Session 06.03 - Intercultural Leadership

Lab: Intercultural Leadership
Date: October 8, 2026
Facilitator: Dan Randall

1. Purpose of today's session

What should today's session achieve?
Work through the various difficulties and benefits of working in intercultural leadership. Where is it working well and where is not working well, and why?

2. Starting point

This roundtable explores the complex interplay of identity, culture, race, and generation within Christian communities, particularly in the UK. The discussion confronts everyday racism, the limitations of a "white-centric" Christianity, and the challenges of creating genuinely intercultural leadership. Key themes include the distinction between self-defined identity and societal identification, the need to decenter English cultural dominance in faith, and the importance of creating "safe spaces" for honest dialogue. Panelists share personal experiences with microaggressions, tokenism, and the emotional labor required by people of color in predominantly white settings. They argue that age is not an excuse for prejudice and call for intentional, Christ-like intercultural living that moves beyond superficial representation to foster true belonging, emphasizing that this requires shared responsibility from both dominant and minority cultures.

3. Key insights

Marina:

- Proposes a three-lens framework for discussion: identity, identification, and mission.
- Emphasizes that the biblical Jesus was non-white and marginalized, making the Gospel itself about racial justice.
- Advocates for pastoral responsibility to create safe spaces, noting that persistent racism contributes to intergenerational trauma and health issues in diaspora communities.
- Warns that churches risk losing young Black congregants to identity-affirming movements if they center a "white Jesus."
- Believes genuine intercultural partnership is possible but requires hard work from both sides.

Israel:

- Highlights that UK churches are statistically more multicultural than UK society (e.g., 12% black churchgoers vs. 6% of the population) but this is not reflected in leadership.
- Links his own positive experience with intercultural teams in his youth to the development of a church culture that empowers women and non-white leaders.
- Urges leaders to reflect on communication, considering not only when to use a joke but whom should never be the target of one.

Usha:

- Argues for "decentering English as Christian" to reflect a global faith.
- Critiques the "whiteness" of some Indian Christianity in England, where assimilation is prioritized over genuine faith for acceptance.
- Rejects generational excuses for racism, stating ignorance is a choice in a diverse, informed society.
- Observes that people in positions of power must consciously choose to empower others, as it is not a requirement for them.
- Recounts being categorized as "black" in her youth in the UK, a term that then encompassed all non-white people.

4. Challenges identified

- **Identity vs. Identification:** There is a significant difference between how individuals define their own identity (e.g., by tribe, specific cultural heritage) and how society identifies them through broad categories (e.g., "Black African"), which often fail to capture personal reality.
- **Deconstructing "White Christianity":** The dominance of English and Western culture has distorted the image of Jesus. Reclaiming the non-white, marginalized, first-century Jewish Jesus is crucial for dismantling white-centric theology and making Christianity more inclusive.
- **The Interweaving of Culture and Generation:** Intercultural and intergenerational issues are deeply interconnected. Different generations perceive culture differently, and younger generations are increasingly vocal in correcting the prejudiced behavior of their elders.
- **The Need for Safe Spaces and Grace:** True intercultural dialogue requires creating safe spaces where people can be vulnerable, ask "ignorant" questions, and make mistakes without fear of permanent judgment. This necessitates patience and mutual grace from all participants.
- **Shared Responsibility for Belonging:** Creating genuine belonging is a partnership. Those in power (the dominant culture) must intentionally empower and make space for minority voices, while individuals from minority cultures must overcome internal barriers to confidently use their voice.

- **Accountability Across Generations:** Age is not a valid excuse for racist or prejudiced comments. In an information-rich age, ignorance is a choice, and accountability applies across all generations.
- **Leadership and Representation:** While UK church congregations are more diverse than the general population, this is not reflected in leadership. This lack of representation, tokenism, and the centering of a "white Jesus" risks alienating younger generations, particularly young Black congregants.
- **Beyond Superficial Representation:** The goal should be a deep "intercultural Christianity" and "Christ-like living," not just a superficially "intercultural church." This means moving beyond symbolic gestures to facilitate genuine understanding, connection, and systemic change in daily life.
- **The Harm of Microaggressions:** Casual jokes and microaggressions related to race, accents, and stereotypes cause real emotional exhaustion and lasting harm. Promptly apologizing and receiving corrections are vital for reconciliation.