

Leadership Formation and Cultural Diversity

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Date: 09.08.2010

Category: Diaspora, Ethnicity, Forming Leaders

Cultural diversity presents an enormous challenge to church and ministry in this globalised, multicultural world. When it comes to diversity people automatically think of ethnicity. However, with different generational groupings, socio-economic categories, regional settings, interest groups and religious groupings (within church denominations and outside with the major religions), to name a few, there is more to it than that.

Theological understanding of culture and God's involvement through creation and the response to the Tower of Babel should undergird leadership responding positively and healthily to diversity.

Leadership requires ministry formation that equips them to handle diversity and be competent culturally. The typical response in the face of diversity is to bunker down, protect ourselves and ensure there is conformity. Difference is not really tolerated. This results from a sense of threat and fear. There are huge consequences if this perception is not dealt with. The alternative is to see diverse contexts as opportunities for service and for God to work in a rich environment. Paul's understanding of the body of Christ reflects the acceptance of diversity and celebrates every part complementing each other in various ways. The orchestra provides a wonderful illustration of diversity in action.

Writings on the multicultural church encourage diversity and its resultant impact on the life and vibrancy of congregations. Is it really possible to build such churches?

Leaders need to be missiological reflective practitioners with a healthy cultural paradigm in their toolbox. They also need to have an excellent understanding of and the related skills to build cross-cultural relationships based on the servanthood model of Christ, the model leader. Duane Elmer's book entitled 'Cross-Cultural Servanthood' explores this area in depth.

How can formal and informal education programs within the local church, denominations and tertiary theological education contribute to this?

My response has been to develop a subject entitled 'Christians in a Multicultural World' which is a core first year subject for students in the Bachelor of Theology, Bachelor of Ministry and Bachelor of Intercultural Studies programs at Tabor Adelaide. It introduces students to culture, God's relationship to culture and the implications, ministry in the local community and developing a global vision.

What are some of the core dimensions that should be incorporated in such training?

Answering these questions will help internally and will assist in engaging with the communities beyond our Christian cultures.