if we don't, we could become marginalized as society changes.

Thomas Nees, director of Mission StrategyUSA in the Church of the Nazarene, made this observation in a recent address to the Nazarene Theological Seminary:

*However we count or estimate, the Church of the Nazarene in the United States and Canada is overwhelmingly white. Judging by our leadership ranks in the superintendency,*

*the General Board, at Headquarters and our educational institutions, one would conclude that, with some obvious exceptions, the church is nearly exclusively white.*

*I fear that if we continue to do nothing different than we are doing, in the near future, when and where there is no majority group, this denomination will be marginalized as a predominately English-speaking white fellowship in a sea of diversity.*

He goes on to say,

*What if McDonald's in its desire to penetrate the market potential of minority groups decided to create a separate chain for African Americans, Koreans, Haitians, etc? What if General Motors decided to create cultural- and language-specific cars? Large companies would go bankrupt with that kind of strategy. They have to make their products appealing to everyone.*

*We have organized an African-American Leadership Development Committee to support a mission strategy that seeks to start churches in African American communities. But not all African-Americans live, shop, work and go to school in African American communities. Furthermore, if African-Americans perceive that the reason the Church of the Nazarene is interested in starting black churches is because they are not welcome in the white churches, the strategy is doomed from the start.*

*If the Church of the Nazarene is to succeed in reaching out to African-Americans in Kansas City, for instance, the message cannot be: "We have a church on The Paseo for black people." The only way we will reach our objectives is for every Nazarene congregation in the city to let it be known that African-Americans are welcome, wanted and needed in every congregation.*

*In multicultural America, we will always have cultural- and language-specific congregations. There is no "one size fits all" worship style. I don't have a problem with congregations that attract people of particular cultures and languages, as long as they don't use their culture and language to exclude. A missional church is one that seeks to bridge the barriers of language, custom and belief to communicate the gospel.*

*We cannot leave it up to our minority leaders to make the church representative and inclusive. They can't do it alone. I have listened to the passion as well as the frustration of our minority leaders. They may strategize, but they can't implement much without the support and empowerment of the majority group.*

The United Pentecostal Church is doing an excellent job as an organization to address the issues of multiculturalism in America. They have as their mission statement:

***The VISION of Multicultural Ministries is to see churches purposefully crossing cultures to share the powerful, life-changing, apostolic message of Acts 2:38.***

Currently, there are ministries to

- Amish – Mennonite
- Chinese
- Deaf
- Ethiopian
- Filipino
- French
- Gypsy
- Haitian
- Jewish
- Korean

- Middle Eastern
- Native North American
- Portuguese
- Russian
- South Asian
- South East Asian

There is also ministry taking place in over 47 language groups including,

1. Spanish
2. French
3. Cambodian
4. Hmong
5. Japanese
6. Korean
7. Laotian
8. Thai
9. Vietnamese
10. Cantonese
11. Mandarin
12. Mieghn
13. Ethiopian
14. Tagalog
15. Ilocano
16. Portuguese
17. Gypsy (Romani)
18. Russian
19. Punjabi
20. Swahile
21. Navajo
22. Apache
23. Sioux
24. Penobscot
25. Lumbee
26. Marshalese
27. Tlingit
28. Haida
29. Tsimpsian
30. Eskimo
31. Aleut
32. Northern Tutchone
33. Athapaskan
34. Cree
35. Yup'ik

36. Oneida
37. Liberian
38. Sisseton
39. Chippewa
40. Cherokee
41. Coast Salish
42. Crow
43. LaGuna
44. Zuni
45. Fijian
46. Burmese
47. Pushtu

As Pentecostals, we must all take ownership of this issue. It is not just an issue for Houston, Toronto or Detroit- it is an issue that every Apostolic leader must understand.

### **I. Overcoming Fear and Anxiety is the First Step**

"A Middle Eastern student, asked to share about the years he had spent as a student in America, said, "I have been in America for four years, and these have been the loneliest years of my life. When I walk down a hallway and an American says with a smile, 'Hi, how are you doing?' I stop and try to tell them how I am doing. Instead, they just keep on walking and don't really care about my answer."

Statistics prove that this student's story is all too commonplace. Among the international students who study in the U.S., historically 70 percent have never been invited to an American home during their stay. More than 85 percent are never invited to an American church nor have any meaningful contact with genuine Christians during an average stay of four years.

Still there is good news from these statistics. These students feel a tremendous need for relationship. They are open to anyone who will stretch out their hand and say, 'I'll be your friend.' The problem is that they are afraid of us, and we are afraid of them, and so interaction doesn't take place.

The primary reason that we avoid interacting with other cultural groups is because of our fear of the unknown. It may be that we are afraid that we will say something that comes out sounding foolish or awkward. We may be fearful of language differences. These are normal relationship barriers, even within cultures. Consider how a teen may feel uncomfortable in a roomful of senior citizens, or a high school drop out in a conference of professional college graduates.

It's a fact- we naturally prefer our own culture and fear being threatened with too much change. That is not prejudice. Prejudice is when we believe that our culture is superior to

others, and also when we make blanket statements about individuals based on our notions about the culture group of which they are part of.

An old adage says that *familiarity breeds contempt*, but when it comes to breaking down relationship barriers, familiarity and fellowship are essential first steps. It is impossible to minister across cultural lines, unless we increase our personal comfort level. That is why some churches can spend thousands reaching Africans in Africa and Asians in Asia, but don't reach any Africans or Asians in their own neighborhood.

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### Activity #1

Find two to three others and brainstorm at least four places and situations where you could spend time in fellowship with people from a different culture group. Then list four activities your church ministry could sponsor that would bring together different culture groups. Share your ideas with the other groups.

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During your activity, you may have found some of the following as activities that can bring people of differing cultures together:

- Sports and game activities
- Dinners
- Prayer meetings
- Home Fellowship group activities
- Picnics
- Ladies Scrapbooking
- Men's fishing and camping
- Scouts

An effective outreach may be designed to meet various needs of youth, senior citizens, employment, daycare, legal and financial advising, education, and housing.

It is important to find the proper balance in these types of activities, because social concerns are not the primary mission of the Church. While these activities may meet needs and open many doors, they should always point to the central purpose of the Church, which is meeting spiritual needs and bring people to the Lord. However, for immigrants in particular, their needs may be overwhelming to them, and the church needs to respond appropriately.

The local church could create a plan for assisting new immigrants by holding classes in English, mentoring, helping to open a bank account, and providing day care for working mothers, having a youth sports night in the church or trying to help people get the legal counsel they need. Some of these areas could easily be covered by members of our congregations, while others may require some special training on our part.

## **Practical Needs You Can Meet for Recent Immigrants**

- Meet them at the airport and help them locate their housing
- If needed, offer them a comfortable bed and temporary housing.
- Help provide household goods and furniture for their new place of residence.
- Show them around the area. Public transportation system, parking meters, pay phones, public restrooms. Also teach them about tipping in restaurants.
- Help them set up a bank account and/or telephone service. Explain how to use a toll-free 800 number and the charges involved with using a 900 number.
- Help them practice their English. (And learn more about their language and culture.)
- Collect idioms and help them interpret their meanings.
- Spend time in conversation with them. Ask about their country. Let them talk about their ideas, needs, and fears.
- Introduce them to Christian friends. (But be cautious about 'hugging' and other friendly but familiar touching which may be uncomfortable or inappropriate in their culture.)
- Invite them on family outings, including a tour of the local library.
- Invite them to attend church services, weddings, funerals, baptisms
- If they have access to a computer, show them how to use the internet.
- Help parents meet the needs of their children, including appropriate dress for school enrolling and getting involved in their children's schooling
- Many immigrants don't understand that all Americans are not Christians. Explain that in America, our culture is distinctly different than our faith. Explain the difference between America's cultural Christian heritage, and genuine Christianity.

Whatever we do, our approach must be genuine. Although we want to reach people with the Gospel, we are not 'marketing' them. We need to avoid appearing to be a used car or vacuum salesman. The goal is to establish points of contact, and to develop relationships.

## **II. Analyzing the cultural makeup of your community**

More than 90 million Americans now claim African, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American ancestry. More than 10 percent of our population was born in a foreign country. Ethnic peoples are growing at 6 times the rate of America as a whole.

Sometimes we don't understand who lives in our own community. I have heard comments of both extremes when referring to other culture groups. I have heard people say, "They are taking over," or "They seem to be everywhere," or "We don't have anyone like that in the town I live in." All of these kinds of comments are probably exaggerated and sometimes insulting.

The world we live in is rapidly becoming urbanized and internationalized. People often feel disconnected and lost, and so they reach out to things that are familiar and comfortable. Feelings of ethnic belongingness are growing stronger, not weaker. In the United States, one of the great challenges for our generation is to learn to minister the Gospel effectively across cultural differences.



The first step is to make ourselves familiar with who lives within our neighborhoods and communities. With the advent of the internet, this is faster, easier, and cheaper than it has ever been before. There are multiple websites, including the official federal census, which instantly provide a composite of your community- even specific neighborhoods in your community. They will tell you the distribution of people according to male/female, married/single, age, race, economic status, homeowners/renters, and even religion. The first step to cross cultural ministry, is to find out who are neighbors are.

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#### Activity #2

In your group, make a list of all of the cultures and subcultures that exist in your community. Now go to <http://www.ethnicarvest.org/regions/mapdoc.htm> for free demographic and census data for your state. (The instructor may print this information out in advance and share a paper copy with the group to analyze.)

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### **III.. Worship and Evangelism: Integrated, segregated and blended approaches**

There are many different models or forms for a successful cross-cultural ministry , and none is the one "right" way of doing it.

Some groups you reach out to will quickly move toward the cultural forms that are already dominant in your church, but even if they do, none will go all the way. This shouldn't bother us. People don't check their personal interests at the door, when they come to church. Youth still like to be with youth, and truck drivers in your church may gravitate to other truck drivers during the Sunday School picnic. Total assimilation is neither possible nor desirable, because people should never have to forfeit the things that make them unique, in order to be part of the larger group.

Some may say, "If they're going to live here, why don't they learn English" but what they are really asking is, "When are they going to become *like us*?" The better approach would be, "When they learn English, it will open a lot of doors for them and their families." Our goal should be to provide an atmosphere to allow people to come to Jesus Christ and live out their Christian lives in the style most natural to them, as long as it is not in violation to Biblical teaching (i.e., such as multiple wives). We should never mistake conformity to Christ and Biblical teaching to conformity to our local cultural norms.

In short, we can celebrate both diversity AND unity in the American Church. Maybe the Church should contemplate our national motto—"E Pluribus Unum"—"*out of many one.*"

#### A. An Integrated approach

A totally integrated approach to cross-cultural ministry means incorporating multiple cultures into the same Youth group, Men's group, and other ministries and worship services. In an integrated church, you would expect to see services translated to other language groups, during the services. This could happen with electronic transmitters that allow those listening to the interpreter to sit anywhere they choose in the building, for language translation, and ASL interpreters for the hearing impaired.

In an integrated church, you would expect to see the department leaders, church advisory board, musicians, singers, ushers and Sunday School staff to gradually have a representation of the various cultures within the church. It will be normal, in an integrated church, to have special speakers from other culture groups, and music that represents diversity. Literature would have pictures of people representing multiple culture groups. The goal is to move from an "us-them" to a "we".

Even within an integrated church, it will be normal for sub-cultures in the church to gravitate to one another, and this is not a bad thing. They may shop at the same stores or be related to one another. It's possible that they have a common interest in some current event that affects their group. Sometimes a complete integration of distinct ethnic groups happens in time, but it can never be programmed, and it often takes many years. The molding and merging of church worship forms and style will be a natural by-product that occurs under the guidance of the Bible and the Holy Spirit.

#### B. A Segregated Approach

Two congregations can meet in the same building, worship in different languages and cultural adaptations and still be united in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:3-6), or a church may want to have a satellite or daughter plant in a neighborhood that has a large concentration of a particular culture group.

The advantage of a segregated approach is that some culture groups prefer to be in a worship center that is a total reflection of their culture. In other words, the church activities and worship services become an island of their culture that they can step into and feel safe and able to grow. It is less intimidating, and it removes the hurdles of advancement in church leadership that, unfortunately, a cultural minority may sometimes confront.

There is also an advantage for language subcultures or singing all the songs in a familiar language, and having literature and Scripture that is easy to understand.

There are also disadvantages. The largest disadvantage of a segregated church that specializes in one culture, is that families coming to their church may be mixed. Often first generation immigrants have children that speak English as their primary language, and relate more to the dominant culture in America than to their parents' culture. In other instances, a husband or wife is of not a member of the sub-culture, and they may feel overwhelmed or isolated in a segregated church, while their spouse is very involved.

The largest disadvantage in the segregated approach is the Scriptural dictate to 'go into all of the world and preach the gospel.' Segregated churches tend to only evangelize

within a certain cultural group, violating this commandment. Ironically, churches that are dominant in a subculture, such as Spanish or Asian churches, have the same issues of churches that are dominant in the majority culture, such as an English speaking church- they still have to find ways to reach out to everybody. When it comes to evangelism we are all general practitioners- we have to reach everyone.

While segregated churches often grow faster than integrated churches, it is sometimes difficult to provide the leadership needed in those churches at the same pace of growth. While a church can open and surge to a vibrant congregation in a relatively short time, it takes much, much longer to develop and qualify preachers, teachers, musicians and other leaders in the same language or culture. Training of minority leaders and lay leaders is critically important to prepare for the rapid growth in this sector of society.

Ironically, historically many segregated churches evolve over time and their identity changes (which is neither good nor bad). That is why, at the turn of the century, census records show many German or Danish churches, but these churches no longer exist in that form today.

#### B. A Blended Approach

Many churches are finding that the approach that works best for them, is a blended approach. The New Testament church largely fit the mold of a blended church. In this approach, the best elements of both the integrated and segregated approaches are utilized. Members of cultural sub-groups are integrated into the life and activities of the entire church (we are probably thinking of other cultures within a caucasian English speaking congregation, but this same process can work if the dominant culture is Spanish, Black, Deaf, Asian or other cultures).

The youth group is multi-cultured as well as the other groups. Translation is offered in worship services, and the church staff represents multiple culture groups. However, there are some activities that are focused on specific sub-cultures. This may be having Sunday school classes in other languages, or Home Friendship groups that target a certain sub-culture. Additional worship services may be added to the schedule that are in a different language or there may be satellite services that aim for evangelism and ministry to certain cultural groups.

The challenge of the blended approach is coordination. The church leadership may find they duplicate some activities, to provide the additional ministry. It may take more workers, more leaders and more planning to be successful. Some of the segregated activities (such as the additional worship service) will take on a personality of their own, which is healthy. However, there may also be the temptation for these groups to fragment from the overall congregation and authority structure of the assembly. The critical factor is keeping relationships strong within the leadership as well as the constituency.

## IV. Misconceptions and Misunderstandings Common When Crossing Cultural Lines

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Activity #3

Five minutes

Meet with two or three others in your group, and make a list of ten things that are different between cultures. Think of things such as humor, or holidays.

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In looking at misconceptions and misunderstandings common when crossing cultural lines, you may have come up with a few things such as :

- Time concepts
- Humor
- Family relationships
- Food
- Hospitality
- Holiday celebration
- Decorating
- Touch/body contact

In our panel discussion, we will address some of these with our panelists.

### Questions for Panel Discussion

1. In your culture group, are there differences from other culture groups in terms of the concept of time?
2. In your culture group, are there differences from other culture groups in terms of the concept of family?
3. In your culture group, are there differences from other culture groups in terms of the concept of hospitality?
4. In your culture group, are there differences from other culture groups in terms of the concept of humor?
5. What are some ways that you can think of, for people in other cultures to **connect** and build relationships with your culture group?
6. In thinking of the worship service, as well as other church activities, if someone from your culture group walking into a church, what would be very welcoming to them? What would be considered a barrier?

7. What trends do you see now among churches- if any- that are good or bad as pertaining to cross cultural ministry?