Reflecting the Kingdom of God:
Interculturality as a Praxis of Ministry for Multicultural Parishes

by

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Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Vision

Underlying the emerging context of multicultural parishes around the world and particularly in the United States, where people of various cultures live and worship together, is the fundamental ecclesiological question: What should a Catholic parish in such a situation look like in its form and essence? This question, generated by the new global context, driven by movements of people, challenges the Church to re-examine its identity and mission in response to the new 'signs of the time.' The church is invited, in these times, to reflect more deeply on her Catholicity and her oneness as the Body of Christ. The Church's oneness is one great mark of her identity, entrusted by Christ who prayed *"that they may all be one"* (John 17:21) just as He and his Father are one. This unity or oneness that Jesus desires for the community he formed and nurtured is inherently inspired by the divine unity in Godself, who lives not in isolation but in communion and in unity.

In many multicultural parishes in the United States today, this prayer of Jesus for the Church is being tested by the prevalence of ethnic divisions, yet the situation also offers a unique opportunity to make Jesus' prayer a reality, though not perfectly. The Church's teachings hold that, as the Body of Christ, the Church is meant to prefigure the Kingdom of God: "She is on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom."[1] In this way, the Church, and for that matter, the parish is to be a place where people of every nation and tongue are gathered and begin to live out the Reign of God in anticipation of the eschatological vision in Revelation 7:9, "a great multitude…from every nation, from all

[1] Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on of the Church *Lumen Gentium*, (21 Nov. 1964) no. 5.

tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." This eschatological vision suggests, in many ways and forms, that the diversity of peoples, cultures, and, in fact, all of creation is part of God's plan, and that God intends to unite them into one worshiping and missionary community. A missionary community of brothers and sisters not limited by culture or language, but rather who courageously cross cultural and geographical boundaries together to include all of humanity in the Kingdom of God. Multicultural parishes are challenged and called to anticipate that eschatological reality, with people from every nation and tongue worshiping God and witnessing to the gospel together through their intercultural living.

The Second Vatican Council articulated this calling in *Lumen Gentium*, when it described the Church as "in Christ like a sacrament… of the unity of the whole human race."[2] The unity of the Church is crucial to her witness to the world as the Body of Christ and an instrument of salvation for humanity. It is that unique divine institution that authentically unites humanity, in its diversity, into one *familia Dei.* Each parish, as a local expression of the catholic Church, is meant to be a visible sign and instrument of communion, communion with God and communion among *all* people.[3] The parish Church is to be that unique home that welcomes, embraces, and interacts with all peoples as the one family of God, baptized into the One Body (cf. 1 Cor 12:13). Maintaining rigid separations along ethnic and national lines contradicts the nature and calling of the Church. The first Christian community presented to us in the Acts of the Apostles alongside Paul's teaching that *"there is neither Jew nor Greek… for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal 3:28) challenges the situation of many multicultural parishes in the U.S catholic church

[2] *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13.
[3] The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1.

while at the same time inviting parishes in this context into bold mutual encounter to affirms our adoption as daughters and sons of the same Father and Lord. The U.S. Catholic bishops, in their pastoral reflections on diversity, have stressed that the Church *must be* one family of God. They write, "We are challenged to get beyond ethnic communities living side by side within our own parishes without any connection with each other. We are challenged to become an evangelizing Church… truly a sacrament of unity."[4]

The unity spoken of by the Church, and particularly by the US Catholic Conference of Bishops, in relation to cultural diversity, is not one that melts cultural difference into a new uniform unidentifiable community that erases every connection to original cultural identities. Instead, it is a unity in Christ where diversity is reconciled into one mutually enriching community of brothers and sisters worshipping one God as "Our Father." The unity in question here is best understood through Pope Francis's challenging description of the Church of our time as a "polyhedron."[5] He sees the Church as a figure with different faces forming a single solid body of Christ, rather than a sphere of indistinct uniformity. The unity that the Church is called to reflect from its foundation and more urgently in the 21st Century, is a unity that values and respects distinctiveness; distinctiveness of cultures, race, and languages, but not to the point that it harms or destroys the beauty and unity of the body of Christ.

The disciples, as we read from the post-resurrection account of Matthew's Gospel, were sent by the risen Lord to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). The Church, by fulfilling this mission of making disciples of every nation and culture, ought to be a

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[4] https://www.usccb.org/committees/pastoral-care-migrants-refugees-travelers/welcoming-stranger-among-us-unity-diversity#:~:text=The%20presence%20of%20so%20many,to%20our%20ancestral%20heritage%20as

[5] Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 Nov. 2013), 226.

home to all peoples and cultures. The Church lives out her essence as "Catholic" when she embraces all peoples and cultures with the same value, respect, and appreciation, in a healthy tension with universal communion. When a culturally diverse parish intentionally works hard to cross the cultural boundaries of separation to engage its cultural diversity in communion, it lives out the mystery of Pentecost and, more importantly, begins to participate in the Kingdom of God in history. This is possible because the Kingdom has already been inaugurated by the incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus, the *autobasileia,* the kingdom itself.

From an ecclesiological standpoint, then, the prevailing practices of multicultural parishes that tolerate parallel ethnic communities in many U.S. catholic parishes need to be re-examined. They need to be examined in the light of the "radical kinship"[6] of the Kingdom of God, of which the Church is to be its prefiguration. The vision of the Church as "One People of God"[7] implies that, in a parish, parishioners, regardless of their nationality or culture, should identify first and foremost as brothers and sisters bound together in Christ, rather than living side by side as a "community of strangers." The radical kinship character of the Kingdom of God erases the attitude of "stranger danger" and invites us to see the "nationally other" or "culturally other" as sister or brother redeemed by Christ.

The Kingdom of God that the Church proclaims is one of reconciliation and unity among all peoples of every race and tongue; as Isaiah prophesied, God gathers all nations and tongues together (Isa 66:18) and prepares a banquet for all (Isa 25:6). The multicultural

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[6] Gregory Boyle, *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2017).
[7] *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13

parish contexts emerging in the U.S. catholic church can be seen in the light of the prophecies of Old Testament prophets and a manifestation of the eschatological church of Revelation chapter seven. I believe that the multicultural parishes in the United States, by living interculturally, fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah and become signs and beginning of the Kingdom of God as taught by the Second Vatican Council. This is what this thesis offers resources to achieve, and it does so by introducing intercultural principles into the administrative structures and ministries of multicultural parish administration, enabling them to reflect the unity in diversity of the Kingdom of God.

1.2 Genesis of the Thesis Project

The "Our Father," the prayer par excellence taught by Jesus, has been reflected upon by theologians in diverse ways. But, as a practical theologian, the phrase "Our Father" has never ceased to fascinate me when I reflect on its unitive trajectory in the light of human diversity and how it can enormously impact how we live in society when we reflect on its practical implications. This prayer, undoubtedly the most common among Christians, raises a question: how many are aware of its opening phrase as an ultimate call to fellowship, as brothers and sisters of one Father? In my reflection on the opening phrase "Our Father," I firmly believe that delving deeper into this theme will significantly enhance the church's approach to mission in a world that is increasingly culturally diverse.

The opening phrase, "Our Father," is somehow intrinsically linked to the message of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus. The kingdom Jesus invites the world to is none other than the kingdom of the Father, to whom we pray as brothers and sisters. When we reflect on this unity in the light of the oneness of the Trinity, it profoundly influences our approach to mission and ministry in multicultural contexts, especially in the

multicultural setting of the church in the United States today. The questions that linger on my mind are: How can our prayer inspire us to a unity that does not erase our differences? How can our prayer challenge and impel us into a communion that mirrors the kingdom we are anticipating?

It is not by coincidence that the Holy Bible opens with a kingdom story of paradise in Genesis with one human family blessed and commissioned by God to multiply and fill the Paradise, and then ends again in Revelation with a kingdom message, a "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1), where all the peoples born of the one ancestry of humanity, in their diversity are to be gathered into one family under one king, God, the source of the first human family. This theme of the Kingdom pulses at the heart of the biblical narrative, shaping Israel's destiny, defining Jesus's mission, and propelling the apostolic Church beyond Israel's borders into the world. But the big question remains: What is God's vision for this kingdom that pervades the Bible? A vision of God is best understood through the eyes of Godself, and that is why what the incarnate Lord reveals regarding this Kingdom should be understood as a true vision of God. The Kingdom revealed by Jesus, the *autobaseleia,* through his teachings and works, is a banquet for all people, a joyful communion where every nation, language, and culture finds a home. It is a kingdom that includes all without distinguishing the center from the peripheries, or as Andrew Walls profoundly puts it, "Christianity, unlike Islam, has a curious tendency to wither in the center and expand at the periphery."[8] It is for an all-embracing kingdom that Jesus lived, labored,

[8] Andrew Walls, Christian Conversion and Mission: A Brief Cultural History, Mark R. Gornik ed., (New York: Orbis books Maryknoll, 2025), 37.

suffered, and died.[9] It is this kingdom message that Jesus entrusted to his disciples: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:21).

Like leaven, this kingdom, from the call of Abraham to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, till today, is expanding steadily, moving from Israel outward to encompass all cultures and nations. Although the Old Testament roots the idea of God's reign in a covenantal relationship with Israel, this was never meant to be exclusive to the chosen people. Israel's election as John Fuellenbach observers was for the sake of others: "In you all families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3). Israel was called to be "a contrast society,"[10] a model of justice and solidarity that would reflect God's intentions for the whole world. Israel was chosen not for its own sake, but to mediate God's saving will to all creation: "The election of Israel out of many nations is a calling for the nations."[11] Even Israel's worship is portrayed as anticipatory, a glimpse of God's final plan for union with all peoples.[12]

Every kingdom has an inherent tendency to expand beyond its homogeneity to include other peoples and nations, as human history consistently reveals. Although a kingdom's power is determined by the number of territories it subjugates, kingdoms also expand to enrich themselves with the gifts, labor, and riches of those over whom they extend dominion. A crucial point to emphasize is that kingdoms always become heterogeneous, not just by design but by consequence. It is thus no surprise that Jesus commissions his disciples to bring the message of the Kingdom to all peoples, cultures,

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[9] John Fuellenbach, Throw Fire (Manila: Logos Publication, Inc., 1998), 73.
[10] John Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 21.
[11] John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 38.
[12] Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God,* 38.

and languages. The kingdom envisioned by Jesus transcends cultural borders and races, proclaiming that all are made in the image of the King and are called to be citizens in His reign. And each culture that God draws into His Kingdom is to enrich the kingdom with its cultural values that have been purified by the gospel message. In political terms, the riches of each culture become a 'commonwealth' to the kingdom, benefiting the whole, the parish, and the Church.

The Acts of the Apostles is a witness to this inclusive ecclesiology. Directed by the Holy Spirit, the Apostolic Church embraced diversity and enriched itself with the surrounding cultures and languages, though it was hesitant at first. St. Paul stood as a passionate advocate for cultural plurality, insisting that difference was not a threat but the fruit of the Spirit. It is therefore not surprising that in the Pauline communities, "Jews, Greeks, barbarians, Thracians, and Egyptians found a common home in Christ."[13] The Church, the bearer of this kingdom message, has over the centuries become home to a diversity of cultures and ethnic identities. In proclaiming the Kingdom of God, the Church has herself been transformed through ongoing encounters with different cultures. Christianity was "from the beginning global in its impulse,"[14] and its early spread across Asia, North Africa, the Near East, and Europe reflected a genuine catholicity, marked by the translation of the Gospel into many languages and traditions, Hellenistic, Coptic, Persian, Syrian, Indian, and more.[15] The great adventure of Christian faith, according to Andrew Wall, is that, "It's always taking new shape as Christ enters new territory, as he

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[13] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 447.
[14] Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 42.
[15] Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent*, 42–43.

takes flesh again in the cultures where he has not walked in flesh before."[16] As the message expanded among cultures, the Church became not merely a herald but also an icon of the Kingdom of God. Vatican II affirms this when it teaches that the Church, as "the seed and beginning of the kingdom," exists to represent the divine vision of a reconciled human family where every person acknowledges the one God as Father and lives in fraternal communion with others.[17]

Yet this vision has not been without distortion. While the early Church was marked by a dynamic openness to cultural differences visible in the inculturation of faith into diverse liturgical expressions such as Syriac, Roman, Coptic, and Maronite rites,[18] the Constantinian shift heralded a different trajectory. As Christianity aligned with the empire, the Church became not just the carrier of the Gospel but the bearer of a dominant culture. Mission, then, took a different turn and became a civilizing project, an outreach from a "superior" to an "inferior" culture. Cultures were not seen as integral wholes but rather dissected into acceptable "elements," which were adapted to the so-called kernel of a supracultural, Western theology.[19] As the mission became entangled with colonial ambition, cultural imposition replaced the initial intercultural dialogue of the Apostolic age. The conquest model of mission, especially during the so-called Age of Discovery, sought to transplant not only Christianity but also European culture, suppressing indigenous ways of knowing and believing in the divine. "Mission was no longer the humble planting of faith in native soil, but an uprooting of peoples from their cultural

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[16] Andrew Walls, *Christian Conversion and Mission: A Brief Cultural History*, Mark R. Gornik ed., (New York: Orbis books Maryknoll, 2025), 19-20.
[17] *Lumen Gentium*, no. 5.
[18] Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 448.
[19] Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 449-450.

heritage."[20] These unfortunate turns of events in the history of the church's mission have left a lasting "negative" impact on the Church's image as "catholic" and as the "sign and instrument"[21] (LG 1) of the Kingdom of God.

The colonial mindset of earlier mission endeavors, presuming the universal validity of Western theology, gave rise to an ecclesiology that privileged uniformity over diversity. This mindset is one of the roots of today's ethnocentrism and nationalism, especially evident in American Catholicism. The distortion of catholicity is observable in what are now termed "shared parishes" in the United States. In these parishes, different ethnic groups share a single parish building but remain functionally segregated by ethnic Masses, ministries, and leadership. Though these parishes may share a pastor or administrative body, they are often divided by invisible walls, parallel communities rather than a communion of cultures. The tragedy is that 'catholic,' which should symbolize a Church where all peoples and cultures find home, is increasingly experienced as an exclusive, if not fragmented, identity. As Richard Gaillardetz writes, "the ecclesiology that aligns itself with empire and power loses its ability to embrace diversity through its engagement with diverse peoples and cultures."[22] But the Second Vatican Council reclaimed the dialogical and communion vision of the Church, one that imagines catholicity not as uniformity but as communion in diversity. In *Gaudium et Spes*, the Church confessed that "it has profited from the history and development of humankind" and committed itself to a mission "in the modern world," not apart from it.[23]

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[20] Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church*, 51.
[21] *Lumen Gentium* no. 1.
[22] Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church*, 51.
[23] Pastoral Constitution on the Church in The Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* no. 44.

Today, to reflect the Kingdom of God in our parishes and communities as truly catholic, we must be courageous and yet trusting in the Holy Spirit, who is the divine force for unity; He, who is always leading us into new ways of loving and caring for each other as brothers and sisters.[24] Intercultural transformation requires our willingness; this is ultimately a conversion point and, as such, a grace.[25] Thus, to live, grow, and become intercultural communities, we must trust in God's abundant love.[26]

1.3 Multicultural Reality in the United States

Today's globalization and the unprecedented movements of people around the globe have led to "the compression of our sense of time and our sense of space; events happening around the world are experienced instantaneously."[27] We no longer need to travel around the world to encounter differences; differences of nationalities and cultures are all around us. Our churches, workplaces, schools, and virtually all institutions have become expressions of a world being pulled together from every part of the globe. Humanity is being drawn into a communion of encounter on every side, and every corner of the world is growing in cultural, racial, national, and religious diversity.[28] This has turned many small communities into microcosms of the world. This demographic change is affecting every stratum of society, and the church, as a social institution, is no exception.

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[24] Maria Cimperman, "What is at Stake" *Engaging our diversity: interculturality and consecrated life today.* Eds Maria Cimperman and Roger Schroeder, (NY: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2020), 4.
[25] Cimperman, "What is at Stake," 9.
[26] Cimperman, "What is at Stake," 3.
[27] Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 11.
[28] Maria Cimperman and Roger Schroeder eds, *Engaging our diversity: interculturality and consecrated life today* (NY: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2020), vii.

This increasing movement of people across the globe over the past few decades is gradually reversing and breaking down the walls of segregation, particularly in the United States context, which has a long history of national and cultural segregation. Teresa Maya puts it better when she says, "we are living in a particular socio-cultural context, in a particular time in history that will only make this hyper-diversity more real, more challenging and certainly *more like the world God created."*[29] The face of Catholic parish life in the United States is significantly impacted by new demographic changes; cultural diversity defines Catholic parishes today. This identity is deeply rooted in the founding generations of Catholicism in the U.S. The history of the Catholic Church in the United States reveals a foundation of diversity, with missionaries arriving from different parts of Europe to evangelize the indigenous peoples. Then, successive waves of immigrants arrived from Spain, Ireland, Germany, and Poland in the nineteenth century, and later migrants came from Mexico, Asia, and other parts of the world.[30]

In recent decades, this trend has seen a tremendous surge as the United States remains "the number one destination for migrants."[31] Research has indicated the impact of migration on the United States Catholic church. The 2014 Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) study on diversity in the church showed that white non-Hispanics formed a 54 percent majority, with Latinos representing 38 percent, with an even higher percentage among younger Catholics.[32] The same research revealed that over 29% of all

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[29] Teresa Maya, "Intercultural Living in Consecrated Life in the United States" *Engaging our diversity: interculturality and consecrated life today.* Eds Maria Cimperman and Roger Schroeder, (NY: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2020), 40.
[30] Brett C. Hoover, "The Shared Parish," *American Catholic Studies Newsletter* (Cushwa Center for American Catholicism) 37, no. 2 (2010): 1–10.
[31] Teresa Maya, "Intercultural Living in Consecrated Life in the United States," 40.
[32] Mark Gray, Mary Gautier, and Thomas Gaunt, "*Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church in the United States*," (Washington, DC: CARA, 2014), 4.

U.S. parishes regularly celebrate at least one Mass in a language other than English.[33] And again, over one-third of Catholic parishes are now identified as "multicultural," meaning they serve two or more racial, ethnic, or linguistic groups within the same parish.[34] California, the focus of this research, is the second-most-diverse state in the U.S. It has between 50 and 75 percent of its Catholic parishes holding Masses in more than one language.[35] California's Catholic population is two-thirds Hispanic/Latino.[36] Significant numbers of Filipinos and other Asian-American Catholics also contribute to the Church's diversity. About 76 percent of U.S. Asian/Pacific Islander Catholics self-identify as Filipino,[37] making Filipinos one of the largest non-Hispanic groups in many West Coast dioceses. These statistics were gathered in 2014, and we can only imagine how these numbers might have spiked over the past decade.

These statistics underscore a new pastoral context: most Catholic parishes can no longer assume a homogenous flock but must minister to a variety of cultural communities under one roof. In light of the growing cultural diversity in Southern California, Santa Clara University received a donation of over one million dollars in December 2023 to help establish a department that helps train leaders for ministry in parishes across California.[38] Cultural diversity is now an integral part of U.S. society, and this demographic change is unlikely to reverse, at least not in the next couple of decades. Accordingly, despite the intermittent xenophobic reactions by some individuals and institutions, this reality is being

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[33] Gray et al, "*Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church in the United States*," 6.
[34] Gray et al, "Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church in the United States," 5.
[35] Gray et al, "Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church in the United States," 5.
[36] Gray et al, "Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church in the United States," 6.
[37] Gray et al, "Cultural Diversity in the Catholic Church in the United States," 7.
[38] https://www.scu.edu/news-and-events/press-releases/2023/december-2023/santa-clara-university-receives-125m-to-establish-the-institute-for-parish-renewal.html

acknowledged by many scholars as the new way of being society, and it will continue to impact every stratum of human society and institutions in the decades ahead.

But as Maya rightly puts it, "the mere fact of diversity does not automatically yield cohesion, communion, and mutuality."[39] Communion and mutuality are two great values that are achieved through intentional effort, but importantly, through grace, because these values are gifts of the Holy Spirit. As this research will explore later, the multicultural character of today's Catholic parishes presents both a gift and a task. It offers a living sign of the universality of the Church and its image as the seed of the Kingdom of God, while at the same time posing practical challenges for fostering communion among different ethnic groups. The situation in Southern California's Catholic parishes exemplifies both the promise and the tensions of multicultural parish life. Ethnic communities often live "side by side" in the same parish with only minimal interaction,[40] raising the central question this thesis seeks to address: How can multicultural parishes transcend ethnic coexistence to become a "reflection of the Kingdom of God"?

As I have observed in a number of multicultural parishes before embarking on this project, the default pastoral approach to the existing diversity has been accommodation and tolerance, and in some cases, assimilation. Since many Parish leaderships often "do not know what to do with diversity,"[41] they respond to it with separate Mass schedules and ministries for the major language groups. In this regard, one might ask, what happens to

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[39] Teresa Maya, "Intercultural Living in Consecrated Life in the United States" 42.
[40] https://www.usccb.org/committees/pastoral-care-migrants-refugees-travelers/welcoming-stranger-among-us-unity-diversity#:~:text=country%2C%20and%20the%20nativism%2C%20ethnocentricity%2C,%281
[41] Antonio M. Pernia, SVD "Ensuring New Wineskins for New Wine: Leadership in Intercultural Communities" in *Engaging Our Diversity: Interculturality and Consecrated Life Today* eds., Maria Cimperman and Roger Schroeder (New York: Orbis Books, 2020), 194.

minor groups that cannot afford to stand on their own? Are they to be ignored or assimilated, and their cultural uniqueness forgotten? The accommodation approach to dealing with diversity carries an unspoken undertone of "let us give each group what it needs" to ensure what many call "peace." But true peace is not the mere absence of conflict or war; peace encompasses justice, freedom, equality, and respect for human rights and dignity.

The accommodation approach to diversity surely has practical benefits and, in fact, is an essential component in the process of intercultural living. It acknowledges the reality of language barriers and offers new immigrant parishioners an opportunity to gradually integrate into their new community through familiar practices. By providing, say, a Spanish Mass, a parish compassionately "accommodates" immigrants of Spanish origin with limited English proficiency. This can foster a sense of belonging and comfort for immigrant Catholics who often "need a safe space to live out their Catholic faith"[42] and to adjust to a new country. In this sense, simple tolerance and mutual avoidance can only keep a fragile peace in the face of diversity.

But remaining tied to accommodation and tolerance presents a number of challenges that hinder the goal of multicultural parishes reflecting the Kingdom of God. While an accommodation approach might prevent open conflict, it often fails to build a genuine Christian community of love. When a multicultural parish limits itself to the accommodation approach, it can at best produce "parallel worship and ministry" that creates separate worlds within the one parish,[43] or what I call a "community of strangers."

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[42] Brett C. Hoover, "The Shared Parish," *American Catholic Studies Newsletter* (Cushwa Center for American Catholicism) 37, no. 2 (2010): 5.
[43] Hoover, "The Shared Parish," 5.

Parallel worship and ministry unconsciously but effectively perpetuate division along fine lines in the name of avoiding conflict. Researchers observe that in many "shared parishes," the scheduling of parish facilities is arranged so that groups might avoid encountering one another.[44] This implicitly and unconsciously institutionalizes a polite but pervasive segregation, creating an "us/them" mindset and what Anthony Gittins calls "veiled Christian apartheid"[45] in the parish. Parishes thus appear to be one on the outside but, in essence, segregated.

Importantly, mere accommodation falls short of the Church's vision of unity. When a parish hosts diverse groups under one administration but fails to foster mutual interaction and build relationships across ethnic boundaries, it is unable to fully reflect the Kingdom of God it represents. Parallel communities are highly prone to foster and catalyze ethnocentrism and nationalism, which, by cultural groups, focus on themselves, consider themselves superior, and view others with suspicion or indifference.[46] Tolerating each other on the surface level does not guarantee deep mutual gifting and loving. As a 2015 panel on shared parishes concluded, "the accommodation approach was an ad hoc response to immigration, but it has resulted in a structure that institutionalizes the separation of communities within the parish."[47] In a nutshell, while necessary at first, accommodation and tolerance are inadequate as long-term pastoral responses for fulfilling the church's call to unity. These approaches secure coexistence, not the kind of communion and mutual

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[44] https://www.usccb.org/committees/pastoral-care-migrants-refugees-travelers/welcoming-stranger-among-us-unity-diversity#:~:text=country%2C%20and%20the%20nativism%2C%20ethnocentricity%2C,%281

[45] Anthony Gittins "Mission for the Twenty-First Century in North America" *'Mission for the twenty First Century"* Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder eds (Chicago: CCGM Publications, 2001), 159.

[46] Brett C. Hoover, "The Shared Parish," 5.

[47] https://catholicphilly.com/2015/02/news/national-news/panel-looks-at-ways-to-bridge-divides-among-groups-in-shared-parish/#:~:text=Shared%20parishes%20are%20not%20part,"

enrichment that the Gospel envisions for "the Body of Christ," which prefigures the Kingdom of God.

1.4 Trinity, Human Person, and Relationship: A Working Guide

The visible parallel worship and minimal engagement among cultures found in many multicultural parishes is, to a greater or lesser extent, due to the fear of relating with the culturally other. A fear created sometimes by our culturally conditioned prejudices and stereotyping, and sometimes by the social structuring of society that puts people and cultures into certain categories. But how can the Body of Christ truly become the new creation that mirrors the reign of God without relationships? It is in this light that I believe the Blessed Trinity becomes a standard and an important model for living interculturally, since through our baptism we all now bear the identity of the Triune God. The life of the Trinity challenges us to rethink our understanding of community and to prioritize relationships and interconnectedness within multicultural parish communities and the human society at large.

In the Trinity we understand that, "being a person in the image and likeness of the divine Persons means acting as a permanently active web of relationship: relating backwards and upwards to one's origin in the unfathomable mystery of the Father, relating outwards to one's fellow human beings by revealing oneself to them and welcoming the revelation of them in the mystery of the Son."[48] Relationships are natural to the essence of the human being, and, as interconnected people, our relationships ought to be characterized by mutual respect, love, and cooperation rather than division, domination, and unhealthy competition. The Trinity serves as a paradigm for how we should relate to one another in

[48] Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and society* (OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 149.

community and to the broader creation, recognizing our interdependence and working together for the common good and the flourishing of our communities and of all creation entrusted to mankind by the Creator.

It is our nature to be open to relationships because of the Source of our being, God. Implanted deep within us is the divine call to transcend ourselves through an encounter with God and other human beings.[49] Leonard Boff, discussing the philosophical perspective of the human being, deals with two important elements: *Being-us* and *Being-in-openness. Being-us:* he explains this as the product of the dynamic of communing in the *us,* the actual community, not just in the sense of a social, familial, loving community, but the mode of being by which we become part of a single whole. We are, we live, and find our existence as human beings through our constant communion with others. The "I" does not exist by itself; it is dwelt in by many, because its roots are dependent on others, and it is permeated by others.[50] Therefore, what is proper to being human is living with, existing in communion with, even our most distant likes, allowing ourselves to be permeated by others and likewise permeating them.[51]

Being-in-openness: only a being that is open to others can commune with, relate to, and build up a community with other con-natural beings.[52] Openness, according to him, is a mark of the Spirit. It implies feeling oneself outside oneself. The person does not form a totality of him/herself. Without openness, there can be no acceptance or bestowing, and nothing new can result from the meeting of two presences. *Being-in-openness* is being in

[49] Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti* (2020), no. 111.
[50] Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 131
[51] Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 131.
[52] Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 131.

freedom, being capable of the love that transfigures the whole universe.[53] To be a *being* implies that we cannot define our lives or who we are in isolation; there are interpenetrating factors, such as our parents, friends, institutions, etc., that always shape who we are. Our lives are in constant openness towards the other because we work and exist in relationships.

Again, we understand by the Trinity "that underlying every existing and moving thing is the impulse for unification, communion, and eternal synthesis of those who are distinct in an infinite, living, personal, loving, and absolutely fulfilling whole."[54] From out of the overflowing beauty of the *ad intra* relationship of the Holy Trinity comes forth the *ad extra* beauty of creation. Creation holds in its essence the pattern of communion and unity, because its source is characterized by communion, unity, and diversity. In Genesis, the human being is said to be created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27). This implies that each human being reveals traces of the Blessed Trinity,[55] in particular, the way humanity is to relate to one another. Just as the Trinity forms an open communion going beyond itself to include creation, human beings made in the image of the Trinity cannot turn in on themselves to the exclusion of other humans and other surrounding created things. Building on the Trinity and creation story, we can assert that it is indisputably God's design that humanity live in community and in harmony with other creatures. However, the wound caused by sin has made living in harmony priceless, and indifference and discrimination are on the rise even in the Christian community, which is to epitomize the love of God. How shall we together call forth a fuller version of the church where God's love dominates?

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[53] Boff, *Trinity and society*, 130.
[54] Leonard Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, (NY: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2000), 6.
[55] Boff, *Trinity and Society,* 38.

If we take a quick glance at many multicultural parishes today, we notice a growing fragmentation and division caused by the notions of freedom, independence, autonomy, and so-called cultural preservation. These notions, though good in themselves, have led many people and groups to become less tolerant of otherness, less accepting of the other, and worse, neglect and indifference towards the poor and the less fortunate. But in the depths of our hearts, none of us can deny our being relational and our need for each other and other creatures. Pope Francis, quoting Thomas Aquinas, writes, "In the depths of every heart, love creates bonds and expands existence, for it draws people out of themselves towards others."[56] In the depths of our hearts, we acknowledge our true selves as beings endowed with grace, power, and love to transcend ourselves, yet these virtues are rarely lived out in our daily actions. Our actions and deeds betray who we truly are, in essence, as human beings, as relational beings. We are quick to choose the exclusive "We" over the inclusive "We," even within the Body of Christ, where love and unity are the commonest vocabulary one can hear.

By intentionally avoiding and neglecting or even dominating the culturally other as Christian faithful, we unconsciously affirm our disobedience to Jesus' command to love. We affirm that we are not guided by the love of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ, the love that includes all and puts the beloved first. We are created not to encounter ourselves or those like us in race or culture. We are designed, on the contrary, to encounter God and the other who might not physically or socially be like us. Jesus commands his disciples: "Love as I have loved you" (John 13:34). Love intrinsically directs itself towards the other. Loving

[56] Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*., (3 October 202), no. 88.

automatically evokes a relationship that gives itself away for the flourishing of the relationship and the dignity of the beloved.

Jesus tells his disciples at the Last Supper, “If him whom you call teacher and master has washed your feet, then you must do the same to each other” (John 13:14). The Christian life calls us to mutual love, loving that breaks the boundaries of culture, race, nationality, and social superiority. As creatures made in the image of the Triune God, we are constantly drawn out of ourselves towards the other who is different from us to create the communion of love. This is what intercultural living challenges us to be: to step out of our cultural selves and encounter the cultural others in our multicultural parishes. By doing that, we become the “sign and sacrament of the Kingdom of God” here on earth.

1.5 Research Approach and Methodology Overview

To explore the transition from parallel ethnic communities to an authentic intercultural parish, this study employs a qualitative methodology grounded in Richard Osmer’s four tasks of practical theology. Osmer’s framework provides a structured approach to investigating pastoral situations and discerning contextually appropriate responses. By employing Osmer’s four-task method, this study ensures a comprehensive and balanced investigation grounded in empirical parish data, while incorporating theological depth and practical insights. The four tasks are as follows:

1. *Descriptive-Empirical Task* – “What is going on?” This stage focuses on understanding parishioners’ lived experiences by gathering information on parish realities from multiple data sources. Data collection methods include semi-structured interviews with parishioners, lay leaders, and clergy; participant observation of

liturgical and community events; and analysis of parish documents, such as bulletins, mission statements, demographic statistics, and historical records.

2. *Interpretive Task* – "Why is this going on?" This stage seeks to understand the collected data by interpreting them through the lens of social-scientific theories and frameworks. By applying relevant theoretical lenses, this analysis contextualizes the situations observed in the parishes and identifies underlying patterns, tensions, and dynamics that shape multicultural parish life.

3. *Normative Task* – "What ought to be going on?" At this stage, we respond to the question by developing a theological foundation for an ideal intercultural parish by drawing on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, official Church teachings on unity and diversity, and insights from contemporary theologians. This normative vision will provide the theological principles that guide the next stage of Osmer's approach.

4. *Pragmatic Task* – "How might we respond?" This final stage proposes concrete, contextually sensitive strategies to guide "shared parishes" toward "intercultural parishes" that embody the eschatological vision of Revelation 7:9.

This qualitative research employs a multiple-case study design, examining three culturally diverse parishes: two in the Diocese of San Bernardino and one in the Diocese of San Diego, all in Southern California. The data collected from these parishes serve as the primary sources for the descriptive-empirical task. By examining three distinct parishes, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how cultural diversity is navigated in different parish contexts and the extent of interaction and division among ethnic communities within multicultural parishes. The multiple case study approach

enables both within-case analysis and cross-case comparison, revealing common patterns across all sites and unique contextual factors that shape each parish's approach to cultural diversity. The Southern California setting is particularly significant to this work, given the region's exceptional cultural and linguistic diversity, making it an ideal context for studying multicultural parish dynamics in the contemporary United States.

1.6 Limitation

While the findings contribute meaningfully to the discourse on interculturality in Catholic parish life, several limitations must be acknowledged to properly contextualize the scope and significance of this work.

First, the study is limited in its geographic and demographic reach. It focuses on only three multicultural Catholic parishes located in Southern California, in the United States, with only four ethnic diversities: Anglos, Hispanics, Filipinos, and Vietnamese. Although these parishes present a range of ethnic and cultural diversity, they nonetheless cannot represent the full spectrum of multicultural experiences across the nation. The diversity of diocesan structures, pastoral leadership styles, and local sociocultural dynamics across the U.S. would suggest that the study's findings may be less applicable to other contexts.

Second, the researcher's positionality warrants critical reflection. As a recent arrival to the United States and someone conducting research in a context culturally and pastorally distinct from my previous ministerial experiences, the researcher acknowledges a degree of outsider status as he steps into unfamiliar ground. This may affect the researcher's depth of understanding of the context, particularly in the face of unanticipated pastoral or cultural dynamics to be encountered during fieldwork.

Third, the study employs a qualitative research design rooted in phenomenological approaches. While this design is based on participants' lived experiences, self-reported data can be susceptible to subjectivity and personal bias from both the researcher and participants. This bias could potentially influence the interpretation of intercultural practices and dynamics within parish life.

1.7 Clarification of Terms

This research revolves around several crucial concepts that require definition and clarification within the context of this study. By establishing clear conceptual boundaries, this work avoids sweeping generalizations and maintains analytical precision. The key concepts examined include ethnicity, ethnic coexistence, culture, multiculturality, interculturality, and the Kingdom of God.

Ethnicity: It is a complex and multifaceted concept that describes how individuals identify with one another based on shared cultural traits, history, or ancestry. This work adopts Fredrik Barth's exposition as its working guideline. Barth defines ethnicity as "entailing social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories."[57] Within this framework, ethnicity functions as a social identity in which an individual accepts the right of co-members to judge and seeks to be accepted and judged by others only in particular ways.[58] This understanding emphasizes the dynamic and

[57] Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 9-10.
[58] Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 2014), 98.

relational nature of ethnic identity, highlighting that ethnic boundaries are not fixed but continually negotiated through social interaction.

Ethnic Coexistence: Building on Barth's conceptualization of ethnicity, Richard Jenkins defines ethnic coexistence "as the ongoing interaction of distinct collectivities across maintained but permeable boundaries, where difference is organized rather than eliminated, and continuity is sustained through regulated intergroup relations."[59] This definition underscores a critical insight: ethnic groups coexist not because they are culturally sealed or isolated from one another, but precisely because boundaries are continually enacted, negotiated, and reproduced through interaction. Ethnic coexistence thus represents an active, dynamic process rather than a passive state of separation.

Culture: Culture is a concept with myriad definitions, reflecting its inherent complexity and multidimensional nature. Edward B. Tylor provides a foundational definition, describing culture as "that complex whole including knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other abilities and habits acquired by people as members of society."[60] This definition emphasizes that culture is acquired through learning and socialization rather than transmitted genetically. Cultural beliefs, norms, customs, and habits are human-made constructs, which means they can be learned, adapted, and transformed.

Gerald Arbuckle offers a more comprehensive definition that integrates both classical and postmodern perspectives on culture. He defines culture as "a network of

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[59] Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 2014), 9.
[60] Edward B. Tylor, cited in Louis Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 134.

symbols, myths, narratives, and rituals created by individuals … as they struggle to respond to the competitive pressures of power and limited resources in a rapidly globalizing and fragmenting world, and instructing its adherents about what is considered to be the correct way to feel, think, and behave."[61] For the purposes of this work, culture is understood as a dynamic rather than static way of behaving. Importantly, this approach to culture recognizes that diverse cultural groups, when committed to forming a community, can develop new shared behavioral patterns that define their collective identity.

Multiculturality: Anthony Gittins writes that "any neighborhood, country, parish, or religious community composed of people from many cultures is *de facto* multicultural."[62] However, this work adopts a more specific understanding of multiculturality as articulated by Lazar Stanislaus, SVD. Stanislaus explains multiculturality as "a situation in which members of different nationalities or cultures coexist side by side without a commitment to building a new integrated community."[63] His explanation implies that multiculturality is a situation where different nationalities maintain peaceful coexistence characterized by tolerance, mutual respect, and some degree of good neighborliness. However, their respective cultures remain only minimally affected by the surrounding cultures, and members do not commit to learning each other's languages or engaging deeply with each other's cultural practices. Multiculturality thus represents coexistence without integration.

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[61] Gerald Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians: A Postmodern Critique* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 17.
[62] Anthony Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 18.
[63] Lazar Stanislaus and Martin Ueffing, eds., *Intercultural Mission* (Delhi: Allianz Enterprises, 2015), xxv.

Interculturality: Unlike multiculturality, interculturality represents a more transformative approach to cultural diversity. According to Daniel Pietrzak, interculturality is "a challenging, never-ending process of development through interaction among members of different cultural groups."[64] Interculturality transcends mere peaceful coexistence or unidirectional cultural movement. It emphasizes mutual "integration of various cultural expressions to form something new without diminishing the value of each cultural component."[65] The mutuality inherent in interculturality makes explicit that its "goal is neither assimilation nor the ghettoization of different people or cultures, but the appreciation and acceptance of similarities and differences."[66]

The defining elements of interculturality—challenge, process, and mutuality—make this concept particularly appropriate for this research. These elements acknowledge the difficult work involved in transforming institutionalized structures into genuinely integrated communities that honor cultural diversity while fostering unity.

The Kingdom of God: This work grounds its understanding of the Kingdom of God in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, particularly regarding the relationship between the Kingdom and the Church. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* no. 5, articulates that the Kingdom of God is revealed and inaugurated in Christ: "the Kingdom is clearly visible in the very Person of Christ,"[67] and it is visibly present in mystery through the Church. According to this document, the Kingdom began in history

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[64] Daniel Pietrzak, cited in Robert Kisala, "Formation for Intercultural Life and Mission," *Verbum SVD* 50, no. 3 (2009): 335.
[65] Daniel Pietrzak, cited in Robert Kisala, "Formation for Intercultural Life and Mission," *Verbum SVD* 50, no. 3 (2009): 335.
[66] Daniel Pietrzak, cited in Robert Kisala, "Formation for Intercultural Life and Mission," *Verbum SVD* 50, no. 3 (2009): 335.
[67] *Lumen Gentium*, no. 5.

with the incarnation and continues through the Church's life, mission, and sacraments. The Kingdom of God and its activities are thus made present in history through the Church, which, as the Body of Christ, prefigures the eschatological Kingdom. This understanding establishes the theological foundation for examining how ethnic coexistence and interculturality relate to the Church's mission of manifesting God's Kingdom on earth.

1.8 Thesis Overview

The thesis project primarily investigates the relationships among ethnic communities in three multicultural parishes: two within the diocese of San Bernardino and one in the diocese of San Diego. The objective is to comprehend the remote factors that sustain and perpetuate the existing "shared parish" reality in many culturally diverse parishes across the United States. Chapter 1 presents the current state of these three identified multicultural parishes, detailing their organizational structures and the functioning of their ministries. It also addresses opportunities for collaboration, potential tensions among the ethnic communities, and power dynamics, including issues of domination and marginalization. Chapter 2 delves deeper into the root causes that sustain and perpetuate parallel ethnic communities within these parishes. It employs social-scientific theories to interpret and understand parishioners' lived experiences, providing insights into the underlying factors that shape these dynamics.

Chapter 3 establishes the theological foundations for intercultural ministry by exploring the perichoretic communion of the Trinity as the basis for intercultural living. This chapter envisions the Kingdom of God as revealed in Revelation 7:9, emphasizing the importance of embracing diversity and inclusivity. Chapter 4 offers practical strategies to help multicultural parishes gradually transition from ethnic coexistence to an intercultural

community. These strategies aim to create a welcoming environment for all people and cultures, transforming the parish into a true home for everyone.

The conclusion summarizes the study's key findings and reflects on their implications for the broader Church. It acknowledges the limitations of the research and suggests directions for future research and pastoral development.

Chapter One: What is Going On?

2.1 Introduction

This first chapter presents the current realities of the three multicultural parishes identified for this study by following Richard Osmer's descriptive-empirical stage. The goal is to understand how different ethnic communities interact within multicultural parishes in this part of the United States. By focusing on three multicultural parishes in the dioceses mentioned above in Southern California, the chapter concretely describes the unique lived experiences and contexts of these parishes. The data gathered here lays the groundwork for the subsequent chapter, which will interpret and analyze the dividing factors and patterns revealed through observation and interviews.

2.2 What Is Going On?

The first task of Osmer's practical theological framework is the descriptive-empirical stage. This primus task asks the practical question: "What is going on?" How does life in multicultural parishes look on the outside and on the inside? How do people feel and relate with the culturally other members of the parish family? This stage involves listening deeply to people's stories and concrete histories. What we do here is gather and present the lived realities of the faith community, their practices, and the dynamics of parish administration. Osmer emphasizes that theological understanding must begin with attentive observation of the practices, patterns, and tensions shaping a community's life.[68] In this spirit, we explore these parishes to discern the realities and relationships defining their communal life.

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[68] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 4.

Our approach to data collection would involve integrating interviews, participant observation, and document review to examine and present the unique circumstances of each parish. Over the course of fourteen weeks, from July to October, 2025, with a minimum of four weeks in each parish, I participated in liturgies, attended parish meetings and events, and had both formal and informal conversations with parishioners and leaders. I conducted interviews with pastors, ministry coordinators, and selected parishioners, focusing on their experiences of leadership, participation, and belonging to a culturally diverse parish. Additionally, examined parish bulletins, census data, and diocesan reports to complement and triangulate the individual narratives.

The choice of the parishes we engage with in this study was informed by their shared cultural diversity. They are parishes with Anglo, Vietnamese, Hispanic, and Filipino ethnic communities. For the purpose of this work, we name the parishes as Parish A, Parish B, and Parish C. As we shall see momentarily in detail, although these parishes share a common ethnic diversity, each embodies distinctive expressions of multicultural parish life, ranging from structured inclusion and cautious coexistence to visible fragmentation. Each parish is unique in its historical development, leadership model, and cultural composition; yet, together, they offer us a broader pastoral reality in the Catholic Church in the United States, that is, the ongoing struggle to live in communion as one redeemed people of God.

As a general overview, Parishes A and B are situated in the Diocese of San Bernardino and are administered by diocesan priests from diverse cultural backgrounds. Parish C, on the other hand, belongs to the Diocese of San Diego, and it is served by religious priests who are also culturally diverse. At Parish C, the pastor is an American-

born Vietnamese, while the associate pastor is a Ghanaian. At Parish A, the pastor is of Anglo descent, and his associate is a Vietnamese American. Parish B has three priests: the pastor and one other associate are American-born Mexicans, and the third is Ghanaian. Already, we notice cultural diversity among the clergy who guide and lead the parishes we are dealing with in this study. As regards participants in my interviews, Parish A had ten, including the pastor, leaders of the four ethnic communities, catechetical leaders, and parishioners. Parishes B and C had nine participants each, including the pastors, ethnic community leaders, ministry leaders, and parishioners.

In presenting the data gathered, pseudonyms are used for places and persons involved in this study, also some data sources are not footnoted for the purposes of safeguarding the privacy of the participants. The data presentation are done per parish and categorized under four main titles: 1) Demographic Trends, 2) Parish Mindset and Atmosphere, 3) Leadership, and 4) Aspirations. After presenting the data on the all the parishes, the chapter concludes with a section that looks at the commonalities and differences among the multicultural parishes. We begin now with Parish A.

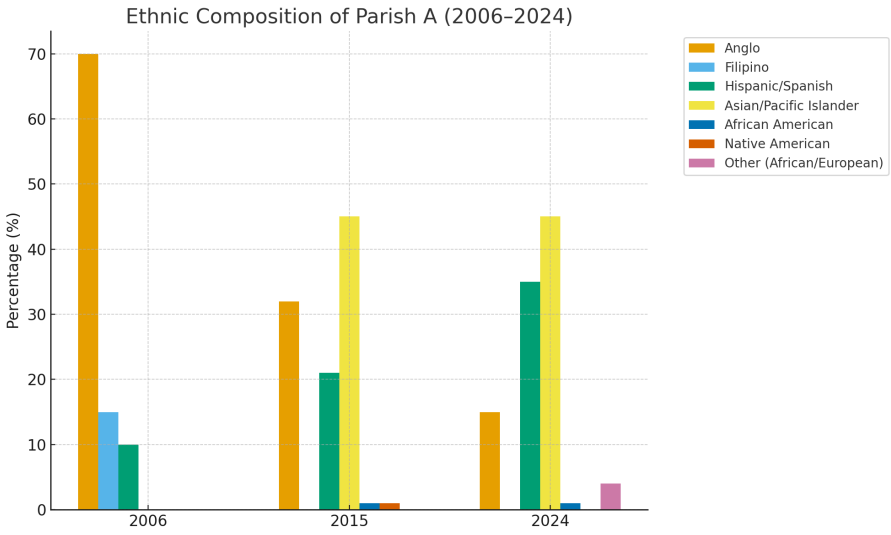
Parish A

2.3.1 Geography and Demographics Trends

Parish A, a young, vibrant community, began 20 years ago with the current pastor. It was a small community with a few hundreds of parishioners, and among these pioneer parishioners, 70% were Anglos, and the remaining 30% were a mix of Filipinos, Hispanics, and Vietnamese. The parish is surrounded by a constantly growing suburban communities, and the residents of these surrounding suburbs are also increasingly diverse in cultural and nationality. According to a government data report, the area experienced a rapid growth of

27.4% in population from 2022 to 2023, and the same data projects a possible rise up to 45% by the end of 2025. The source indicated that, there are five major ethnic groups living in the surrounding suburbs of the parish. The data indicate 40.1% Hispanics, 31.1% White non-Hispanic, 15% Asians, 3.44% African Americans, and other nationalities 5.52%.

The parish, since its foundation, has experienced exponential growth across the board. The ministries as well as the members have grown and has become noticeably more diverse. Its demographic has undergone significant changes over the past two decades of its establishment. In 2015, per the parish annual reports documents, the parish had 1,478 registered households and a total of 4,822 members. After a decade, in 2024, the number of families doubled and the population went up about 200%, from 4,822 to 11,596. The growth in numbers also impacted cultural diversity. Between 2015 and 2024, the African Americans and Asian/Pacific Islanders maintained a percentage of 1 and 45, respectively. The Anglo population declined significantly, from 32% to 15%, while the Hispanic population increased substantially, from 21% to 35%. In addition to the original ethnic categories, the parish data revealed that, there has been new cultures from parts Africa and Europe joining the parish community in the last ten years



2.3.2 Parish Mindset and General Atmosphere

As stated earlier, the parish began as a multicultural community with Anglos, Filipinos, Hispanics, and Vietnamese. This identity persists at the time of this study despite demographic changes. Father Edi, the pastor, emphasized in our interview how his attitude toward multicultural parish administration was largely guided by the pastoral vision of Bishop Robert Barron, who, at the time the parish was established, was the Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of L.A. He said the bishop was very firm on building a multicultural mindset for parish administration, given the fast-growing cultural diversity around the Archdiocese.

The mission statement that guides the parish's orientation rightfully acknowledges cultural diversity as a major component of the parish's life and sees it as a gift to be shared. A portion of the mission statement reads, "*Called to be good stewards, graced by God, we serve one another, using our different gifts with joyful hearts as we reach out to our neighbors…*" This portrays a vision that seeks not only to enrich itself but also to reach out to others as a missionary community. The mission statement sees the sharing of cultural

gifts as stewardship and mutual enrichment, echoing Roger Schroeder's definition of interculturality.[69] The mutual stewardship through mutual cultural gifting subtly points toward interdependence and relationality, which, as I will further develop in Chapter 3, reflects the *perichoretic communion*[70] of the Holy Trinity.

The parish began as a single community with English naturally serving as the language of worship, given the small number of parishioners and the dominant Anglo proportion. Later that same year, however, a change began with an initiative by five Vietnamese families, who, though new yet eager to belong, approached the pastor to request a Vietnamese Mass. This was granted, and a Vietnamese community was formed with a regular Sunday Mass schedule. The pastor, according to one of those five families, welcomed their request without hesitation.

Later that same year, Pastor Edi, noticing the growing number of Hispanic families, took the initiative to introduce a Spanish Mass to the Sunday schedule. Thus, in a single year, the parish grew from a single Sunday Mass to three Masses in different languages. The courage to introduce Masses in languages other than English, according to Fr Edi, contributed to the rapid growth of the parish. Parish A's earliest embrace of cultural diversity through distinct ethnic Masses could be one of the crucial factors contributing to the parish's friendly intercultural atmosphere. As noted by the Pastor, the pioneering Anglo members showed no resistance to the inclusion of Vietnamese and Spanish celebrations. Meanwhile, the Filipino community, strong in numbers from the beginning, never sought

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[69] Roger Schroeder, "interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue", in *Verbum SVD,* 54, 2013, P. 12.
[70] *Perichoresis* is a theological term that describes the intimate interpenetration or mutual indwelling of the three divine Persons of the Blessed Trinity. It has its foundation from John Damascene.

to have a separate Mass. They chose instead to be a part of the English-speaking community; however, they annually expressed their cultural devotion through the *Simbang Gabi*, a Marian novena in preparation for Christmas.

Since right from the beginning, diversity was acknowledged as an integral part of Parish A's life, there is significant evidence of acceptance and communion among the cultural groups, albeit with its deficiencies. Also, because the parish is in the suburbs, many non-Anglo members can communicate in English, which further supports a shared sense of belonging and enriches the parish's communal life.

To build their identity as one family, the parish has, over the years, celebrated multicultural masses on Holy Thursday and Thanksgiving Day. Additionally, they have always celebrated the baptism and confirmation for adults as one family at the Easter Vigil Mass to integrate them into the whole parish community. This liturgy, however, is celebrated in English with no cultural variations. The multicultural Masses on Holy Thursday and on Thanksgiving integrate songs, readings, and prayers from the various major ethnic communities. Attendance at such parish-wide celebrations is not as large as one would expect; the church barely fills up on these occasions. This already indicates the struggle of building an intercultural parish.

Despite the acknowledged friendly atmosphere at Parish A, interviews revealed that ethnically unique celebrations are viewed as "our celebration," excluding those of other cultures. The Vietnamese community, for instance, has consistently celebrated the Lunar New Year and Our Lady of La Vang at venues outside the parish church. Implicitly implying that, the celebration is just for "us." It was also recounted by one of the Hispanic

leaders that many of their community members were displeased when, during the 2024 celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe, non-Hispanic parishioners were assigned to carry the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Guadalupe in the procession. Many, according to her, asked, "Why is it they who are carrying the image of 'Our Mother?'" Implying once again that the Guadalupe celebration is exclusively for Hispanics. This attitude of exclusive celebrations and covert expressions of displeasure presupposes a dislike of others interfering with "our celebration" and points to some of the unspoken tensions among the ethnic groups. This emphasis and emotional desire for exclusive celebrations unconsciously create an "Us" and "Them" categorization, which eventually form thick invisible walls of ethnic divisions in the parish. Fredrik Barth has said that what defines ethnicity is not the "cultural stuff" but the boundaries that distinguish them from others.[71] This means that the persistence of ethnic separation often depends less on belief and more on the maintenance of social boundaries that separate groups.

Also, observation and interactions revealed a loyalty to ethnic communities rather than to the parish. Ethnic-based activities are enthusiastically participated in, while parish-wide activities attracted little interest among the ethnic groups. This reveals an ethnocentric attitude that prioritizes homogeneity over heterogeneity and views the best solely from one's own limited cultural worldview. Interviews and informal interactions revealed that many considered parish-wide activities to be English community activities. The idea fostering this attitude could be attributed to how other ethnic communities perceive the

[71] Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 15.

English community as the default members of the parish, and themselves as supporting members rather than parishioners.

From these observations, we can see the internal structural struggle with belonging. Are some considered more parishioners than others? Do some have more privileges and responsibilities than others? As the social psychologist Henri Tajfel reminds us, social identity is "that part of an individual's self-concept which is derived from his/her membership to a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to this."[72] His reminder highlights how emotional and symbolic attachment to one's cultural group can strengthen identity but also limit intergroup interaction.

One unique multicultural social activity is the seniors' Sunday breakfast gatherings in the Parish. In the past ten years, there has been an organized, though voluntary, breakfast for seniors who apparently make up a sizeable number of the Sunday 7 a.m. Mass. This initiative has created an intercultural space for the elderly to bond together and share their common feeling of old age. Finding a common denominator to develop cross-cultural relationships is always a step in the right direction toward building an intercultural community.

Another encounter that spoke loudly of the hospitality of the parish was when, in a conversation with a couple who had to drive 30 minutes to Mass, I asked "What is your motivation for driving all over here when there are other closer options?" They answered

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[72] Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 255.

by saying “we feel more at home in this parish.” It was touching response; a response that goes beyond personal preference and reveals an affective dimension of ecclesial identity. I realized from their response that hospitality and relational warmth can transcend territorial and cultural boundaries, and foster a sense of belonging that transcends geographic boundaries.

With regards to the various communities, I observed that, the English-speaking community, unlike the Vietnamese and Spanish communities, composed of diverse peoples and cultures. Its membership is composed of Anglos, Filipinos, Africans and Hattians. What unites them is not culture, it is the English language. Although diverse in its composition, English language dominates its operations and celebration. There is no incorporation of songs or readings from other languages to acknowledge the diversity of the group. English, as the name of the group suggests, has been institutionalized as the only medium of communication and celebration. During a Marian feast celebration which I happen to be the celebrant, I requested the choir which apparently was a Filipino group to include one Filipino Marian Hymn in their song selections. Surprisingly, they instinctively and unanimously responded, “This is an English Mass, Father.” Such as instinctive response revealed the carefulness and the fear not to offend others, as well as the resistance to diversity, and how linguistic categorization subtly perpetuate language hegemony.

On Sundays, parish announcements were prioritized over those of ethnic communities’ particular interests. This prioritization is to ensure attention on what interests the whole parish comes first to ethnic community interests. And regarding preparation for the reception of the sacraments, each ethnic communities has its separate preparation

program in their respective languages. Following the same trajectory, the celebrations for these sacraments are held in their respective ethnic communities' Masses.

2.3.3 Leadership Interaction and Coordination

The parish pastoral leadership team is composed primarily of members from the English community with a representation from the Hispanic and Vietnamese communities. The leadership team is mostly appointed by the pastor. There is no official process for forming the various leadership teams; it is largely at the discretion of the pastor, in consultation with his cohort. Delegates from the ethnic communities see themselves as mere representative and liaisons for their communities. Although the pastor is pro-multicultural and the mission statement acknowledges diversity as a blessing to be shared, this is not reflected in the parish's leadership structures. Also, the periodic ministry leadership meetings focus primarily on logistics rather than shared ministerial reflection or community discernment. A periodic meeting of ministry coordinators is an important structure for promoting coordination and collaboration among ministries of the ethnic communities, but it has become an information-dissemination tool.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, with concern for the growing diversity of the parish community, has emphasized the need to have knowledge, develop attitudes, and skills in intercultural and interracial relations to effectively evangelize the present context.[73] However, Parish A has no formal formation structures to form and orient its leaders toward building a multicultural mentality. Collaboration is left at the mercy of individual goodwill. Goodwill is a necessary element, but it cannot thrive without

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[73] Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church: *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers* (Washington, DC: USCCB Communications, 2017)

institutional support, especially in structured institutions. Without intentional intercultural competency training, leaders risk perpetuating ethnic parallelism. One pastoral councilor recalled that when the council encouraged an increase in ethnic community financial support, an ethnic community reacted, saying, “My community wouldn’t be able to do this” without first consulting the community. When leaders lack the competency needed in a multicultural community, the tendency is to operate on assumptions and to prioritize the ethnic group at the expense of the whole parish.

2.3.4 Aspiration of Pastors and Leaders

Pastors, leaders, and parishioners with whom I engaged in this project shared a common consensus of wishing to see a community that loves beyond the current intra-group cohesion. Many envision a more loving and intercultural participation. This ideal parish is characterized by respect and mutual appreciation for the cultural contributions of all. This section presents, in direct quotations, a couple of the desires as expressed by the pastors and parish council leaders. Pastor Edi hopes for a community that actively interacts with one another, and that each encounter becomes an encounter with Jesus, as promoted by the patron of the parish, St. Teresa of Calcutta. Fr. Edi says:

> “Well, I think that you know, my challenge and my vision and what I want is for more people to find the Lord here at this community, and two, as the mission statement says, to encourage people to bring their giftedness to bear in building up the body of Christ.”

The parish pastoral council president, on the other hand, looks forward to a more intercultural interaction among the various ethnic communities that ultimately become an integral part of the parish’s normal way of being, he says:

> “Of course, you know, I would want for like the multicultural masses to continue, of course, you know, the Thanksgiving one especially, but beyond that, I would like, even if it might just seem like a really small thing, I guess, but I would like to

> see, you know, you know, like for instance, the Hispanic ministry and the Vietnamese ministry working together for, you know, some kind of fundraiser going on out front. during all the masses, not just a Hispanic mass or not just after the Vietnamese mass, you know, so that way you're getting like Vietnamese, Hispanic, and then working with the English and everything, you know, just to be able to kind of have those crossovers, you know, that kind of collaboration to the point where it's not like even surprising, you know, it's just kind of like a normal thing. I think that that would be a good place to be, you know."

2.3.5 Reflective Synthesis

In general terms, Parish A stands as a hopeful but unfinished sign of ecclesial interculturality. Its demographic expansion embodies the Church's global reality, and its relational warmth reveals genuine missionary energy. Nonetheless, persistent linguistic and cultural boundaries show that hospitality alone does not guarantee communion. Theologically, the parish reflects, to a certain extent, the "*already-but-not-yet*" nature of the Kingdom of God: diverse peoples gathered around one table, still learning to share life beyond their cultural worldviews. Thus, Parish A's journey from multicultural presence to intercultural communion evokes ongoing conversion, where diversity ceases to be merely a descriptive acknowledgment and becomes transformative.

Parish B

2.4.1 Geography and Demographic Trends

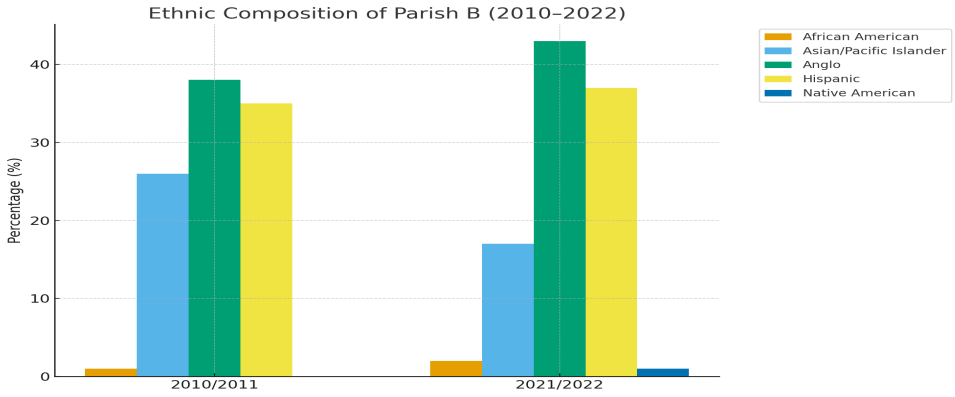
The second parish to be considered stands within a community that was once predominantly Anglo. However, between the year 2000 and 2021, the larger community experienced a significant demographic transformation. Government data on residents in the larger community where the church is located indicate that the number of households nearly doubled between 2000 and 2021, while the population increased by approximately 150%, rising from 44,000 in 2000 to nearly 110,000 in 2021. This expansion reshaped the area's ethnic composition and the ratio of ethnic groups. The Anglo and Asian populations

declined by 4.6% and 0.56%, respectively, while the African American population rose by 0.62%. Meanwhile, the Hispanic population increased by 3.52%, while the Pacific Islander and other groups grew by 1.01%.

The parish data largely mirrors the broader demographic shifts in the community. In 2010-2011, the parish had 6,099 registered households and 21,055 parishioners. Breaking the number down by ethnicity and ratio, there were 38% Anglos, 35% Hispanics, 26% Asians and Pacific Islanders, and 1% African Americans. A decade later, in 2021-2022, the number of households increased to 9,584, with notable demographic changes. Anglos rose to 43%, Hispanics to 37%, Asians and Pacific Islanders declined to 17%, African Americans doubled to 2%, and Native Americans represented 1%. Surprisingly, even as the wider Anglo population declined, their share within the parish increased significantly, while Hispanic representation grew only slightly despite the substantial growth in the local community. This suggests that factors such as parish participation patterns, language accessibility, and community engagement may influence representation more than residential trends do. One unusual feature of the parish data is that it does not capture newer African and European members who now contribute to the parish's increasingly diverse life.

Overall, the statistics highlight a parish embedded in a rapidly diversifying environment. Parish demographic change mirrors broader societal trends, making cultural adaptation both an ecclesial and social imperative. These figures reveal both demographic vitality and pastoral complexity, calling for ministry that responds to cultural fluidity and

evolving identities. This Parish, in many ways, reflects the broader sociocultural metamorphosis shaping faith communities across suburban communities.



2.4.2 Parish Mindset and General Atmosphere.

The parish, established thirty-two years ago, initially served a predominantly Anglo community with a barely visible Hispanic presence. At the beginning, as one could easily predict, all Masses were in English. However, within the parish's first five years, a demographic shift began to surface. In response, the leadership introduced a Sunday Spanish Mass and later a Filipino monthly Mass. These ethnic Masses has seen become an identity of the parish. Some longstanding Anglos parishioners view these developments as foundational to the parish's evolving identity. That being said, observations and interviews reveal that the parish's internal culture continues to be greatly shaped by Anglo-liturgical sensibilities and conservative devotional practices. Reverence for the Eucharist emerges as the defining characteristic of belongingness. Parishioners consistently cited the solemnity of worship, kneeling to receive holy Communion on the tongue, and Eucharistic adoration as their primary motivation for belonging. What unites and sustains the parish's cohesion in their devotion around the Eucharist. We can see here that Eucharistic devotion can foster

ritual coherence and sustain unity when cultural agreement is tenuous, but it can also reinforce the dominant group's domination and control.

On Sundays, there are five Mass schedules, four in English and one in Spanish. Each of the Masses fills the fifteen-hundred-capacity building, virtually to the brim. A major recurring concern that came up in the interview with Hispanics was the turn of their request for an additional Mass schedule. While many of them desire an additional Sunday schedule because of their numbers, their leaders, supported by Pastor Fr. Gytan, however, think they do not need another schedule since, as the pastor emphasized, "they could hardly fill up one Mass."

The English community, like that at Parish A, is culturally diverse, with many Hispanics, Filipinos, and individuals from Africa and the Pacific Islands who have integrated into it. The diversity notwithstanding, English remains the legitimized medium of communication and celebration with no intercultural integration to reflect the community. One of the associate pastors, Fr. Osigya, when asked about the dominance of English despite the cultural diversity of the English community, said, with optimism, that there would be no violent reaction to introducing other cultural variations if the Anglo section of the English community were duly informed. And answer that covertly implies a host privilege. Due to the group's language qualifications, as an English-speaking community, English automatically becomes the privileged language for celebration, with no consideration given to other languages therein.

Again, observations and interviews revealed that English holds a central place in the parish's administrative and catechetical life. As the pastor, Fr Gytan, sadly recounted, some members of the Anglo community reacted by questioning the introduction of

bilingual announcements and updates in the parish bulletin. He said they asked whether it was necessary to institutionalize that. In the same vein, catechetical preparation for the sacraments is conducted in English, and Spanish resources are made available for Hispanic parents who wish to homeschool their children. The coordinator for religious education acknowledged that Spanish catechesis was introduced a couple of years ago but was subsequently canceled due to low attendance and a shortage of personnel. The shortage of personnel did not sit well with me, because nearly 90% of those providing catechetical training in English are Hispanic immigrants or American-born Hispanics.

Furthermore, the data revealed minimal cross-cultural interaction. This could be a ripple effect of the parish's self-description as an Anglo community, despite the apparent cultural diversity. This generally accepted, internalized identity of the parish makes English and Anglo patterns of worship the default of the parish's life. This, in many ways, has hindered dialogue among the cultures, and even when the Anglos want to engage in dialogue, the emphasis on ownership makes others feel like 'guests' of the parish. This situation of Parish B is in sharp contrast to the teaching of Pope Francis when he said, "the future is not monochrome; … How much our human family needs to learn to live together in harmony and peace, without all of us having to be the same!"[74]

The parish motto, *"St. Martha: A Caring Community,"* receives little emphasis among participants, according to the gathered data. The motto, in itself, is inward-looking; it lacks a missionary urge to go beyond its borders. As was hinted earlier, Eucharistic devotion functions as a key marker of ecclesial identity of the parish. Participants

[74] Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020), no. 100.

consistently cited the community's solemn liturgical atmosphere as the primary reason for their continued participation. This is expressed in the traditional practice of receiving Communion on the tongue or while kneeling, and women attending Mass with veils. This emphasis on reverence, rather than on their parish's stated motto of "*A caring community*," suggests a spirituality shaped more by liturgical ethos than by communal interaction. The pastors' description of the parish as "Anglo and conservative" further underscores how Anglo ritual patterns have become a stabilizing force amid demographic diversifications.

Again, what reinforces the consciousness to preserve the Anglo-ness of the parish is the idea that, as the pastor puts it, "the only existing Anglo predominant parish in the diocese." This mindset dictates the affairs and direction of the parish, even though the current parish statistics show that about 70% of young families in the parish are Hispanic and Asian, and 95% of the parish staff are Spanish-speaking parishioners. The US Bishops' Conference statement on cultural diversity challenges the Parish's current pastoral mindset. The statement says, "Although traditional pastoral approaches, such as the national parish, have been useful over the years, they are increasingly more difficult to sustain or inadequate for the growing diversity of the Church."[75]

Sunday Mass attendance is high, but post-Mass interaction is sparse. Parishioners seem in a hurry to leave, though they need not worry about parking, as the Mass schedule is organized to allow enough time for interaction after Mass. This attitude suggests a spirituality focused on vertical communion with God rather than horizontal communion among parishioners. Leonardo Boff, however, has emphasized that the Eucharist,

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[75] Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church: *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers* (Washington, DC: USCCB Communications, 2017), xiii.

understood rightly, is both adoration and social transformation: "Sharing in Christ's table is a commitment to the communion of all."[76] Thus, the challenge now lies in harmonizing contemplative depth with intercultural encounter.

Despite the evidence of Anglo dominance, the parish makes efforts to foster unity among the cultures. The effort to create an intercultural community is evidenced in its occasional bilingual Masses, particularly on Christmas and on Holy Thursday. However, the attempt to build an intercultural orientation through bilingual Mass does not generously acknowledge the broad spectrum of cultures in the parish. The bilingual Masses recognize only English and Spanish, no Filipino included, despite being a major ethnic group in the parish. The reason, according to the pastor, is that, unlike the Hispanics, the Filipinos and all the other nationalities present in the parish can understand English. The focus, therefore, is not on celebrating cultures but on responding to the needs of a particular group of people.

A unique aspect of the Filipino is that, whereas the English and Spanish Masses limit themselves to monolingual celebrations, the Filipino Mass is bilingual. The Filipino Mass introduces some variety in their once-a-month Eucharistic celebration. It incorporates English songs, an English reading, and the gospel is read in both English and Tagalog when the reading is not lengthy. The homily is usually in English, with some Tagalog phrases interspersed throughout. The primary purpose of this dynamic, according to them, is to create space for their children who do not have a firm grasp of Filipino. By grafting their celebration with such variation, their Mass now attracts Anglos and Hispanics who might

[76] Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Communion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000) 57.

otherwise miss their regular schedule. The Filipino celebration expresses sensitivity among themselves and openness to other cultural realities.

2.4.3 Leadership Interaction and Coordination

The parish has a structured periodic meeting of ministry coordinators. This, however, turned out to be a time to provide orientations and updates on new developments, about reservation protocols, and announcements from the different ministries. Although coordinator have a consistent opportunity to meet, their meetings give very little attention to sharing ministry experiences, challenges, and prospects. In consonance with the situation in Parish A, this parish also lacks formal leadership training for leaders of the various communities and ministries. Those elected or appointed to leadership roles are not adequately prepared with the multicultural orientation and attitude needed to navigate the complexities of multiculturality. The lack of leadership formation also raises the question of *who defines belonging* in a diverse Church. When the "default culture" sets the tone of reverence, time, and space, the parish risks sacralizing one cultural expression over others. Boff's notion of *community without domination*[77] calls for precisely the opposite, a mutual exchange of gifts where power is shared and hierarchy of culture dissolves into reciprocity.

The parish leadership team is inclined toward inclusion, but, as in the case of Parish A, the English Community, led by the pastor, serves as the core group, with representation from the Hispanic and Filipino communities. The composition of the leadership team gives the impression that pastoral council meetings and decisions are primarily intended to serve the English community. In addition to the leadership team, one easily notices how leadership in other areas gravitates around the Anglo/English community. This reflects a

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[77] Leonard Boff, *Trinity and society,* (OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 120.

situation of historical privilege; the founders and pioneers of the parish dictate its activities and direction. This, as revealed in interviews, has led members of other ethnic communities to see themselves as supporting the English community rather than the parish. Korie L. Edwards warns that "being diverse doesn't mean that white people are not going to still be in charge and run things."[78] The leadership situation of the parish mirrors how diversity within churches can mask deeper asymmetries of power. Brett Hoover likewise observes that "the power dynamics between ethnic and racial groups within a Catholic parish shape the confidence and responsibility persons from different groups feel vis-à-vis parish life,"[79] implying that unacknowledged hierarchies can erode participation from marginalized groups.

2.4.4 Aspiration

Parish B leadership passionately talks about their parish becoming a hegemony-free community. A faith community where all members, regardless of their contribution, feel equal and loved and need and support each other. The pastor's vision reveals an overcoming of the existing internal struggle and the parish's call to care for one another, as he said:

> "I think my vision would be for greater understanding and empathy for people of different cultures, different also socio-economic classes, for the poor. I think that there will be a greater acceptance. You know, racism, prejudice, bias, be eliminated, right? But there will be that greater understanding for the other. That my way is not the only way of doing it, or my way is not the only right way. Because again, there's a lot of that influence, right? There's a lot of There's a lot of what's the word I'm looking for in the parish there's a lot of Entitlement mm-hmm a lot of entitlement Where people think right I donate it my name is on the wall Right, so I should be able to have a say I donate this much money right so there's a lot of entitlement I

[78] Korie L. Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.
[79] Brett C. Hoover, *The Shared Parish: Latinos, Anglos, and the Future of U.S. Catholicism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 152.

> think how things should be should this way or the more the bigger my check is The more I should be listened to so I think if there was a greater sense of maybe equalness Compassion understanding that we truly would live out that we are the caring community Because the people who say we're the caring community are the ones that don't show Sometimes the care, right? They're the ones that are making the racist comments or not being inclusive of others, right? So I think my dream would be for a greater understanding that there wouldn't be so much of this maybe fear of the unknown that we wouldn't see the other as a threat or that we wouldn't they wouldn't write off people just discount them because they look different they have an accent they speak differently right for that greater sense of understanding"

In the same line of thought, another ministry coordinator said,

> "I would like to see one day that it sounds cliche, but that we get along. However, if we have to be, we have to be willing to say that I don't like this, but at the same time be able to tell me you don't like it, how would you fix it? That we live in a world that we were not afraid that someone is going to put us down. I don't know how to put it in words. I don't know how to put it in words."

2.4.5 Reflective Synthesis

The parish community, although centered on the Eucharistic devotion, which is a table of unity, is hesitant in intercultural integration. Its identity, rooted in Eucharistic reverence, fosters spiritual depth but can unintentionally resist the dynamism of cultural plurality. Sociologically, the parish exemplifies *selective assimilation, as* described by Alejandro Portes or Israel Zangwill's *melting pot effect*, in which minority groups adapt to dominant forms while their own expressions remain peripheral. English and the Anglo community are the dominant factors in the parish, shaping its life and administration. In theological terms, Parish B reflects the tension between the Church's catholicity and the comfort of homogeneity found in many parishes today. Also, the parish's strong Eucharistic focus offers potential for unity if reinterpreted through an intercultural lens, that is, as the one Body of Christ gathered from many languages and peoples. The third and fourth stages of this project will explore how liturgy, leadership, and formation can embody the Trinitarian perichoresis, harmonizing difference rather than suppressing it.

Parish C

2.5.1 Demographic Trends

The final parish to be considered is situated in a community that has undergone tremendous economic and demographic changes. Changes that have significantly impacted the parish's current situation. In the mid-20th century, the area transitioned from a suburban, middle-class commercial center to a more densely populated urban center, partly due to the re-zoning of areas for multi-family housing and the demolition of single-family homes. From the 1970s onwards, the area became a common destination for various immigrant and refugee communities. Most of them came from Southeast Asia, Africa, and Central America, as well as locally based African Americans and Hispanics who were drawn to the neighborhood as rents rose in other parts of the city. The place is known for its significant ethic and racial diversity, with a high percentage of foreign-born residents, many of whom are immigrants or refugees.

The area transitioning from a middle-class community to now a predominantly immigrants and refugee community can tell us how much that change the life of the parish. The parish population now consists of immigrants and individuals who have sought asylum from countries experiencing economic and political instability. Fifty years ago, however, as recounted by an Anglo parishioner who has been part of the parish the last 75 years, the community was populated by middle-class Anglo families and a small group of Hispanic individuals. The changes, she said, were caused by the gradual relocation of people of different cultures into the neighborhood and the movement of Anglos out of the community. The Anglo families currently account for only 0.5 percent of the entire congregation. Another Anglo parishioner who has worshiped with the parish for the past forty years recounted that, many of the Anglo families left the area for economic reasons, seeking

better jobs, housing and schools for their children. He added, without hesitation, that the movement of Anglos was partly influenced by the influx of other cultures into the neighborhood. He emphasized further that many Anglos would prefer a homogeneous group to a heterogeneous community, and that this preference was perhaps aggravated by the communication barrier or the difficulty in understanding people of different cultures.

The Hispanic and Vietnamese communities make up over 95% of the total number of parishioners. What is now considered the English community are foreigners from different parts of Africa and Haiti, as well as a sizable number of Vietnamese who attend the English Masses. The two dominant communities, Hispanic and Vietnamese, remain strong in their native languages. This creates a communication barrier among the communities, leaving them in a compartmentalized kind of community. It was observed during daily Masses, how the congregants responded to the prayers in their respective languages rather than in English, which was the language of the celebration.

As a community, that has become a home for many immigrants, the natural tendency to stick with “their own kind” is an obvious character of Parish C. Most of its members are foreign-born and elderly, on average, who do not consider learning a new language as an option. These unavoidable situations produce a community that is visibly segregated in all respects. The atmosphere, however, is very friendly, and attendance at Mass is encouraging. One can easily sense the desire of people wanting to interact after the daily Mass, but language difficulties hinder them. Nonetheless, they do not pass each other by without say, ‘good morning’ after the Mass.

2.5.2 Parish Mindset and General Atmosphere

The data collected revealed that for a long time, the parish has had three ethnic communities existing side by side. The history indicates a point in time when each of the three ethnic communities was administered by a priest of its own ethnicity. Each community had its own administrative team to run its plans and activities, but shared the same church building. A long-time parish staff worker recounted the sad incident of how a former pastor, who initially attempted to integrate the communities, was strongly opposed by some parishioners and subsequently transferred. Today, the parish is officially merged under one administrative leadership, but remnants of the old system remain; communities still maintain a mindset of independence, particularly the Hispanic and Vietnamese communities. The English community serves as the default community and is directly administered by the pastors, since, like Parish A and B, it lacks substantive leadership.

A parishioner in an interview recounted a recent parish outing when people instinctively divided themselves into a “Spanish bus” and a “Vietnamese bus,” and even redirected a participant who had chosen the “wrong bus” to where she belonged. Such an incident, though seemingly normal, reveals the kind of separation and the resistance to intermingle. The incident reflects what sociologists term *bounded solidarity.* Ethnic identity can provide security in contexts of vulnerability, but it can also unintentionally inhibit broader communion. As a Vietnamese leader emphasized, “We love to pray together, but we do not yet speak together,” capturing the reality of communion without communication.

At the time of this study, the only practical approach the parish had taken to unite its cultural diversity was holding trilingual Masses on special occasions. The trilingual

Masses organized during the Easter Triduum and the parish's patronal feast days serve as moments of unity and offer opportunities for cross-cultural interaction. These two occasions are the only opportunities to celebrate the community's unity and diversity, but due to space constraints and language limitations, they are poorly attended. Many people say participating from the outside did not feel good, thus they preferred to stay home, while others stayed away because of the length of the celebration.

The observed communication difficulty significantly hinders efforts to bridge ethnic communities. As noted by the pastor, "holding meetings with the groups together is difficult because of the language barrier." Up until the time of this study, the pastor had to meet each ethnic community separately to discuss their separate annual activities. The clergy of the parish primarily align themselves with the programs and plans prepared by the various ethnic communities, since there is no single parish pastoral council to coordinate the communities' activities. Each community organizes itself under its own pastoral leadership in consultation with the pastor.

Programs and activities unique to a specific ethnic community are not published in the parish's weekly bulletin, and neither are they announced at Masses for other cultural groups. Among the Hispanics and Vietnamese, their activities are independently organized and executed. They do this with no malicious intent; it is how things have always been done over the years. Some think it is a burden to include other cultures due to the language barrier; as a result, special activities are often exclusively attended by insiders. The Hispanic community does not expect Anglos or Vietnamese to participate in the celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe, just in the way that the Vietnamese community does not expect

attendance from Hispanics or Anglos during their Lunar New Year or the celebration of Our Lady of La Vang.

Traces of segregation are apparent among the youth, who also have separate leadership and activities. Each group has its own leadership structures and sets of programs, and there is no coordination among them. Although both youth groups claim their organization is open to all, not everyone is welcomed due to the internal cultural and language structures of their groups. The youth group leader of the Vietnamese community acknowledged that, although they are bilingual in carrying out their activities, the core values of their organization are preserved and taught only in Vietnamese. The same is true for the Spanish group. The internal structures of these groups do not encourage intergroup interaction; they unconsciously reinforce distinctions among the youth who could have been easily organized into one group, since they all share English as a common language of communication.

2.5.3 Leadership interaction and coordination

The parish is presently restructuring its leadership to create a unified front. For many years, the lack of a parish pastoral council to unite the various ethnic communities has hindered coordinated planning across cultural communities. Before the current pastor's appointment, about a year and a half ago, the parish was administered by the pastor who formed a four-headed circle with the other three parish staff workers. They made all administrative and pastoral decisions independently and informed the ethnic communities on matters that concern them. Currently, while the formation of a pastoral council is still in the process, what the pastor does is to meet separately with the ethnic community

leadership to plan the year's activities. The English-speaking community, since it has no formal leadership, simply follows the parish's general liturgical program.

Joint leadership meetings have been virtually nonexistent. There is no common ministry coordinators' meeting as we found in the two earlier parishes. During major parish activities, such as parish feast days or Holy Thursday, it is the pastor, together with the staff, who plan the activities and assign each group its responsibilities. The expected roles of each community are then communicated to the leaders of each group. The leaders are excluded from the planning process, yet they generously fulfill their part of the obligation. This top-down approach, according to them, has helped prevent conflicts and prolong meetings, but it has also perpetuated isolated leadership and discouraged intercultural dialogue.

Again, just like the previous parishes, there is no parish-wide leadership formation program to foster multicultural awareness or collaboration. Ministries in the parish remain organized and managed within the individual ethnic communities, operating independently with minimal coordination across groups. Consequently, there is no common ground for deliberation, sharing cultural gifts, or collaborating as one parish family.

2.5.4 Aspiration of Pastors and Leaders

The pastors of Parish C envision a unified Christian community that embodies the essence of heaven on earth through a Christ-centered collaborative approach. Both pastors aspire to establish a parish that perceives itself as a cohesive Christian community, transcending the notion of separate communities. Furthermore, they envision the parish life

as a prefiguration of a heavenly existence, characterized by peace, unity, and love. The pastor said that:

> "If they'll work together and we see the love in there, then we will completely support. And that's my dream. They're able to work together. So, regardless of any priests who come, they cannot destroy that unity. But Christ has to be at the center for that unity to work. So if they're Christ-centric, they work together. That's basically heaven. That's heaven. And I think it's impossible to have heaven here, but we can get very close to heaven on earth if we work together like that."

In addition, the associate pastor also stated:

> "It's a little bit realistic. I wouldn't say to destroy all the cultures,… but I believe. We don't need the ethnic communities. We don't need the Anglo community. We don't need the Vietnamese community. We need the Christian community. We need one Christian community."

2.5.5 Reflective Synthesis – Parish C

The parish exemplifies both the beauty and the challenges of intercultural Catholicism. Its members embody the global visage of the Church, encompassing refugees, migrants, and families seeking a sense of belonging. However, its structures still reflect a pre-intercultural ecclesiology. The parish is multicultural in composition but not yet intercultural in practice. Its narrative is one of coexistence, striving for communion.

It faces the call not to assimilate but to move from the comfort of "our group" to the risk of "our shared life" as one family. The establishment of a new pastoral council marks a promising beginning—a movement from isolation toward dialogue, from parallel structures toward a shared imagination of church. In this liminal stage, the parish becomes a prophetic sign of what the global Church itself is becoming: diverse, wounded, yet drawn by grace toward the communion of the Triune God.

Having analyzed the demographics, intercultural mindset, leadership, and aspirations of all three parishes, we now proceed to identify commonalities and differences, recognize their strengths, and pinpoint areas for improvement. This groundwork will

facilitate the fourth chapter, which will address practical strategies for enhancing intercultural living within multicultural parishes.

2.6 Common Patterns

Across all three parishes, there is a striking, continuous pattern of demographic transformation marked by increasing cultural diversity from around the world. Each parish reflects the larger trend of shifting population dynamics in Southern California, as formerly strong Anglo communities have become diverse mosaics of Hispanic, Filipino, Vietnamese, and other ethnic groups from Africa and other parts of Europe. Parish A experienced a notable rise in Vietnamese and Hispanic membership, alongside a decline in Anglo numbers. Parish B saw a similar diversification of residents, and Parish C, once predominantly Anglo, is now overwhelmingly composed of Hispanic and Vietnamese immigrants. This shared demographic evolution points to a broader narrative of cultural migration, and the church mirrors the society it serves in its pluralism.

Liturgically, all three parishes share the practice of bringing together various communities in a single celebration, often through bilingual, trilingual, or multicultural Masses on special occasions such as Holy Thursday and Thanksgiving. These moments are intended to symbolize unity in diversity, even if participation levels vary. The attendance at these combined celebrations is generally low compared to the regular ethnically specific Masses. During common liturgical celebrations, Parish A has the English community as the most represented, but in Parishes B and C, the Hispanic communities are the most represented.

Parishioners across the board seem more comfortable worshiping within their linguistic and ethnic groups. Yet, as Robert Putnam warns, "in the short run, immigration and diversity tend to reduce social solidarity and social capital... People in more diverse communities tend to 'hunker down,' that is, to pull in like a turtle."[80] This reality underscores the need for intentional structures that foster trust and ethnic collaboration as communities grow in their diversity. Furthermore, while the Filipino community consistently incorporates English and Tagalog songs into its worship, the English, Spanish, and Vietnamese communities refrain from incorporating music or prayers from other cultures during their regular Sunday liturgies. Consequently, their celebrations remain exclusively monolingual and insular. There are no attempts to grow beyond its boundaries and comfort zone. Notably, the English communities across the three parishes are internally diverse, comprising individuals of Anglo, Pacific Islanders, African, Asian, Hispanic, and European descent, yet their celebrations are always in English.

Another commonality among the three parishes is the absence of leadership formation programs/training to help foster an intercultural mindset among parish leaders. Chosen leaders in all three parishes receive no training in intercultural competency to enable them to work as one parish to bridge the existing separation among ethnic communities. Parish pastoral councils and ministry coordinators' meetings are typically administrative, focusing on updates and scheduling. There is no room for shared reflection on ministries. Additionally, all three parishes have English communities that lack structured leadership; unlike the Hispanic, Vietnamese, and Filipino communities, which

[80] Robert D. Putnam, "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First Century," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30, no. 2 (2007): 144.

have a substantive leadership structure, the English communities have the pastor as their default leader. This imbalance often results in the English community being treated as the default parishioners and assuming leadership roles, while other groups operate as supporting this default parish community. Thus, while all three parishes present themselves as culturally diverse, they are still in the process of becoming truly intercultural, that is, communities where mutual influence and cultural exchange are intentional and celebrated. Their shared story is one of promise and struggle: the promise of visible diversity and the struggle to translate that diversity into communion.

2.7 Divergences

Despite the common trends mentioned above, each parish reveals some distinct expressions of multicultural life and pastoral adaptation. Parish A stands out for its high level of communication and interaction among cultures, particularly visible on Sundays when parishioners linger after Mass for fellowship and conversation. The welcoming atmosphere and the pastor's long-term commitment to multicultural inclusion have fostered a sense of "home" that attracts people from outside the parish boundaries. Parish A's leadership structure, though still developing, includes representatives from the major ethnic groups on the pastoral council, reflecting at least an effort toward inclusive decision-making.

In contrast, Parish B maintains a more reserved, segmented environment despite its demographic diversity. The parish's self-perception as an Anglo and conservative community creates a tension between tradition and multicultural reality. Unlike Parishes A and C, Parish B conducts catechetical preparation exclusively in English, offering only minimal accommodations for non-English-speaking parishioners. Its bilingual Masses on

major feasts are limited to only Spanish and English, and many Anglos view it as overly long.

Parish C, on the other hand, reflects a more fragmented ecclesial identity. Its communities, Hispanic, Vietnamese, and a smaller English group, operate quite independently, each with its own leadership, schedules, and programs. Unlike Parishes A and B, which have parish pastoral councils, Parish C has only recently begun the process of forming one, as previous attempts at integration led to conflict and the eventual removal of the then-pastor of the parish. While trilingual Masses are celebrated on major feasts, they are infrequent and often seen as burdensome due to space constraints. Finally, the communication barriers between the two dominant communities further hinder intercultural engagement.

2.8 Theological Synthesis

The descriptive findings from the three parishes reveal both the vitality and the vulnerability of multicultural parish life. Across the board, the parishes mirror the changing face of the Church in the United States: once predominantly Anglo, they now reflect the global character of Catholicism through the growing presence of Hispanic, Filipino, Vietnamese, and African communities. For these parishes, diversity has become not an exception but the ordinary condition of parish life. Yet, the data strongly affirm that fact that a multicultural presence does not automatically translate into intercultural communion. While each parish exhibits goodwill and hospitality, the underlying structures and practices often sustain cultural parallelism rather than mutual transformation.

The patterns suggest a Church that is multicultural in appearance but monocultural in practice; a Church that celebrates diversity on special occasions but struggles to integrate diversity into its unique cultural communities. This disjunction reflects what Brett Hoover calls "the paradox of the shared parish."[81] A situation where communities coexist under one roof but rarely enter into transformative encounters. The descriptive-empirical findings thus point to the need for intentional intercultural formation, spaces of encounter, shared leadership, and theological reflection that nurture mutual recognition as members of one Body.

Theologically, the situation described across the parishes can be read as a microcosm of the universal Church's pilgrimage toward the Kingdom of God. The tensions between unity and diversity, belonging and difference, echo the Trinitarian mystery of communion in difference. As Leonardo Boff notes, "The Trinity is the highest expression of unity in diversity, a community without domination."[82] When a parish becomes a space where cultures coexist without relationships, it fails to reflect this divine pattern of relationality. Conversely, when communities begin to engage in shared ministries and mission, they move towards the Church's call to be a community of missionary disciples.

From the standpoint of Osmer's fourfold method, the first stage, the descriptive-empirical, has illuminated the empirical realities that the subsequent stages will interpret and address. The next chapter, corresponding to the interpretive task ("Why is this going on?"), will probe deeper into the underlying sociocultural and pastoral causes that sustain

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[81] Brett C. Hoover, *The Shared Parish: Latinos, Anglos, and the Future of U.S. Catholicism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 5.
[82] Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), xviii.

ethnic boundaries within parishes. Ultimately, the movement from description to interpretation prepares the ground for practical transformation, envisioning parish life as a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. A community where the many become one without ceasing to be many, and where cultural diversity is transfigured into communion by the Holy Spirit, who is at the same time the source of different gifts and the unifier of diversity.

Chapter Two: Why is this Going On?

3.1 Introduction

In the first chapter, following Osmer's descriptive-empirical task, I presented the situation of the three culturally diverse parishes under study, with particular attention to how the major recognized ethnic communities interacted with one another and parish administrative structures. The data revealed that while these parishes acknowledge the apparent demographic changes and diversity within their communities, translating this diversity into a deeper intercultural communion that prefigures the Kingdom of God, with people from every tongue and nation worshipping together (Lk 13:29, Rev. 7:9), has been a struggle. The current situation of the Parishes is best described by what Brett Hoover refers to as "Shared parishes" or what I have termed "community of strangers." Hoover uses "shared parish" to describe a situation in which different ethnic communities share the same space and sacramental life yet maintain distinct boundaries through separate liturgical schedules, independent ministries, and segregated leadership structures.

Because what emerged from the interviews and participant observation may not reflect the actual reality due to individual subjectivity, it is necessary that we seek a deeper understanding by testing the data. We do this to better understand parishioners' narrated experiences and to avoid undue judgment and unsupported generalizations. By going beyond merely observed realities and individual narratives, we can offer an interpretation that closely accords with what we have observed across contexts.

Therefore, in this current chapter, following Osmer's second task of Practical Theology, we ask the simple yet vital question, "Why are these observed patterns going on?" Through this question, we move beyond a surface-level description to uncover the

underlying dynamics, structures, and factors that generate and sustain the patterns presented in the first chapter. By offering an in-depth interpretation of the ethnographic data, the new emerging insights will serve as lenses through which we look toward the normative theological stage that answers the question, "What ought to be going on." The goal at this juncture of the thesis is to go beyond mere observations and anecdotes to purposefully avoid the danger of an abstract theological reflection that is disconnected from the lived reality.[83] By providing an appropriate interpretation of the data, this chapter lays a solid foundation for meaningful, practical theological reflection in the fourth chapter.

In this chapter, I employ an interdisciplinary dialogue as a primary methodological approach. I bring social-scientific theories into conversation with the empirical data presented from Parishes A, B, and C. By engaging these fields of study, I do not intend to reduce theological reality to social-scientific categories, but instead to allow these theories to serve as interpretive lenses that help us see more 'clearly' what might otherwise remain hidden in the complexity of parish life.

Here again, I argue that the parallel ethnic communities observed in Parishes A, B, and C are not merely the result of cultural preferences or practical accommodations but rather are sustained by interlocking systems of ethnic boundary maintenance, linguistic power dynamics, structural segregation, and ethnocentrism that operate beneath the surface of parish life. These systems, while often unintentional, create and reinforce hierarchies that privilege established groups and marginalize newcomers and minority groups,

[83] Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 79.

ultimately hindering the parishes' ability to embody a healthy catholicity and communion across cultures.

I have structured this chapter into seven major but interconnected parts. It begins with an introduction and then establishes the theoretical framework for interpretation, grounded in Osmer's understanding of the interpretive task. Third, it examines the five key interpretive themes emerging from the descriptive data: ethnic boundary maintenance, migration and demographic transformation, linguistic hegemony, cultural segregation, and ethnocentrism. Each theme integrates theoretical frameworks with specific evidence from the parishes under study. Fifth, it synthesizes the themes into a broader interpretation that names the deeper pastoral fault lines operating across the three parishes. Sixth, I will examine some existing "seeds" in the raw data that prepare the grounds for would be pragmatic proposals for intercultural living in the fourth chapter. Finally, it concludes with a summary of why these dynamics persist, followed by a brief transition to the next chapter.

Theoretical Framework

3.2 From Descriptive to Understanding

The interpretive task occupies a central place in Osmer's theological framework; it forms the foundation for both the normative and pragmatic stages of this work. Having presented the empirical data gathered through the case study tools, we now face the key question of interpretation and meaning: "What deeper dynamics explain the patterns we have observed"? Osmer describes the interpretive task as "drawing on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring."[84] This task requires us to move beyond the "what" of description to the "why"

[84] Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 4.

of explanation to properly understand the emerging patterns. Thus, it is not sufficient to observe that Parish B's leadership is predominantly Anglo, despite demographic shifts; we must ask why this pattern persists. What might be the structural, cultural, psychological, or contextual factors sustaining this pattern? To get to the root of the issues at play in these parishes, I employ a theoretical framework that draws on sociology, anthropology, psychology, and organizational studies to illuminate the underlying causes and mechanisms that produce the observable phenomena.

The purpose of employing social-scientific theory in practical theology is to provide interpretive frameworks that help us see patterns, relationships, and dynamics that might otherwise remain invisible, taken for granted, or be downplayed as insignificant. As Osmer notes, a theory functions as a "map"[85] that brings certain aspects of reality into focus while potentially obscuring others. Therefore, the selection and application of theory in this chapter is carefully and critically done to serve the purpose of a map that helps us understand and explain certain situations, rather than a reductionist explanation.

I employ five primary theoretical frameworks to guide the data analysis and interpretation process. Each theory is used to address a distinct pattern brought forward from the empirical data:

1. *Ethnic Boundary Theory* (Fredrik Barth and Wimmer): This theory explains how ethnic identities are formed, maintained, and reinforced through symbolic boundaries.
2. *Segmented Assimilation Theory* (Portes and Zhou) is employed to explain the observed differential patterns of integration among the immigrant communities.
3. *Linguistic Capital and Symbolic Power* (Pierre Bourdieu) are used here to analyze and understand how language functions as a mechanism of power and exclusion.
4. *Contact Hypothesis* (Gordon Allport) is used to examine conditions under which intergroup contact reduces prejudice or reinforces separation.

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[85] Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction,* 80.

5. The *concept of ethnocentrism* is used to examine and explain loyalty to and a preferential option for homogeneous activities over parish-wide community activities.

These theories are not employed in isolation. They are dialogically engaged with one another, recognizing that the realities of multicultural parish life are complex and multifaceted, and thus require a holistic approach. Each theory illuminates a particular segment of the phenomenon under investigation, and together they provide a more comprehensive understanding of why parallel ethnic communities persist in these multicultural parishes.

3.2.1 The Hermeneutical Spiral: Theory and Practice in Dialogue

The interpretive process follows Osmer's "hermeneutical spiral,"[86] a dynamic, interactive movement between empirical observation and theoretical interpretation. This process constitutes a dialogical conversation or a constant back-and-forth between the concrete particulars of parish life and the abstract concepts of social science. Empirical data challenge, refine, and sometimes contradict theoretical expectations, whereas theory helps us identify patterns and connections in the data that might otherwise elude our attention. This dialogical approach respects both the integrity of parishioners' lived experiences and the insights of social-scientific research. The approach recognizes that theory without empirical grounding becomes abstract speculation, while description without theoretical interpretation remains merely anecdotal. The goal, therefore, is a comprehensive interpretation that honors the complexity of multicultural parish life while providing explanatory depth.

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[86] Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction,* 20-22.

Key Interpretive Themes Emerging from Parishes A, B, and C.

Having established the theoretical framework, we now turn to the five major interpretive themes emerging from the descriptive data. Each theme addresses a distinct dimension of the parallel ethnic communities observed in Parishes A, B, and C. Drawing on relevant social-scientific theories, we shall explain why these patterns of separation persist. Each theory is briefly described and then applied to specific data to explain each emerging theme.

Ethnic Boundary Maintenance

3.3.1 Theoretical Framework: Barth's Ethnic Boundary Theory

Fredrik Barth's theory of ethnic boundaries challenged earlier anthropological assumptions that "ethnic groups were rigid and bounded entities formed through responses to ecological factors, and defined by territorial boundaries and objective cultural traits (language, customs, beliefs, dress, etc.)."[87] Instead, he and his colleagues argued that ethnicity is fundamentally about boundary maintenance, the social processes by which groups distinguish themselves from others and maintain these distinctions over time.[88] According to Barth, ethnic boundaries are sustained not by the total cultural content they enclose but by "selective interaction and categorical distinction"[89] through which cultural markers such as language, dress, religious practices, and food signal group membership and differentiate "us" from "them." Ethnic boundaries are socially constructed through continuous negotiation of difference and reinforced through everyday interactions among cultures.[90] Importantly, Barth observed that ethnic boundaries can persist even when

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[87] Eloise Hummell, "Standing the Test of Time – Barth and Ethnicity," *Coolabah,* no. 13 (2014): 46-59.
[88] Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 9-38.
[89] Barth, *"Introduction,"* 15-16.
[90] Barth, "*Introduction*," 14-15.

cultural content changes, because what matters is not specific cultural traits but the "social mechanisms of recognition and differentiation"[91] that sustain them.

Barth identified several mechanisms by which ethnic boundaries are maintained, including c*ategorical ascription*: that is, how groups define or classify individuals into ethnic categories based on visible markers.[92] *Self-identification*: how an individual or a group defines itself and wants to be known by others outside of the ingroup.[93] *Boundary markers*: this regards how specific cultural features or traits (language, rituals, symbols) are selected to signal and assert group membership.[94] And *Institutional separation:* this refers to distinct organizational structures that guard the exclusion and incorporation that reinforce group boundaries.[95]

Andrea Wimmer, building on Barth's boundary theory, emphasized that boundary-making is also reinforced by institutional incentives, unequal power distribution, and social networks. Therefore, whether ethnic differences become salient or fade depends on how these structures reward or constrain collective identification.[96]

In what follows, we use the theoretical framework to understand the parallel ethnic communities in the three multicultural parishes and to support the argument that the persisting division is not simply the result of cultural differences but is actively maintained through boundary-marking practices.

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[91] Barth, "*Introduction*," 9.
[92] Barth, "*Introduction*," 15.
[93] Barth, "*Introduction*," 15.
[94] Barth, "*Introduction*," 15-16.
[95] Barth, "*Introduction*," 9-10.
[96] Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making,* Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

Application to Parish Data

The empirical data from all three parishes reveal multiple mechanisms of ethnic boundary preservation operating simultaneously. With boundary theory, we now analyze how the different ethnic liturgies, parallel ministries, and unique cultural events serve as means of creating and sustaining boundaries in these culturally diverse parishes.

3.3.2 *Liturgical Separation as Boundary Marker*

The most visible boundary marker across all three parishes is the separation of liturgical celebrations by language and ethnic community. In Parish A, the three major ethnic communities, English, Hispanics, and Vietnamese, have different Sunday Mass schedules at separate hours of the day, and the celebration is limited to the languages of the respective ethnic communities. English Mass is just English, and so also are the Hispanic and Vietnamese Masses in their respective languages. Parish B also maintains separate Spanish, Filipino, and English Mass schedules with such spacing that hinders the opportunity to encounter people from the preceding Mass. Parish C has the same pattern of liturgical separation, with different Mass schedules for English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

This liturgical separation functions as a "diacritical feature,"[97] a cultural element that is given special emphasis because it signals and reinforces group boundaries and the "us" and "them" categories. While apparently about language accommodation, these separate liturgies create distinct temporal separation in parish life, minimizing contact between

[97] Hummell, "Standing the Test of Time – Barth and Ethnicity," 56.

ethnic communities and thereby reinforcing and sustaining separation as the normal way of being a parish.

3.3.3 *Parallel Ministry Structures*

Beyond liturgy, all three parishes maintain parallel organizational structures that reinforce the existing boundaries. At each of the three parishes, each ethnic community has its own internal pastoral council that oversees its internal affairs, including ministries and devotional celebrations. Parishes A and C's Hispanic and Vietnamese communities independently operate their own catechetical programs, youth groups, ministries, and cultural celebrations, separate from the English-speaking parish community.

These parallel structures create "institutional separation,"[98] which minimizes cross-group interaction and collaboration, thereby allowing the maintenance of cultural patterns that differ from those of the host society and other cultures. While these organizational structures may have emerged from practical considerations (language barriers, cultural preferences), they, in the long term, function to maintain ethnic boundaries by creating separate spheres of parish participation. Parishioners develop loyalty and identity within their ethnic-specific ministries, with limited incentive or opportunity to engage across ethnic lines.

3.3.4 *Cultural Events and Symbolic Boundaries*

The culturally appropriated celebrations, such as Our Lady of La Vang and Lunar New Year (Vietnamese) and Our Lady of Guadalupe (Hispanics), have become important expressions of ethnic identity in these Parishes rather than a celebration of parish identity.

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[98] Barth, "*Introduction,"* 10.

While these events are sometimes described as opportunities for "sharing culture," the observational data reveal that they often reinforce rather than bridge ethnic boundaries because they are exclusively celebrated. There is little cross-cultural participation, and sometimes none at all. The Vietnamese community in Parish A, as noted earlier, has consistently celebrated the Lunar New Year as a culturally exclusive event at venues chosen specifically outside the parish premises. And so does the Hispanic community in Parish C celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe with no expectation of seeing non-Hispanics.

These exclusively culturally attributed events function as "signals and emblems of identity"[99] that publicly display and affirm ethnic boundaries. Rather than creating intercultural exchange, these celebrations often become performances of ethnic distinctiveness for a largely in-group audience, reinforcing the sense of separate ethnic communities sharing space rather than forming a unified parish.

3.3.5 Synthesis

Barth's theory helps us understand that the existing parallel ethnic divisions in these parishes are not accidental or temporary but are actively produced and reproduced through practices that constantly preserve the boundaries among them. These boundaries serve essential functions for ethnic communities, providing a space of cultural comfort, linguistic familiarity, and social solidarity. However, they also create structural impediments to the formation of genuine intercultural parish communion that reflects the Body of Christ and ultimately the Kingdom of God that the Church is called to prefigure. The persistence of these boundaries suggests that current parish structures and practices inadvertently support ethnic separation rather than integration. Thus, without intentional efforts to create

[99] Barth, *"Introduction,"* 14.

boundary-crossing spaces and practices, the default tendency will continue to support the maintenance and reinforcement of ethnic distinctions.

Demographic Transition and Segmented Assimilation

3.4.1 Theoretical Framework: Understanding Immigrant Integration

The second interpretive theme addresses the demographic reality facing all three parishes. In each of them, there have been significant shifts in ethnic composition driven primarily by immigration. The demographic profile of the parishes has changed over the years and continues to change, but the patterns of change differ from one parish to another. To help us understand the various dynamics of immigrant integration in these parishes, we turn to segmented assimilation theory, developed by sociologists Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou.[100]

3.4.2 *Segmented Assimilation*

The 20th-century traditional assimilation theory[101] predicts a linear process whereby immigrants would gradually "abandon" their ethnic distinctiveness and adopt the cultural patterns of the host society. This "straight-line assimilation" model assumed that over time and across generations, ethnic differences would diminish and immigrants would be incorporated into a unified mainstream culture. However, research on contemporary immigration has shown that this linear model does not adequately account for the diverse pathways of immigrant integration. Portes and Zhou proposed segmented assimilation theory to account for the varied outcomes observed among different immigrant groups.

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[100] Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou, "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 530 (1993): 74-96.
[101] Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

According to this theory, immigrants and their descendants may follow different trajectories of incorporation into American society, depending on multiple factors that include *Human capital:* Education, professional skills, and economic resources that immigrants bring into the new context. The *Context of reception:* the existing government policies, labor market conditions, and societal attitudes toward the immigrant group impact immigrant integration. Next is the *Ethnic community resources:* that is, how new immigrants integrate into a new society is immensely influenced by the strength of ethnic networks, institutions, and social capital pre-existing in that society. And finally, the *Racial stratification:* how the immigrant group is positioned within existing racial hierarchies.[102]

Instead of the linear path toward assimilation, the segmented assimilation theory identifies three possible pathways that immigrants and their children adopt to the host environment. First is *Upward assimilation:* that is, some immigrants quickly integrate into mainstream institutions, achieve economic mobility, and acculturate gradually due to their educational status, economic resources, and the support of the locally established community network. Second, *Downward assimilation:* there are immigrants who end up on the opposite end of the continuum, in marginalized or impoverished segments of society with limited economic opportunities, usually due to racial discrimination, poor education, or economic barriers. Third, *Selective acculturation:* some immigrants also try to strike a balance; they maintain ethnic identity and culture while simultaneously achieving economic success and social mobility.[103]

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[102] Portes and Zhou, "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants,"74–96.
[103] Min Zhou, "Segmented Assimilation: Issues, Controversies, and Recent Research on the New Second Generation," *International Migration Review* 31, no. 4 (1997): 975-1008.

The theory emphasizes that the integration process of an individual or an immigrant group is not predetermined by their cultural characteristics but is shaped by structural factors, economic opportunities, reception, community resources, and institutional support.

Application to Parish Data

The three parishes, as we saw in our presentation in the previous chapter, have each experienced distinct patterns of immigrant integration, influenced by the factors and characteristics brought forward by Portes and Zhou.

3.4.3 *Filipino Immigration and Selective Acculturation*

The Filipinos in both Parishes A and B are in the state of selective acculturation. Most of them arrived with varying levels of professional credentials and English-language proficiency. Many work in healthcare, education, and professional services. This "human capital" facilitates their economic integration into the host society while, at the same time, maintaining their ethnic values and networks through occasional cultural celebrations.

In these two parishes, A and B, Filipinos have largely integrated into the English-speaking (Anglo) community. Those in Parish A, aside from their annual observance of the Christmas novena, "*Simbang Gabi*," remain an integral part of the English-speaking community. Those in Parish B have a once-a-month Sunday schedule and join the Anglo community for the rest of the Sundays of the month. Filipinos in these Parishes, thus, maintain ethnic identity while concurrently participating in mainstream American liturgical, economic, and civic life within the larger society. Their integration into the Anglo community in Parish B also explains why the parish celebrates bilingual Masses (English and Spanish) but does not incorporate Tagalog.

Selective acculturation, though promising in this respect, still creates a paradox in parish life. For instance, although Filipinos are economically and socially integrated into the Anglo community, they remain structurally separated by their particular leadership structures. The question would be, to what extent would communities following a selective acculturation path of integration coordinate and cooperate with the parish leadership structures?

3.4.4 *Latino Immigration and Varied Trajectories*

Parish B has Hispanics who are well established in the States in terms of their education and social life, and those who are still finding their feet. Established Hispanics, particularly those in the second or third generation, exhibit patterns of upward assimilation, economic mobility, and integration into mainstream parish structures. Many hold catechetical leadership positions and participate in English-language Masses and ministries. On the other hand, there are those facing challenging reception contexts due to factors such as limited English proficiency, legal status, and experiences of discrimination. For this group, the Spanish-language Mass and Latino ministries provide social support and cultural refuge.

This division within the Hispanic community creates internal tensions. Those who have integrated them sometimes express frustration with recent immigrants' limited English and their perceived resistance to integration. On the other hand, some recent immigrants feel marginalized by the acculturated section of the community. This internal situation of the Hispanic community in Parish B attests to the varied ways in which immigrants integrate into their host society. These diverse pathways can create both internal and external challenges for efforts to integrate cultures in the parish.

3.4.5 *Vietnamese Refugees and Ethnic Enclave Formation*

The Vietnamese community in Parish C remains isolated with limited structural integration. Many of the first-generation arrived as refugees following the Vietnam War in the 1970s and built strong, concentrated ethnic neighborhoods. The community in Parish C is among the first such communities to be formed. Segmented assimilation theory recognizes that the coethnic community, that is, the pre-established ethnic community in the host country, can serve protective functions by providing economic opportunities, social support, and cultural continuity in contexts where the broader society may be hostile or unwelcoming.[104] The Vietnamese community in Parish C is structurally isolated, pastorally and financially. They, according to the pastor, who is American-born Vietnamese, have a preference for a "pure" Vietnamese priest, as the pastor puts it.

While this enclave provides crucial social support for Vietnamese parishioners, particularly elderly immigrants with limited English, it also creates structural isolation. The observational data reveal minimal interaction between the Vietnamese community and other ethnic groups in the parish.

Linguistic Hegemony and Symbolic Power

3.5.1 Theoretical Framework: Bourdieu's Theory of Linguistic Capital

The third interpretive theme addresses one of the most covert yet pervasive dynamics observed across the three parishes. English remains the official language for communication in these parishes, both in printed communications and in everyday parish operations. English is perceived as the official institutional language, and this unconsciously marginalizes other languages. To understand this dynamic of how one

[104] Portes and Zhou, "The New Second Generation," 86-87.

language dominates in a multicultural institution, we turn to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of linguistic capital and symbolic power.[105]

3.5.2 *Language as Symbolic Capital*

Bourdieu argued that language is not merely a neutral medium of communication but a form of symbolic capital, a resource that confers power, prestige, and access to institutional resources. In any "social field,"[106] there are certain forms of language that are recognized as "official, standard, or proper," while others are seen as "unofficial."[107] Those who possess the legitimate or official language variety enjoy social, economic, and political advantages,[108] while those who lack this linguistic capacity experience exclusion, marginalization, and, at times, oppression. Due to the merits that come with competence in the official or legitimate language for those who possess it, it is rendered as a "linguistic capital" for them.

The value of this capital is not intrinsic to the language itself; it is socially constructed through institutional processes. The educational systems, government bureaucracies, media, and religious institutions[109] play varied roles in establishing and solidifying legitimate languages that are valued in social contexts and fields. This process of legitimation is often invisible; it appears natural or inevitable rather than as a social construction serving particular interests.[110] Bourdieu also introduced the concept of "symbolic violence" to describe how linguistic domination operates. Symbolic violence

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[105] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). 37.
[106] Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals: The Political Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu,* 57.
[107] Swartz, *Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals: The Political Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu,* 57.
[108] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 37-38.
[109] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power,* 107
[110] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 109.

occurs when dominated groups accept and internalize the legitimacy of the dominant language, coming to see their own language as inferior or inappropriate for certain contexts.[111] This internalization makes linguistic domination appear consensual rather than coercive, even though it systematically disadvantages non-dominant speakers.

Also, Bourdieu conceptualized social fields as "linguistic markets"[112] in which different forms of linguistic capital have differential value. In any given market, he says, speakers must possess the appropriate linguistic capital to participate effectively. Those who lack the dominant language variety face exclusion from full participation, even when formal barriers are absent.[113] Importantly, Bourdieu argued that linguistic markets are not level playing fields where all speakers have equal opportunities to acquire dominant language skills. Rather, access to linguistic capital is shaped by class position, educational opportunities, and social networks.[114] This creates linguistic hierarchies that reinforce broader structures of social inequality.

A key insight from Bourdieu is that linguistic domination requires institutional legitimation. It is not enough for a language to be widely spoken; it must be recognized as the official or legitimate language of institutional life. This legitimation occurs through formal policies (official language designations) and informal practices (which language is used in meetings, documents, and decision-making).[115] Once a language is established as legitimate, it becomes the medium through which institutional power is exercised. Those who speak the legitimate language fluently can navigate institutional structures effectively,

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[111] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 51-52.
[112] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 37.
[113] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 37-38.
[114] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 62-65.
[115] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 107-116.

while those with limited proficiency face barriers to participation, regardless of their other qualifications or contributions.

Application to Parish Data

The empirical data show evidence of multiple ways in which language functions as linguistic capital (English in Parishes A and B and Spanish in Parish C), creating hierarchies of access and participation and, consequently, marginalizing other languages.

3.5.3 *English as the Language of Institutional Power*

English dominates in all three parishes as the legitimate institutional language. Parish councils primarily conduct meetings in English. Financial reports, parish bulletins, websites, announcements, and official correspondence are primarily in English, with a scanty presence of Spanish and Vietnamese. Even in Parish C, where Spanish has become the dominant language, English still dominates in its communication outlets. Parish B's insistence on English as the medium of sacramental preparation, despite the 41 percent share of Hispanic parishioners, underscores the dominance and institutionalization of English. Parish C, with a 56 percent Hispanic population, has made Spanish the de facto primary language of many parish contexts. As a lifelong Anglo parishioner of Parish C complained, "We feel marginalized and uninformed of parish activities."[116]

This linguistic structure creates a fundamental asymmetry: English speakers in Parish A and B, and Spanish speakers in Parish C, can participate fully in parish governance and decision-making, while non-speakers of the respective languages in these Parishes face barriers to institutional access. These situations reveal that linguistic hierarchy is not

[116] Parish C, Interview, September 20, 2025.

merely about communication but about power. Those who possess the dominant and official language possess a capital to dominate parish councils, finance committees, and strategic processes. The "unofficial" or minority languages, though having separate ethnic councils, have limited authority over parish-wide decisions and resources.

3.5.4 *Linguistic Barriers to Leadership*

The linguistic structure of parish governance creates barriers to leadership for those who lack proficiency in the legitimate institutional language. Parish A has several Hispanic and Vietnamese parishioners who may have experience in church leadership and pastoral formation, but the core pastoral council leadership is composed primarily of Anglos or fluent English speakers. This suggests that a limitation in English proficiency is taken as a sign of inefficiency for parish leadership roles. The Spanish language in Parish C marginalizes English and Vietnamese-speaking communities. Leadership positions are predominantly held by Hispanics, with a barely visible presence of Vietnamese, despite their numbers and leadership experience. Parish C's situation suggests that linguistic dominance is not an Anglo problem but rather a broader structural pattern of linguistic hierarchy. The dominance of a single language often leads to its legitimation as the normative language, while others are seen as secondary.

This pattern reflects Bourdieu's "censorship effect" in linguistic markets, in which linguistic requirements exclude qualified individuals from participation.[117] The requirement of English or Spanish fluency serves as a gatekeeping mechanism that

[117] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 137-138.

maintains the dominance of English- or Spanish-speaking groups in parish leadership, even when this requirement is not explicitly articulated or enshrined as policy.

3.5.5 *Internalization of Linguistic Hierarchy*

Particularly striking in the interview data is evidence of the dominated group's internalization of the linguistic hierarchy, pointing to Bourdieu's symbolic violence. Several immigrant parishioners view their limited English as a personal failure rather than a structural barrier. For instance, the Vietnamese community leader in Parish A repeatedly apologized during the interview for her "poor English," even though she articulated clearly and thoughtfully. This internalization of linguistic hierarchy legitimates the dominance of English or Spanish in the case of Parish C. When non-English speakers blame themselves for their exclusion rather than questioning the parish's linguistic structure, the system of linguistic domination becomes self-sustaining. As Bourdieu argued, the most effective forms of domination are those that are misrecognized as natural or inevitable rather than seen as social constructions that could be otherwise.[118]

3.5.6 *Translation as Subordination*

Parishes B and C provide some translation of parish bulletins into Spanish, but none into Vietnamese or Tagalog. The translation pattern is also unidirectional, from English to scattered, symbolic, or abbreviated Spanish translations, thereby reinforcing linguistic superiority. English speakers do not have to navigate non-English communications because they have the full version of everything. In contrast, non-English speakers must continually translate or rely on translation to understand certain aspects of parish communications. This pattern of incomplete and unidirectional translation conveys an implicit message about

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[118] Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 170.

linguistic hierarchy: English is the parish's primary language, and other languages are accommodated as a concession rather than valued as equal.

3.5.8 *Synthesis*

Bourdieu's theory of linguistic capital illuminates how language functions as a mechanism of power and exclusion in these multicultural parishes. The dominance of English in Parishes A and B is not simply a practical accommodation to the majority language but a structural feature that systematically advantages English speakers and disadvantages others, regardless of their faith commitment, cultural gifts, or potential contributions to parish life. This linguistic hierarchy operates largely invisibly; it appears as a practical necessity rather than as domination. Yet its effects are profound: it shapes who can participate in decision-making, who holds leadership positions, whose voices are heard, and ultimately whose vision of parish life prevails. Addressing the parallel ethnic coexistence in these parishes will require not just translation but a fundamental rethinking of linguistic power structures.

Structural Segregation and the Contact Hypothesis

3.6.1 Theoretical Framework: Allport's Contact Hypothesis

The fourth interpretive theme addresses the most visible pattern across the Parishes. In each of these parishes, there is a prevalence of parallel ethnic structures: separate liturgies, independent ministries, distinct governance, and minimal cross-cultural and intercultural interaction. Although the ethnic communities share the same physical space and sacramental life, parishioners from the different ethnic communities have minimal

meaningful contact with one another. To understand why proximity does not automatically lead to integration, we turn to Gordon Allport's contact hypothesis.[119]

3.6.2 The Contact Hypothesis

The fundamental premise of contact theory is that prejudice stems largely from ignorance, stereotyping, and a lack of familiarity with the out-group, and that, under certain conditions, intergroup contact can reduce prejudice and enhance intergroup relations. This theory emerged during a period of significant racial tension in the United States in the 1950s, and it has become one of the most influential theories in social psychology, having been tested in countless studies.[120] Allport specifies carefully that not all contact reduces prejudice. In fact, he emphasizes that contact under unfavorable conditions can increase intergroup tension and reinforce stereotypes.[121]

Allport identified four essential conditions for contact to have positive effects, these included: *Equal status:* participants must have equal status within the contact situation. Members of the different groups must interact as peers, with neither group holding superior status or power within the immediate contact situation.[122] *Common goals:* the groups must work toward shared objectives. Common goals transform the contact situation from a mere encounter into a purposeful collaboration in which success depends on contributions from all participants, regardless of their membership status.[123] *Intergroup cooperation:* groups must work together cooperatively rather than competitively to achieve their shared

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[119] Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954).
[120] Thomas F. Pettigrew and Linda R. Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90, no. 5 (2006): 751-783.
[121] Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (California: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979), 261
[122] Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Tropp, "Allport's Intergroup Contact Hypothesis: Its History and Influence" eds John Dovidio, Peter Glick, and Laurie Budman *On the Nature of Prejudice: Fifty Years after Allport* (MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 264.
[123] Pettigrew and Tropp, "Allport's Intergroup Contact Hypothesis: Its History and Influence" 265.

objectives.[124] By doing so, they foster positive affect and trust among themselves, recognizing that their success depends on their interdependence. *Institutional support:* Because contact occurs within broader social contexts, the attitudes and norms promoted by authorities, laws, and customs powerfully shape the quality of contact.[125]

According to Allport and confirmed by many other studies, when these conditions are in place, contact can reduce prejudice, increase empathy, and build cross-group friendships. Conversely, when contact occurs in contexts of status inequality, competition, or a lack of institutional support, it can reinforce prejudice and hostility.[126]

Allport and other subsequent researchers on the contact hypothesis have distinguished between different types of intergroup contact and how they can or cannot enhance integration: 1) Superficial contact: Brief, impersonal encounters with no real interaction. 2) Casual contact: Friendly but shallow interactions with limited personal disclosure. 3) Acquaintance: Sustained interactions involving personal sharing and relationship development. 4) Intimate contact: Deep friendships characterized by trust, vulnerability, and mutual support.[127]

Many studies corroborate the idea that superficial contact has little effect on prejudice reduction, whereas acquaintance and intimate contact can significantly improve intergroup attitudes. The depth and quality of relationships matter more than mere frequency.[128]

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[124] Pettigrew and Tropp, "Allport's Intergroup Contact Hypothesis: Its History and Influence" 266.
[125] Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 281.
[126] Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice,* 276-278
[127] Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Intergroup Contact Theory," *Annual Review of Psychology* 49 (1998): 65-85.
[128] Pettigrew and Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory," 766-768.

Application to Parish Data

Through the lens of contact theory, we can identify several ways in which the absence of Allport's conditions perpetuates ethnic separation and hinders intercultural communion within shared parish space.

3.6.3 *Superficial Contact and Casual Interaction*

Across Parishes A, B, and C, the dominant pattern is "superficial or casual contact." Parishioners from various ethnic communities have brief, impersonal encounters that lack the depth needed to reduce potential prejudices and build relationships. The separate Mass schedules, independent ministry structures, and culturally exclusive celebrations create conditions that limit meaningful intercultural interaction. These structures sustain casual, minimal contact[129] among the various communities, fostering conditions for prejudice and intergroup distance to persist or even intensify.

The parallel ministry structures in these parishes reinforce this pattern of minimal contact. Each ethnic community operates its own catechetical programs, youth groups, devotional societies, and pastoral councils with little coordination or collaboration across ethnic lines. As a result, parishioners develop relationships and loyalties within their ethnic-specific ministries, with limited incentive or opportunity to engage across cultural boundaries. The absence of shared activities means that parishioners can participate fully in parish life without ever forming meaningful relationships with members of other ethnic communities.

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[129] Pettigrew and Tropp, "Allport's Intergroup Contact Hypothesis: Its History and Influence," 269.

3.6.4 *Absence of Common Goals and Cooperative Interdependence*

The persisting parallel structures fail to foster intercultural engagement due to the lack of shared goals and cooperative interdependence among the ethnic communities in these parishes. As emphasized by contact theory, genuinely shared objectives among groups significantly help break down barriers to difference and foster deeper communion. Yet in these parishes, ministry activities, sacramental preparation, devotional practices, and even youth programs are organized along ethnic lines. There is no coordination or collaboration among the leaders of these ministries, and no apparent common goals unite them. Parish C's failure to establish a functioning parish-wide pastoral council until recently exemplifies the shared lack of common goals that might unite the diverse communities under a single purpose.

The bilingual, trilingual, and multicultural Masses on major feasts, experienced as burdensome rather than celebratory due to length and space constraints, reveal further that attempts at shared worship to promote intercultural contact are viewed by many as obligations to be endured rather than opportunities for cooperative celebration. There is no functional reason for members of different ethnic groups to interact meaningfully, much less to develop the "cross-group friendships"[130] that are needed to overcome prejudice and build authentic intercultural relationships.

3.6.5 *Unequal Status and Power Asymmetries*

Contact theory emphasizes that meaningful intergroup contact requires equal status between groups in the context of the contact situation. However, the data from all three parishes reveal significant status asymmetries that undermine the potential for positive

[130] Pettigrew and Tropp, "Allport's Intergroup Contact Hypothesis: Its History and Influence," 269.

contact outcomes. The historically dominant Anglo communities in Parishes A and B continue to control formal governance structures, financial resources, and decision-making processes. The established Hispanic-dominant community in Parish C controls the dominant positions, whereas the Vietnamese and English communities hold limited institutional power. The Vietnamese in Parishes A and C are underrepresented in parish formal structures. As one Vietnamese parishioner in Parish C sums it up, "We are very involved in the practical organization of the liturgical activities, but not so much with parish administration."[131] This comment reveals an awareness of unequal status among the parishes, and that "no level playing field"[132] exists on which the cultures could comfortably dialogue to dispel stereotypes. These status differences continually reinforce prejudices.

3.6.6 *Lack of Institutional Support for Integration*

The apparent lack of clear institutional support for intercultural integration across the parishes implicitly but powerfully undermines the existing limited contact opportunities. The tacit endorsement of cultural segregation in these parishes fails to establish a cross-ethnic ministry coordination and instead promotes exclusionary ethnic operations. The language barrier cited by a respondent in Parish C as making the cross-cultural invitation feel "burdensome" indicates a deeper institutional failure that exposes how little these parishes have invested in multicultural leadership development or intercultural competency training.

Parish A's Hispanics' complaints about non-Hispanics carrying the image of the Our Lady of Guadalupe expose the absence of institutional guidance and support for

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[131] Parish C, Interview, September 14, 2025.
[132] Hoover, *The Shared Parish: Latinos, Anglos, and the Future of U.S Catholicism*. New York University Press, 63, 2014. Kindle.

intercultural practices. Contact theory predicts that, without institutional support that explicitly endorses intergroup cooperation, even well-intentioned individuals will hesitate to bridge cultural divides for fear of social awkwardness, lack of skills, or implicit sanctions from their own ethnic community. The lack of institutional support thus results in a self-perpetuating cycle in which structural segregation produces minimal contact, which ultimately reinforces cultural stereotypes and unfamiliarity, thereby allowing these patterns to solidify into what parishioners accept as normative multicultural parish life.

3.6.7 *Competitive Rather Than Cooperative Dynamics*

While overt competition between ethnic communities is not prominent in the parish data, subtle forms of competition emerge in the allocation of resources, scheduling of liturgies, and recognition of cultural celebrations. Each ethnic community negotiates with parish leadership for Mass times, access to parish facilities, and financial support for cultural events. This creates a zero-sum dynamic in which one community's gain (e.g., an additional Mass time) may be perceived as another community's loss. The agitation among some Hispanics in Parish B over having only one Mass schedule, as compared to the four English Masses, can be understood in this context.

The separate fundraising efforts maintained by each ethnic community in Parishes B and C exemplify this competitive dynamic. Rather than pooling resources for common parish needs, each community raises funds independently for its own ministries and celebrations. While this practice may emerge from practical considerations (ethnic-specific events, language-specific materials), it reinforces a sense of separate interests rather than shared mission.

Furthermore, the limited participation in each other's cultural celebrations suggests a lack of cooperative engagement. Vietnamese parishioners celebrate the Lunar New Year or the Feast of Our Lady of La Vang with minimal attendance from Hispanic or English-speaking parishioners. The Hispanic celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe draws primarily Hispanic parishioners. These events function more as parallel expressions of ethnic identity than as opportunities for cooperative intercultural exchange. This can be a breeding ground for competition over parish resources.

3.6.8 *Synthesis*

Allport's contact hypothesis helps us understand why the gathering of cultural or ethnic diversity in these parishes has not automatically yielded intercultural integration. The structural organization of parish life that honors separation and lacks institutional support prevents the kind of meaningful contact that could foster genuine intercultural communion.

The analysis indicates that the parallel ethnic communities observed in Parishes A, B, and C are sustained not by prejudice or ill will, but by structural arrangements that minimize meaningful contact between them. Parishioners, despite their cultural diversity, share the same physical space and participate in the same sacramental life; however, the structures within which they operate create rare opportunities to build relationships, challenge stereotypes, or foster mutual understanding. Also, the parishes' organizational structures reinforce status hierarchies and power asymmetries. Dominant ethnic communities maintain control over institutional structures while minority communities remain marginalized, even when they might constitute a significant portion of the parish population.

Ethnic Community Loyalty

3.7.1 Theoretical Framework: Ethnocentrism

The fifth and final theological framework seeks to explain the visible manifestations of loyalty to ethnic-based activities rather than to parish-wide activities. What could be the underlying reasons for the active and lively participation in ethnic based celebrations, and the apparent lukewarm attitude toward multicultural and trilingual Masses and other poorly participated in parish-wide activities? To help understand this observed pattern, we now turn to the concept of ethnocentrism.

3.7.2 *Ethnocentrism*

Ethnocentrism, as defined by Louis Luzbetak, is "the tendency to regard the ways and values of one's own society as the normal, right, proper, and certainly the best way..."[133] That is, the tendency to make one's cultural standards the normative or the frame of reference for evaluating other cultural groups. Bories Bizumic identifies six facets of ethnocentrism that help us understand how this phenomenon manifests in multicultural contexts. Let us briefly consider each of Bizumic's six facets of ethnocentrism. 1. *Devotional:* this refers to the strong, ardent, unconditional loyalty, attachment, and dedication to a person's ethnic group and its interests.[134] 2. *Group cohesion:* this involves the view that high levels of integration, unity, and cooperation should pervade one's ethnic group, with the needs of the ingroup taking precedence over the needs of its individual group members.[135] 3. *Preference:* this has to do with the inclination to like and prefer one's own ethnic group over others without necessarily seeing the ingroup as superior to the

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[133] Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspective in Missiological Anthropology* (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1988), 65.
[134] Boris Bizumic, *Ethnocentrism: integrated Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2019), 30.
[135] Bizumic, *Ethnocentrism: integrated Perspective,* 31.

outgroup.[136] 4. *Superiority:* it is the belief that one's own ethnic group is better than or superior to others on certain dimensions of central significance, such as morality, history, spirituality, sociability, economy, development, etc.[137] 5. *Purity:* this has to deal with the desire to maintain the "purity" of one's ethnic group and reject mixing with outgroups.[138] 6. *Exploitativeness:* this happens when an ethnic group is centered on itself, believing that its own interests are of foremost importance, and, thus, gives little or no consideration to the views and feelings of the outgroup.[139]

Application to Data

The descriptive findings from the parishes reveal several manifestations of ethnocentrism that help explain the persistence of ethnic parallel loyalty and the challenges to authentic intercultural communion. Three situations from Chapter One particularly illuminate how ethnocentric attitudes shape parish life.

First, Parish B's self-perception as "an Anglo and conservative community" despite the huge Hispanic demographic shift demonstrates the facets of superiority and purity. To refer to a parish community that is 41% Hispanic as an Anglo community is a high expression of cultural superiority and a complete desire to keep the Anglo culture "unstained." Again, the parish's exclusive use of English for catechetical preparation and its minimal accommodations for non-English-speaking parishioners express the "purity" character of ethnocentrism, which rejects intercultural mixing. Also, the Anglo community's perception of bilingual Masses as "overly long" also reflects an ethnocentric

[136] Bizumic, *Ethnocentrism: integrated Perspective,* 31.
[137] Bizumic, *Ethnocentrism: integrated Perspective,* 32.
[138] Bizumic, *Ethnocentrism: integrated Perspective,* 33.
[139] Bizumic, *Ethnocentrism: integrated Perspective,* 33.

judgment that evaluates liturgical practices through Anglo cultural norms; implicitly positioning Anglo preferences as the standard against which other cultural expressions are measured.

Second, Parish C's fragmented ecclesial identity, characterized by communities operating independently with their own leadership, schedules, and programs, brings to the fore the group-cohesion and preference facets of ethnocentrism. The separate functioning of these communities, each prioritizing internal cohesion over intercultural engagement within the same parish, is a visible sign of group cohesion. The often description of the trilingual Masses as "burdensome" reveals a preference for cultural homogeneity within each community. The communication barriers between communities serve not merely as practical obstacles but as protective boundaries that allow each group to maintain its cultural distinctiveness or purity.

Third, across all three parishes, the pattern of poor attendance at common liturgical celebrations, juxtaposed with the often faithful and proactive participation in ethnic-based activities, signals an ethnic preference. While there are occasional celebrations of cultural diversity, there is a resistance to incorporating other cultural elements from other ethnic groups into regular ethnic Sunday celebrations. This reflects in some way a desire to maintain the purity of their ethnic practices. Each cultural community pursuing its own interests within the parish structure, with minimal collaboration and little consideration for how its practices affect other groups, reveals a subtle systemic exploitation.

3.7.3 *Synthesis*

The ethnocentric dynamics evident in these three parishes reveal that cultural diversity alone does not guarantee intercultural communion because of the tendencies of

ethnocentrism. The six facets of ethnocentrism operate both individually and systemically to maintain cultural boundaries within multicultural parishes. Across the three parishes, the exploitative pursuit of each group's interests without adequate consideration of others perpetuates parallel communities and sideline communion. These findings suggest that overcoming ethnocentrism requires more than good intentions or occasional celebrations of diversity. It demands intentional formation in intercultural competence, structural changes that promote shared leadership and decision-making, and a theological vision that recognizes cultural difference not as "a threat to unity but as a gift"[140] and as a manifestation of the Church's catholicity.

3.8 Toward an Emerging Interpretation

Having examined the five interpretive themes, ethnic boundary maintenance, segmented assimilation, linguistic hegemony, structural segregation, and ethnocentrism, I will now synthesize these insights into a comprehensive understanding of why parallel ethnic communities persist in Parishes A, B, and C.

The five themes are not isolated phenomena but interconnected systems that mutually reinforce each other. Ethnic boundary maintenance generates the social-psychological motivation for separation, which is driven by the desire to preserve ethnic identity and community. Segmented assimilation provides the structural context that makes ethnic enclaves protective and valuable. Linguistic hegemony establishes power hierarchies that privilege certain groups over others. Structural segregation prevents meaningful contact that could challenge boundaries and reduce prejudice, while ethnocentrism reinforces the

[140] Safwat Marzouk, *Intercultural Church: A Biblical Vision for an Age of Migration* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 2.

tendency to prefer one's cultural values as the best among others. Together, these systems create a stable pattern of ethnic separation that is resistant to change because it is supported by multiple, mutually reinforcing mechanisms. Consequently, efforts to address any single dimension are unlikely to disrupt this equilibrium because the other dimensions continue to sustain separation.

Furthermore, these parishes embody a fundamental paradox: they are simultaneously diverse and segregated. They comprise multiple ethnic communities under a single parish roof, yet these communities remain largely separate in their organizational life, social relationships, and access to power. The parishes' data reveal multiculturalism as coexistence rather than communion, a sharing of space without mutuality and integration. This paradox is not unique to these three parishes but reflects broader patterns in American Catholic life and American society more generally. The United States is increasingly diverse, yet many institutions and communities remain segregated along ethnic and racial lines. Churches, schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces may contain diversity, but this diversity is often organized into parallel groups that minimize meaningful intergroup contact.

Another important insight from this interpretive analysis is that the persistence of parallel ethnic communities cannot be attributed primarily to prejudice, ill will, or lack of pastoral concern. The pastors and lay leaders in these parishes genuinely desire to serve all their parishioners and frequently express commitment to unity and inclusion. Many dream and aspire for greater interaction and unity. However, as the analysis shows, good intentions are insufficient to overcome structural barriers to integration. The systems of separation described in this chapter operate largely beneath the level of conscious intention.

They are embedded in institutional structures, organizational routines, and taken-for-granted practices that appear natural or inevitable rather than as choices that could be otherwise. Addressing parallel ethnic groups will require more than exhortations to unity or celebrations of diversity. It will require critical examination of parish structures and intentional restructuring to create conditions conducive to genuine intercultural communion.

A further important finding is that parallel ethnic communities are not neutral organizational structures; they reflect and reinforce existing power hierarchies. English-speaking, typically Euro-American parishioners enjoy structural advantages, control over parish governance, access to resources, symbolic legitimacy, and the ability to define parish identity and priorities. In contrast, immigrant communities, particularly those with limited English proficiency, occupy subordinate positions with limited institutional power. This power imbalance is often invisible to the dominant group that benefits from it. Dominant-group members may perceive the parish as welcoming and inclusive, unaware of the barriers faced by individuals outside their ethnic community. This invisibility of privilege itself serves as a mechanism of domination, preventing recognition of the need for structural change.

Finally, this analysis reveals that the parallel ethnic communities impose costs on all parishioners, not just marginalized groups. While ethnic-specific structures provide important benefits such as cultural comfort, linguistic access, and social support, they also limit the potential for mutual enrichment, cross-cultural learning, and the witness of unity in diversity that is central to Catholic ecclesiology. Parishioners in these parishes miss opportunities to encounter the gifts of other cultural traditions, to expand their

understanding of faith through different cultural expressions, and to experience the catholicity of the Church. They also miss above all the joy of the Kingdom of God in concrete form. The existing parallel communities impoverish parish life by fragmenting what could be a rich intercultural communion.

3.9 Identifying Existing Seeds of Transformation

Despite the structural barriers presented in the previous section, the data from Chapter One also reveal nascent practices and emerging sensibilities that point toward possibilities for transformation and intercultural living. These "seeds of transformation" are not yet fully mature alternatives to the prevailing paradigm of parallel ethnic communities; however, they represent glimmers of hope for a different way of being parish and, by extension, church. Identifying and nurturing these seeds is essential for any pragmatic strategy of change. The seeds also demonstrate the fact that intercultural communion is a process of becoming.

First, across the three parishes, several emerging practices signal a tentative and uneven movement toward intercultural living. The most significant breakthroughs consistently involve the younger generations. The bilingual and multicultural youth ministry initiatives, particularly in Parishes A and B, in response to second and third-generation parishioners who inhabit hybrid cultural and linguistic identities, are a brave step. This creates shared spaces where English-speaking, Spanish-speaking, and Vietnamese-speaking youth interact beyond the boundaries of their parents' communities. This program is embryonic and fragile, yet it represents a shift from ethnic parallelism toward relationship-building among those who will shape the parish's future.

Second, liturgical innovations also cut across the parishes. While daily and weekly worship remains segregated mainly by language, joint liturgies during Easter, parish feast day, and Thanksgiving have become occasions for these parishes to gather as one body. These multilingual celebrations, which weave together readings, songs, and prayers from the parish's various ethnic communities, foster a sense of communion and oneness. Although such common celebrations are difficult to coordinate and frequently provoke complaints about length or unfamiliarity, they nonetheless serve as symbolic counter-narratives that challenge various forms of ethnocentrism.

Third, leadership structures are slowly evolving to include formal representation of all major cultural communities, creating the awareness that intercultural communion cannot be achieved through liturgy alone. The formation of parish councils with members drawn from each ethnic group is especially consequential: it moves decision-making away from "consultation by ethnicity" toward shared governance and accountability. Although these councils are still in their early stages, their existence directly challenges the long-standing assumption of Anglo default leadership.

These developments are best understood as seeds rather than accomplishments because each carries the weight of resistance from those invested in maintaining familiar structures, and each demands sustained pastoral energy, intercultural competence, and resources that are often scarce. These existing initiatives mark a meaningful departure from a static multicultural model, one that tolerates ethnic cohabitation without demanding relationships, toward something more demanding: the slow work of intercultural communion.

Conclusion

This chapter has employed social-scientific theories to interpret the parallel ethnic tracks observed in Parishes A, B, and C. Five interpretive themes have illuminated different dimensions of this phenomenon: Ethnic boundary maintenance explains how ethnic identities are actively constructed and reinforced through symbolic markers and social practices. Segmented assimilation reveals how structural factors shape different pathways of immigrant integration. Linguistic hegemony exposes how language functions as a mechanism of power and exclusion. Structural segregation demonstrates how parish organizational structures prevent meaningful intergroup contact. And ethnocentrism reveals the cause of ethnic loyalty over parish-wide programs. Together, these themes reveal that parallel ethnic communities are not accidental or temporary but are sustained by interlocking systems of separation embedded in parish structures and practices. These systems, while often unintentional, create and reinforce hierarchies that privilege established groups while marginalizing newcomers and minority communities.

This interpretive analysis sets the stage for the normative theological reflection in Chapter Three. Having understood why parallel ethnic communities persist, we now ask: What ought to be going on? How does Catholic theology and ecclesiology evaluate these patterns? What vision of parish life should guide efforts at transformation? For these parishes to become more than international and multicultural communities of private identity, we must confront a radical theological question: What vision of the Church is God calling us to embody in an era of rapid demographic shifts? We cannot respond to these questions by returning to sentimental appeals for “unity” that leave existing power structures untouched. It must emerge from the heart of Christian revelation itself, the triune

life of God, in which difference does not generate hierarchy, and mutuality is not an accessory but an essence. The doctrine of the Trinity refuses cultural assimilation and rejects dominance disguised as order; it models a communion in which persons retain identity while giving and receiving life from one another. Thus, Interculturality, which we shall deal with in more detail later, is not a strategic innovation; it is a praxis of fidelity to the God who draws people from everywhere into one Body. The normative stage, therefore, turns to the Church's own theological imagination: Scripture, sacramental theology, ecclesial teaching, and the social Trinitarian vision that confronts us with the truth that the parish is not permitted to remain what it has become**,** and that pastoral leadership must be reshaped by the divine hospitality that annihilates exclusion and makes room at the table for every tongue, every race, and every people.

In the next chapter, I will draw on Catholic theological resources to develop normative criteria for assessing and transforming multicultural parish life to reflect the Kingdom of God. This theological reflection will build on the empirical and interpretive work of the first two chapters, ensuring that normative judgments are grounded in concrete reality rather than abstract ideals.

Chapter Three: What Ought to be Going On?

4.1 Introduction

At the descriptive stage, we identified structural separation, power imbalances, and limited intercultural encounters as the challenging factors hindering intercultural living in the parishes we are dealing with. In Chapter Two, we probed beneath the surface to understand the root causes sustaining the persisting boundary maintenance, linguistic hegemony, structural segregation, and ethnocentrism at the various parishes.

In this chapter, we address Richard Osmer's third task of practical theology: the normative task, which asks, "What ought to be going on?"[141] in the culturally diverse parishes that we have been dealing with in this work. After describing the realities of Parishes A, B, and C and interpreting their underlying dynamics, we now turn to theological reflection to establish a normative vision for multicultural parishes. This vision seeks to inspire and help parallel ethnic communities to build a "family home of mutual support and challenge that goes beyond individual whim or comfort."[142] This normative vision is grounded on the very nature of God, the "perichoresis-communion"[143] of the Trinity revealed in Jesus Christ, and the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit. The fundamentally theological question this chapter seeks to address is: How does the Trinitarian communion inform the Church's living of her diversity as one community of believers?

The chapter proceeds in six sections. First, I establish the life of the Triune God as the model for human community by exploring the concept of perichoresis. Second, I trace the movement from Trinitarian life to ecclesial praxis, showing how communion

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[141] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 4.
[142] Anthony Gittins, "The Challenge of Intercultural Living: Anthropological and Theological Implications" in *Intercultural Living* Vol. 1 Lazar Stanislaus and Marin Ueffing eds. (Noida: Saurabh Printer, 2015), 58.
[143] Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishes, 2005)

ecclesiology grounds the parish's identity and mission. Third, I will explore the concept of interculturality as participation in Trinitarian life and how perichoretic communion addresses the problems of domination and coexistence. Fourth, I connect intercultural living to the Kingdom of God, as fulfilling the parish's eschatological calling. Fifth, I offer a vision for multicultural parishes. And finally, I conclude by summarizing the normative theological foundations and transitioning to the pragmatic-strategic task of Chapter Four.

4.2 The Triune God as Model for Human Community

Leonard Boff and many other theologians have proposed that "the Trinity understood in human terms as a communion of Persons lays the foundations for a society of brothers and sisters, of equals, in which dialogue and consensus are the basic constituents of living together in both the church and society."[144] In the same line of thought, Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* points to the dynamic communion of the Trinity as how it lays the foundation for human society. He writes that "if we go to the ultimate source of that love which is the very life of the triune God, we encounter in the community of the three divine Persons the origin and perfect model of all life and society."[145] Boff further believes that "the Trinity seeks to see itself reflected in history, through people sharing their goods in common, building up egalitarian and just relationships among all, sharing who they are and what they have."[146] The Trinity, therefore, serves as the ultimate model for human community and social relationships. The Triune God's perfect communion, expressed in the concept of *perichoresis,* provides a theological foundation for pursuing unity among the cultural diversities of human society.

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[144] Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 120.
[145] Pope Francis, Encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), no. 85.
[146] Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 134.

4.2.1 *Perichoresis*

The concept of perichoresis has deep roots in the history of Christian thought. From the earliest centuries, theologians have sought to articulate the mysterious unity of the three divine Persons as revealed in Scripture. Both Eastern and Western Church Fathers affirmed that the three divine persons indwell one another completely without losing their distinct identities. Walter Kasper quotes St. Hilary of Poitiers as describing the Father and Son as "One in the Other… not One made up of Two, but One in the Other, because in the Both there is no otherness."[147] St. Augustine similarly taught that each person of the Trinity exists in each of the others: "Each of them is in the other two… and thus all are in all," yet "without confusion and without separation."[148] Such expressions point to a unity far deeper than mere cooperation or agreement; there is a mutual interiority of each Person in the others.

The Greek Fathers eventually coined the term *perichoresis* to denote this reality of internal mutuality. The word (from *peri*–around and *chorein*–to contain or make space) implies an interweaving or rotation, often likened to a dance.[149] The concept was first introduced by the fourth-century Cappadocian Father Gregory of Nazianzus in relation to the two natures of Christ, united (without confusion) in one person. By the 7th century, St. John of Damascus extended the term explicitly to the Trinity, teaching that the Father, Son, and Spirit "embrace one another" and "are permanently in one another"[150] in an unceasing

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[147] Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 283.
[148] Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 283-4.
[149] Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 72.
[150] Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 283.

movement of love. The Council of Florence (1439) taught that, due to the unity of nature in God, "the Father is wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Son is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son."[151] This conciliar statement beautifully captures perichoresis as the total co-inherence of the three Persons. The declaration safeguards both the oneness of God and the threeness of Persons, steering between the extremes of tritheism and modalism. The triune God is one, not as a monolithic individual, but as a unity of three who exist in and with and for each other.

While the term perichoresis became part of classical Trinitarian doctrine, its implications remained largely within academic theology for many centuries. In the West, the Trinity's relational ontology often remained abstract, and ordinary Christian piety tended to neglect the trinitarian mystery in favor of a generalized one-personal God. In the 20th century, however, a renaissance in Trinitarian theology occurred. Thinkers like Karl Barth re-centered the Trinity in Protestant thought, and Karl Rahner insisted that the Trinity is the very ground of all Christian life and experience, with his famous axiom: "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice versa." Building on this renewal, contemporary theologians have rediscovered the vivid communal vision of the early Church.

Jürgen Moltmann, John Zizioulas, Leonardo Boff, Catherine LaCugna, Paul Fiddes, and others, drawing variously from patristic, social, and liberation perspectives, have presented the Triune God as a "community of love"[152] in which relationality is

[151] Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 284.
[152] Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us: Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), *279*

central. As John Zizioulas emphasizes, "the being of God could be known only through personal relationships and personal love. Being means life, and life means communion."[153] In the works of these great theologians, perichoresis emerges not as a remote metaphysical puzzle but as a profound symbol of divine life that is consequential for the Church and for human society as a whole. Leonard Boff has said that "the Trinity understood in human terms as a communion of Persons lays the foundations for a society of brothers and sisters, of equals, in which dialogue and consensus are the basic constituents of living together in both the church and society."[154] LaCugna in particular was convinced that Trinitarian theology must move from speculation about God-in-Godself to the lived reality of "God for us." She and others began to speak of the Trinity's perichoretic unity in a more accessible, imaginative way: as an eternal dance of divine Persons.[155] This image, to which we now turn, has proven evocative in conveying that the Triune God's life is inherently dynamic, interpersonal, and open to creation. It portrays, in essence, a divine dance of constant invitation, the very heart of God reaching out to embrace the world.

4.2.2 *A Divine Dance of Constant Invitation to Communion*

To say that God is a "divine dance" is to affirm that the Trinity is an eternal movement of love, joy, and relational energy; never static, never self-enclosed. Perichoresis is "the circling movement that occurs through the three Persons' eternal acts of self-donation to one another."[156] Many theologians note the term's resonance with the Greek word *choreia* (dance). Though this is really a play on words, given the closeness

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[153] John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 16.
[154] Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 120.
[155] LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 272
[156] Joy Ann McDougall, *Journey of Love: Moltmann on the Trinity and Christian Life* (Oxford: University Press, 2005). 156.

between "*perichoresis*" (going around) and "*perichoreusis*" (dance), this happy coincidence has, however, given rise to rich imagery. The three divine Persons are like dancers in perfect sync, "weaving in and out" of each other in a rhythm of reciprocal love. There is "one fluid motion of encircling, encompassing, permeating, enveloping, outstretching,"[157] in which each divine Person expresses oneself toward the others and fulfills oneself in that very act of giving to the others.[158]

As one dancer moves, the others move in response, creating a single patterned movement of profound unity. "There are neither leaders nor followers in the divine dance, only an eternal movement of reciprocal giving and receiving, giving again and receiving again… The divine dance is fully personal and interpersonal, expressing the essence and unity of God."[159] In other words, the Trinity's unity is not that of a static substance or a solitary ruler but that of an active, living communion. The Father, Son, and Spirit exist in an eternal dance of love, belonging completely to one another in mutual devotion. This delightful image, as LaCugna says, "forbids us to think of God as solitary."[160] God is, by nature, an interpersonal event of love.

What is perhaps most remarkable about this divine dance is that it is not a closed circle. It is a dance of constant invitation. God's triune life is generously open and oriented toward creation to welcome others into its joyous fellowship. LaCugna emphasizes that perichoresis should not be understood as merely an inner-Trinitarian relationship with no bearing on us; rather, it signifies the communion between God and

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[157] LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 272.
[158] LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 272.
[159]LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 272.
[160] LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life,* 272.

creation. "'The divine dance' is indeed an apt image of persons in communion: not for an intra-divine communion but for divine life as all creatures partake and literally exist in it,"[161] writes LaCugna. We, in fact, *know* about the "dance" of perichoresis because of the "dance" of the Triune God in the history of salvation. Humanity and the world are created to join in the triune communion. By God's gracious design, "not through its own merit but through God's election from all eternity, humanity has been made a partner in the divine dance."[162] Everything that exists comes from the overflowing love of God, revealed in creation, in the incarnation of the Word and the bestowal of the Spirit, and everything is destined to return to God "through Christ in the Spirit."[163] This outgoing and homeward movement (what classical theology called *exitus* and *reditus*) is "the choreography of the divine dance" spanning all eternity and "manifest at every moment in creation."[164] In other words, creation itself is invited into the eternal circulation of love, the Trinity.

There are not "two separate communions," one within God and one among creatures, but one overarching mystery of communion uniting God and humanity as "beloved partners in the dance."[165] Such an understanding radically blurs any absolute wall between the "immanent Trinity" and the "economic Trinity." Indeed, LaCugna and others argue that God's very identity is intrinsically related to God's self-giving for the world. The Triune God is, by nature, hospitable: the Father, Son, and Spirit open their life

[161] LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 274.
[162] LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 274.
[163] LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 274.
[164] LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 274.
[165] LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 274.

to welcome creation into their midst, as depicted in Andrei Rublev's famous fifteenth-century icon of the Trinity.

Jürgen Moltmann similarly speaks of the Triune God as one who "creates and evolves a community of all His creatures with Himself and with one another, a community which corresponds to Him."[166] Out of the dynamic love shared by Father, Son, and Spirit, God freely made a world to draw creatures into the circle of triune fellowship. Rather than viewing creation as something external to God, perichoresis allows us to see creation as being embraced within the wide dance of God's life. Leonardo Boff expresses this in a vivid way: "Creation exists in order to welcome the Trinity into itself. The Trinity seeks to welcome creation within itself… It is the feast of the redeemed; it is the heavenly dance of those set free."[167] In other words, God's saving purpose is ultimately to bring us home into the heart of divine communion, a festive dance of liberated sons and daughters in the "home of the Trinity." Creation's destiny is communion.

The "divine dance" imagery also conveys God's joyful agency in reaching out to the world. The Triune God is not a static host, passively awaiting our arrival. He is, instead, an active dance who steps forth to invite. The incarnation is God in Christ stepping into the "public square" of the world and extending his hand of invitation to humanity. Theologian Paul Fiddes aptly remarks that in this metaphor, what ultimately matters is not focusing on the individual dancers but on "the patterns of the dance itself, an interweaving of ecstatic

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[166] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 224

[167] Leonard Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2000) 109–10.

movements."[168] The patterns of the dance are the patterns of God's love. They flow outward in creative and redemptive action, and all creation is invited to join the flow. Thus, perichoresis as a divine dance beautifully captures both God's inner life (perfect triune love) and God's relationship with creation (constant loving outreach). It tells us that God is love-in-relationship, and that we exist to be taken up into that relationship. The world's creation and salvation are essentially about being included in the Trinity's fellowship of unity in diversity. In this way, what might seem a lofty abstract concept becomes intensely personal and practical: the Triune God is inviting us, indeed, inviting all things into His life.

Perichoresis captures four essential dimensions of Trinitarian life, with profound implications for the human community. First, it emphasizes *relationality*: the divine Persons exist not in isolation but in constant, dynamic relationship with one another. The three divine Persons are known as persons precisely because they exist in relationship. The Father is Father in relation to the Son, the Son likewise is Son in relation to the Father, the Spirit is the boundless love of the Father and Son for each other that flows over in a relationship of love with the whole of humanity.[169] Second, perichoresis highlights *reciprocity*: each Person is given completely to the others and is received by the others completely into themselves. The Father gives everything to the Son, the Son gives everything to the Spirit, and so forth in an eternal movement of self-giving love.[170] Third, perichoresis maintains *distinctiveness within unity*: the three Persons remain distinct, the

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[168] Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 72.
[169] Robert Kisala, "Theological Foundations of Interculturality" *Verbum SVD* vol. 54, 2013, p. 27.
[170] McDougall, *Journey of Love: Moltmann on the Trinity and Christian Life,* 97.

Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, yet they are perfectly one in their mutual indwelling.[171] Neither unity nor diversity has precedence in the Trinity; both are in the nature of God.[172] And fourth, the divine dance is not closed in on Godself. Each person takes the initiative to step out of personal identity, goes beyond it to reach out, invite, and include humanity in the communion of joy.

This Trinitarian perichoresis reveals that unity and diversity are not opposed but mutually enriching. The Blessed Trinity is a community of inclusion, active participation, and mutual respect. John Zizioulas insists that God exists as "personal only in the community of three persons. Outside the Trinity, there is no God. In other words, God's being coincides with God's communal personhood."[173] The harmonious dance of the Trinity makes it difficult to understand any one divine Person without the others. Their differences are finely penetrated by the others through the dance, so much so that the Father must always be understood together with the Son and the Holy Spirit, and so also the Son and the Holy Spirit. The divine Persons maintain their unique identities precisely through their relationships with one another. Their distinctiveness does not create division; rather, it enriches their communion. This pattern of diversity in communion provides the theological foundation for multicultural parishes, where different cultural communities can maintain their distinct identities while living in genuine communion.

The perichoretic communion challenges three common distortions in understanding unity and diversity. First, it opposes *uniformity*, which eliminates diversity in favor of a single dominant culture. In the Trinity, the Persons do not merge into an undifferentiated

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[171] McDougall, *Journey of Love: Moltmann on the Trinity and Christian Life*, 98.
[172] Kisala, "Theological Foundations of Interculturality" *Verbum SVD* Vol. 54, 2013, p. 28.
[173] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and Communion,*16.

oneness; they remain distinct while being one. Second, it opposes *fragmentation*, which segregates diverse groups into parallel communities. The divine Persons do not exist in isolation; they dwell in one another in perfect communion. "Otherness is constitutive of unity, and not consequent upon it" because "God is not first one and then three, but simultaneously One and Three…Each Person in the Holy Trinity is different not by way of difference of qualities but by way of simple affirmations of being who He is."[174] True unity, therefore, requires both the preservation of distinct identities and the establishment of genuine relationships of mutual indwelling. Third, the perichoretic communion of the Trinity is against domination, the categorization of some as superior and others as subordinates. In the perichoretic unity, there is no subordination of persons, but constant communication and communion among them. The three Persons commune in perfect equality and mutual interdependence.

4.3 From Trinitarian Life to Ecclesial Praxis

The Second Vatican Council's *Lumen Gentium* articulates a communion ecclesiology that flows directly from Trinitarian theology. The document declares that "the Church in Christ is in the nature of sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men."[175] This understanding grounds the Church's identity and mission in the Trinitarian life of communion. Just as the three divine Persons exist in perichoretic communion, so the Church is called to manifest this communion in her life and governance.

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[174] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *The Trinity Global Perspective* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 94.
[175] Dogmatic Constitution on The Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November 1964, no. 1.

Communion ecclesiology emphasizes that the Church's unity is derived from her participation in the life of the Trinity. *Lumen Gentium* states, "The eternal Father, by a free and hidden plan of His own wisdom and goodness, created the whole world. His plan was to raise men to a participation in the divine life."[176] The Church exists as the community of those who participate in divine communion through baptism and share in the life of the Trinity. As John Paul II explains in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, "To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning."[177] The Trinity provides not only the source but also the pattern for ecclesial communion. The Father sends the Son and the Spirit to gather humanity into the divine life. *Lumen Gentium* describes this mission: "The Son, therefore, came, sent by the Father. It was in Him, before the foundation of the world, that the Father chose us and predestined us to become adopted sons."[178] Through Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection, humanity receives the gift of adoption as children of God. The Spirit continues this work, building up the Church as the Body of Christ and temple of the Spirit.

This Trinitarian foundation shapes the Church's understanding of herself as a communion of local churches. Each local church, including each parish, participates fully in the mystery of the Church and manifests the presence of the universal Church. Vatican II teaches that "this Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the New Testament."[179] The parish, therefore, is not merely an administrative subdivision but a

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[176] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 2.
[177] John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (January 6, 2001), no. 43.
[178] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 3.
[179] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 26.

genuine expression of the Church's communion, called to reflect the perichoretic life of the Trinity in its own community life. Communion ecclesiology has profound implications for multicultural parishes. If the Church's unity flows from Trinitarian communion rather than cultural uniformity, then cultural diversity does not threaten ecclesial unity but rather enriches it. Just as the Trinity unites distinct Persons in perfect communion, so the Church should unite distinct cultural communities in ecclesial communion. The challenge for multicultural parishes is to move beyond parallel coexistence toward genuine perichoretic communion, where different cultural groups dwell in one another while maintaining their distinct identities.

4.4 Interculturality as Participation in Trinitarian Life

We now turn to a central concept of this chapter: interculturality. We explore this concept to establish it as a theological concept rooted in the Trinity, and propose it as a new way of doing ministry in multicultural parishes that addresses the issues of domination and parallel ethnic coexistence.

4.4.1 *Interculturality*

The recent rapid migration has led to demographic change in almost every part of the world, creating what sociologists call multiculturalism. This refers to any social context in which people who differ in culture and language live in close proximity to one another, by chance rather than by choice,[180] and have no intention of engaging with one another culturally. Multiculturality, as Antonio Pernia puts it, has become a veritable "sign of the

[180] Lazar Satanislaus and Martin Ueffing, eds., *Intercultural Living,* Vol. 1 (New Delhi: Allianz Enterprises, 2015), xxvi.

times" and constitutes today a real missionary challenge.[181] This growing sociological phenomenon has led some sociologists and missiologists to propose interculturality as a response and an alternative way of living and doing ministry in a multicultural context that engages cultures to mutually enrich one another and reduce division and prejudices.

Interculturality has been described as a theological ideal: different cultures in society or a community interacting in mutual ways, so that, beyond mere coexistence, they enrich and transform one another through the process of giving and receiving,[182] and challenge one another to recognize and discern between the "seeds" and "weeds" in every culture.[183] It is defined by Lazar Stanislaus and Martin Ueffing as the "sustained interaction of people of different cultural backgrounds leading to the transformation and enrichment of each one and everyone."[184] Interculturality is also defined by Roger Schroeder as a "real in-depth mutual relationships and exchanges among cultures, on both the individual and communal levels."[185] It is "mutually enriching and challenging for all involved."[186] In intercultural living, cultures have reciprocal relationships, and people from different cultural groups interact, learn, and grow together. It is founded on relationship-building that transforms, shapes, and molds through encounters. It focuses on relationship-building, deep connections, interactions, mutual gifting, respect, and learning from one another.[187] Anthony Gittins proposes the following as important features of intercultural living: a) it

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[181] Pernia, "Interculturality: Mission in an Age of Multiculturality" in *Missio Dei in Today's World*, ed. Lazar Stanislaus and Christian Tauchner (Germany: Franz Schmitt Verlag, 2025), 276.
[182] Pernia, "Interculturality: Mission in an Age of Multiculturality," 281.
[183] Roger Schroeder, "Interculturality: Learnings and Challenges" in *Missio Dei in Today's Word* eds. Lazar Stanislaus and Christian Tauchner (Germany: Franz Schmitt Verlag, 2025), 233.
[184] Satanislaus and Ueffing, eds., *Intercultural Living,* (Noida: Saurabh Printer, 2015), xxiv.
[185] Roger Schroeder, "Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue," in *Verbum SVD,* 54, 2013, p. 12.
[186] Schroeder, "Interculturality: Learnings and Challenges," 231.
[187] Satanislaus and Ueffing, eds., *Intercultural Living,* xxvii.

is an intentional and faith-based undertaking, b) it challenges culturally polarized communities into communion c) it is not a mastery of new techniques alone, it is possible from a supernatural perspective, d) it requires commitment and sustained work, and e) it challenges everyone in ministry in relation to others whether by gender, age, ethnicity, religion or culture.[188]

Interculturality builds an interactive community that mutually enriches one another through their diversity, moving beyond coexistence and accommodation toward the appreciation and celebration of cultural difference. It "replaces attitudes and structures of superiority and paternalism with those of mutual interdependence and authentic relationships"[189] that respect difference. Antonio Pernia proposes this way of living as the Christian response to the demographic changes in our globalized world,[190] because it offers a balanced ground between monoculturalism and radical pluralism.[191]

4.4.2 *Interculturality as Perichoretic Communion*

The theological foundation for intercultural living is the Triune God as such, specifically in the concept of *perichoresis*, which concerns the mutual indwelling and interpenetration of the three divine Persons. According to this concept, the divine unity is the dynamic communion among the divine Persons through their mutual and permanent indwelling. Joy Ann McDougall describes perichoresis as signifying "a unity that is constantly created anew through the acts of self-giving and receiving among the three

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[188] Anthony Gittins, "The Challenge of Intercultural Living: Anthropological and Theological Implications" in *Intercultural Living* Vol. 1 Lazar Stanislaus and Marin Ueffing eds. (Noida: Saurabh Printer, 2015), 56.
[189] Schroeder, "Interculturality: Learnings and Challenges," 232.
[190] Pernia, "Interculturality: Mission in an Age of Multiculturality," 281.
[191] Schroeder, "Interculturality: Learnings and Challenges," 232.

persons."[192] In this eternal life process, "perichoresis is 'an ongoing dialectic of self-differentiation and self-giving that establishes both particularity or otherness in the Trinity and the unity of the three persons with one another.'"[193] The communal life of the Trinity is one of constant self-giving that does not eliminate the uniqueness of the Persons; they share all of themselves and yet maintain their identity because it is in relationship that their uniqueness emerges. Crucially, "in the perichoretic unity there is no subordination among the divine persons."[194] There is no top-down or center-periphery; none is subsumed by the other; they are in perfect equality, regardless of their particular roles in the economy of salvation.

Drawing on the immanent life of the Trinity, interculturality is grounded in the following divine principles to foster a community that reflects the Triune God and the Kingdom's diversity. The intercultural principles drawn from the perichoretic communion include mutuality, respect for difference, equality, unity in diversity, and interdependence and cooperation. We shall consider each one of them in what follows.

Mutual Enrichment Among Cultures: Mutuality is core to the concept of perichoresis. The divine Persons give themselves totally and receive unreservedly from the others. Each empties himself for the others, in order to accept the others; by so doing, each becomes who He truly is.[195] There is no one-way giving or receiving, but a perfect

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[192] Jürgen Moltmann, "Forward," in Joy Ann McDougall, *Journey of Love: Moltmann on the Trinity and Christian Life* (Oxford: University Press, 2005), xii, quoted in Budi Kleden, "Trinitarian Spirituality and Interculturality," 21.
[193] Joy Ann McDougall, *Journey of Love: Moltmann on the Trinity and Christian Life* (Oxford: University Press, 2005), 97-98.
[194] McDougall, *Journey of Love: Moltmann on the Trinity and Christian Life,* 98.
[195] Kleden, "Trinitarian Spirituality and Interculturality," in *Intercultural Living* Vol. 1 Lazar Stanislaus and Marin Ueffing eds. (Noida: Saurabh Printer, 2015), 36.

circulation of love that flows from the outpouring of themselves for the other. At the heart of interculturality is this very principle of mutuality found in the perichoretic communion of the Trinity. Through intentional interaction, cultures open themselves to be enriched and transformed by the values of others. The enrichment in intercultural living is constantly mutual; there is no "giver" and "receiver," all are both givers and receivers. The intentionality of reciprocity enables ethnic communities to enrich one another. Pope Francis urges that "we need to communicate with each other, to discover the gifts of each person, to promote that which unites us, and to regard our differences as an opportunity to grow in mutual respect."[196]

This mutuality directly addresses the issues of linguistic hegemony and power imbalances that sabotage the building of one family in Parishes A, B, and C. As we saw in the previous chapters, some ethnic groups, either by virtue of their numbers or of their historical affiliation to the parish, held privileges over others. There is a disproportionate representation of ethnic groups on the pastoral council and other important parish committees. In interculturality, however, each ethnic community becomes both a giver and a receiver, irrespective of its size and historical contributions to the parish. Interculturality harnesses all the goodness therein each ethnic community for the enrichment of the whole community.

Respect for Difference: Interculturality creates a safe space for difference. In intercultural living, difference is not a threat or danger but an opportunity to understand ourselves better and to widen our horizon about God. It promotes the virtues of humility

[196] Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), no. 134, quoted in Schroeder, "Interculturality: Learnings and Challenges," 234.

and openness to encountering difference and learning new ways of living. Interculturality's respect for differences encourages individuals and ethnic communities to feel comfortable with diversity[197] and to participate as insiders rather than spectators. Its respect for difference does not presuppose separation; instead, as in the Trinity, it enables quality communion, reciprocity, and mutual growth.[198] "Accepting differences is not easy [because] the otherness of the others seems to challenge [our] comfort."[199] Intercultural living calls on multicultural parishes to move a step beyond tolerance to active appreciation, recognizing that "the greatness of trinitarian communion… consists precisely in its being a communion of three different beings."[200] Interculturality's principle of respect for difference addresses the issues of ethnocentrism and boundary maintenance by affirming that each culture reflects something of God's goodness and offers unique gifts for the growth of the whole. Each culture is welcomed and accepted, and there is mutual respect for their unique gifts, history, and identity. Mutual respect and honoring cultural differences in intercultural living build a multicultural parish into a family of respected equals.

Equality: Another significant principle we find in the Perichoretic communion of the Trinity is equality of the divine Persons. Their unique roles do not privilege one over the other nor subordinate one to the other, because in their seemingly unique roles, each mission is accomplished as one community. The life of the Trinity rests entirely on perfect reciprocity and equality; there is no room for hierarchy nor patterns of domination and

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[197] Pernia, "Interculturality: Mission in an Age of Multiculturality," 282.
[198] Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 140.
[199] Kleden, "Trinitarian Spirituality and Interculturality," 28.
[200] Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 150.

subjugation in the eternal giving and receiving of Trinitarian fellowship.[201] There is no hierarchy of being, no greater or lesser Person; the three are perfectly equal in dignity, power, and glory, as the doxology emphasizes.

In contrast to the power dynamics and structural segregation found in Parishes A, B, and C, interculturality promotes equal voice in decision-making, equal access to resources, equal representation in leadership, and equal participation in the parish's sacramental and ministerial life. Equality is an important element in building a true community, because, as Budi Kleden rightly writes, "People can only feel at home in a community and work together, if there is a basic acknowledgement that each one with his/her cultural background is an individual with the same rights and responsibilities as others."[202] Equality takes precedence over domination and marginalization in intercultural living, enabling individuals and cultural groups to know they are heard and treated as equals, and so participate not as guests but as integral members of the parish.

Unity in Diversity: In the Trinity, the Persons remain distinct while fully indwelling one another. The Father does not become the Son, nor the Son the Spirit. Perichoresis is not fusion but mutual interpenetration that honors difference and uniqueness. In intercultural communities, unity is not uniformity, but unity is 'unity in diversity.' This principle is beautifully articulated by Pope Francis, who writes that, "We are not all the same, and we should not all be the same. We are all diverse, different. Each has its qualities, and this is the beautiful thing about the Church. Each one contributes what God gave them

[201] McDougall, *Journey of Love: Moltmann on the Trinity and Christian Life,* 97-98.
[202] Kleden, "Trinitarian Spirituality and Interculturality" 30.

to enrich all others."[203] He further emphasized that "uniformity kills life. And when we try to force this uniformity on everyone, we kill the gifts of the Holy Spirit."[204] Diversity is not opposed to unity; it is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and God is in Himself a unity in diversity. God wills diversity because it is his nature. This diversity, however, is not meant to divide, but rather to attract the goodness in the other. The Final Document of the Synod on Synodality acknowledges and emphasizes unity in diversity as the essence of the Church's Catholicity.[205] An intercultural church, therefore, is "premised on the understanding of unity as 'unity in diversity,' allowing the variety of cultures of the world to have a place in the church as they are."[206]

Interculturality's promotion of unity in diversity addresses both the problem of domination, which erases difference in the name of unity, and the problem of coexistence, which maintains difference at the expense of unity. Living interculturally, the ethnic communities preserve their distinct identities while entering into deep communion with one another. Difference does not hinder unity when love is the guiding principle for pursuing unity; in love, we will the good of the beloved; we go beyond the self.

Interdependence and Cooperation: The divine Persons work together in perfect harmony to accomplish the work of creation, redemption, and sanctification. None carries alone the burden of their mission because wherever the Son is, there also the Father and the Holy Spirit, and so also are the other two. Thus, the suffering of the Son on the cross

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[203] Pope Francis, General Audience, October 9, 2013, quoted in Pernia, "Interculturality: Mission in an Age of Multiculturality," 283.
[204] Pernia, "Interculturality: Mission in an Age of Multiculturality,"
[205] XVI Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, "For a Synodal Church," par. 38, quoted in Pernia, "Interculturality: Mission in an Age of Multiculturality," 283.
[206] Pernia, "Interculturality: Mission in an Age of Multiculturality," 282-83.

was the suffering of the Father and the Holy Spirit. They live and accomplish their mission in an eternal communion of cooperation. Interculturality recognizes the fundamental interdependence of cultures and persons. As Budi Kleden profoundly articulates, "We are who we are because they are who they are. Our existence is not to be separated from theirs. We would not be getting stronger and more perfect if there would be no differences, and if all would think and feel in the same way."[207] This interdependence is developed through "healthy interaction among the cultures,"[208] where each culture is valued for what it is, and what it is able to contribute to the bigger community. There is no room for comparison; instead, there is an eagerness to share and participate in parish activities in their own unique ways. The cooperation and interdependence in intercultural living call for "graciousness, diplomacy, compromise, mutual respect, serious dialogue, and the development of a sustained common vision."[209]

The Trinitarian character of cooperation challenges the uncoordinated, separate ministries and parallel structures we find in Parishes A, B, and C. It initiates shared ministries, collaborative leadership, and common projects to ensure full participation by ethnic communities. Through interculturality, ethnic communities in multicultural parishes become a "sign of the Kingdom," working together toward the common *Missio Dei*: to proclaim the good news and gather all nations into the Kingdom of God.

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[207] Kleden, "Trinitarian Spirituality and Interculturality," 27.
[208] Pernia, "Interculturality: Mission in an Age of Multiculturality," 282.
[209] Schroeder, "Interculturality: Learnings and Challenges," 237, citing Anthony Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally*, 4-5.

4.5 Interculturality and the Kingdom of God

The practice of intercultural living in culturally diverse parishes is not merely a pragmatic response to demographic changes but a participation in God's eschatological vision for humanity. The Kingdom of God, which Jesus proclaimed and inaugurated, envisions the gathering of all peoples into a communion of love and justice. Intercultural living in parishes represents a prophetic realization of this Kingdom vision, making present now what will be fully realized in the eschaton. The biblical vision of the Kingdom consistently emphasizes the inclusion of all peoples. God's covenant with Abraham promises that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:3). The prophets envision a time when "many nations will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD…He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths'" (Mic 4:2). Isaiah prophesies that God's house "will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isa 56:7). These texts reveal that God's salvific plan encompasses all peoples, not just a single nation or culture.

Jesus' ministry embodied this inclusive vision. He crossed cultural boundaries to engage Samaritans, Gentiles, and other outsiders. His encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4) and his healing of the Syrophoenician woman's daughter (Mark 7:24-30) demonstrate his openness to those beyond the boundaries of Jewish culture. After his resurrection, Jesus commissioned his disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). This Great Commission mandates the Church to cross cultural boundaries and gather all peoples into the Body of Christ. The Book of Revelation provides a powerful eschatological vision of the Kingdom: "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing

before the throne and before the Lamb" (Rev 7:9). This vision reveals several crucial aspects of the Kingdom. First, it includes people from *all* nations and cultures; none are excluded. Second, the multitude is *diverse*, maintaining their distinct identities even in the eschaton. The text does not describe a homogeneous mass but a diverse multitude from different nations, tribes, peoples, and languages. Third, this diverse multitude is *united* in worship of the Lamb. Their unity comes not from cultural uniformity but from their common relationship with Christ.

The Church, as "the seed and the beginning of the Kingdom,"[210] is called to anticipate in her own life the unity and diversity of the Kingdom of God. The parish, as a concrete manifestation of the Church, has a particular responsibility to embody this Kingdom vision. When multicultural parishes practice genuine intercultural communion, they become signs pointing toward the eschatological gathering of all peoples. They make visible in the present what God promises for the future. Antonio Pernia explains that "an 'intercultural church' is premised on the understanding of unity as 'unity in diversity,' allowing the variety of cultures of the world to have a home in the church."[211] Thus, intercultural living in the church is not merely a response to sociological realities but a participation in God's eschatological mission to unite all peoples. This theological understanding elevates intercultural living from a pragmatic strategy to a fundamental dimension of the Church's identity and mission. Parishes that embrace interculturality participate in God's work of gathering all peoples into the Kingdom. Conversely, parishes

[210] Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 5.
[211] Pernia, "Interculturality: Mission in an Age of Multiculturality" 282-83.

that maintain cultural separation and domination contradict the Kingdom vision and fail to fulfill their eschatological calling.

The Kingdom vision challenges both cultural domination and cultural separation. Against domination, it affirms that all cultures and peoples have equal dignity before God. No single culture can claim superiority or the right to dominate others. The Kingdom includes people from *all* nations, not just those who conform to a particular cultural pattern. The eschatological vision of Revelation 7:9 delegitimizes all forms of cultural imperialism and establishes the equal dignity of all peoples and cultures.

Against separation, the Kingdom vision insists on genuine unity among diverse peoples. The multitude in Revelation 7:9 is not segregated by culture but stands together before the throne. They worship in harmony, united in their praise of the Lamb. This unity does not eliminate diversity but encompasses it. As Kleden explains, "The Kingdom vision reveals that God's intention is not cultural uniformity but communion in diversity."[212] Pope Francis has emphasized the church as a place of intercultural living, referring to it as a home for all. In *Fratelli Tutti*, he writes, "The Church offers herself as a family among families… open to being witness in today's world, open to faith, hope and love. The Church is a home with open doors, because she is a mother."[213] This vision of the Church as a welcoming home for all peoples reflects the Kingdom's inclusive character. Francis challenges the Church to move beyond being a sphere to a polyhedron, a genuine communion across differences.

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[212] Kleden, "Trinitarian Spirituality and Interculturality," 36.
[213] Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (October 3, 2020), no. 276.

Pernia argues that "a church that fosters genuine interculturality within itself and promotes intercultural dialogue outside itself will be a truly credible sign of the all-inclusiveness of the kingdom of God."[214] When parishes practice genuine interculturality, they participate in God's eschatological work of gathering all peoples. They become signs of the Kingdom, demonstrating that communion across cultural differences is possible through the power of the Spirit. This eschatological dimension gives urgency and importance to the work of building intercultural parishes. The eschatological vision also provides hope and motivation for the difficult work of intercultural living. Building genuine communion across cultural differences is challenging and often painful. It requires overcoming deep-seated prejudices, relinquishing power and privilege, and learning new ways of relating. The eschatological vision reminds us that this work is not futile but participates in God's ultimate purposes for humanity. As Boff emphasizes, the Trinity is our social program.[215] The perichoretic communion of the Trinity provides both the model and the goal for intercultural living.

Roger Schroeder writes that the eschatological vision should inspire multicultural communities to persevere in building intercultural communion despite obstacles and setbacks, "because the church needs it and the world needs it."[216] The Kingdom of God has already been inaugurated in Christ but awaits its full realization. The Church lives in this "already but not yet" tension, experiencing both the presence of the Kingdom and its incompleteness. The Church understands herself as the seed and beginning of that

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[214] Pernia, "Interculturality: Mission in an Age of Multiculturality," 284.
[215] Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 134.
[216] Roger Schroeder, "Interculturality as a Paradigm of Mission," in Stanislaus and Ueffing, eds., *Intercultural Mission,* (Delhi: Allianz Enterprises, 2015), 170.

Kingdom in history, but not its final realization. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, "The Church… receives the mission to proclaim and to establish among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is on earth the seed and the beginning of that kingdom."[217] The Church therefore lives within a tension: she already participates in the life of the Kingdom through word, sacrament, and communion, yet she remains marked by human limitations, cultural divisions, and unfinished conversion.

For this reason, the Church understands herself as a pilgrim people journeying toward the fullness of God's reign. *Lumen Gentium* teaches that while the Church is endowed with divine gifts, she still "presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God," continually seeking deeper fidelity to the Gospel.[218] This pilgrim condition means that the visible life of the Church never perfectly embodies the Kingdom she proclaims. The effort to build intercultural parishes that genuinely reflect the communion of God's Kingdom, therefore, unfolds gradually and often through tension, misunderstanding, and even conflict. Such struggles do not signal failure; rather, they reveal the unfinished character of the Church's historical journey. Guided by the Spirit, the Church strains toward the fullness of the Kingdom, patiently transforming relationships, structures, and cultures so that the diverse people of God may more clearly manifest the reconciled communion that will reach perfection only in God's final reign.

The Eucharist plays a crucial role in connecting intercultural living to the Kingdom vision. The Eucharist is both a foretaste of the Kingdom banquet and a source of unity for the Church. When diverse cultural communities gather around one table to share one bread

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[217] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), no. 763.
[218] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8.

and one cup, they enact the Kingdom vision of all peoples united in worship of the Lamb. The Eucharist challenges any form of division, superiority, and exclusion, calling the Church to manifest the communion she celebrates. The practice of intercultural living in parishes, therefore, has profound eschatological significance. It is not merely about managing diversity or responding to demographic changes but about participating in God's mission to unite all peoples in the Kingdom. When parishes embrace genuine interculturality, they become signs of the Kingdom, anticipating in the present what God promises for the future. They witness to our culturally and racially fragmented world that communion across differences is possible through love and the power of the Spirit. And they fulfill their calling to be "a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race."

4.6 Vision for Multicultural Parishes

The intercultural parish, grounded in perichoretic principles, envisions itself as a living icon of the Kingdom of God - a communion of culturally diverse people dwelling in unity through relationships of mutual love, respect, and appreciation of the differences as gifts. The intercultural parish transcends the "shared parish" model of parallel communities, becoming a genuine *familia Dei*, where members from every culture and language recognize one another as brothers and sisters united by their common baptism into the mystery of the Trinity. The intercultural parish embraces its identity as a sacrament and sign of the Kingdom of God, where people "from every nation, tribe, people and language" stand together in worship of the Lamb, not yet perfect, but journeying on as God's pilgrim people. This vision calls the parish to intentionally work to embody in its

structures, worship, and mission the perichoretic communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as an effort to make present the invisible reality of God's triune life.

This ideal parish structures its governing systems to reflect the Trinitarian principles of equality, mutual respect, and shared participation. It actively works to eliminate domination and control over decision-making by any single ethnic group, ensuring equal participation in pastoral councils, finance committees, and leadership positions. Intercultural leadership teams are established to bring diverse cultural perspectives to parish life, from liturgy planning to social outreach. It ensures that decision-making processes emphasize dialogue, consensus, and mutual accountability, rather than majority rule or hierarchical imposition. The pastor acts as a facilitator of communion, helping diverse ethnic communities listen and shape one another through prophetic dialogue and jointly discern the Spirit's direction. Governing the parish with these principles fosters a perichoretic communion, enabling authentic participation of all ethnic communities in parish life.

The parish works to approach mission through an intercultural lens, recognizing that evangelization flows from and leads to communion. Rather than operating separate cultural ministries, the parish makes efforts to create opportunities for intercultural collaboration in service, outreach, and witness. The parish commits itself to engage in prophetic witness against racism, xenophobia, and cultural superiority and domination through its radical intercultural fellowship, both within its own walls and in the larger society. It is guided by a kenotic missiology in which each ethnic community empties itself of ethnocentric attitudes by transcending itself and embracing the other in radical hospitality. This intercultural mission makes the parish a sign of the Kingdom, showing a

divided world that genuine communion across differences is possible through participation in Trinitarian life. Even in its imperfection, the vision of the kingdom shines through.

The parish cultivates this vision through intentional practices of relationship-building, mutual learning, and ongoing conversion. It creates regular opportunities for genuine encounters across cultural boundaries, shared activities, intercultural prayer groups, joint service projects, and the celebration of cultures. The parish invests in language learning, cultural education, and intercultural competency training for all members, recognizing that building communion requires knowledge, skills, and transformed attitudes. Most fundamentally, the parish grounds its intercultural living in the love poured into hearts by the Holy Spirit, the same love that unites Father, Son, and Spirit in eternal communion. This love enables members to transcend ethnocentric attitudes, embrace sacrificial service, and persist in the difficult work of building communion. The parish remains constantly open to change, recognizing that demographic shifts require ongoing adaptation and that the Spirit continually calls the community beyond its comfort zones into deeper communion. Through these practices, rooted in baptismal identity and sustained by Eucharistic communion, the multicultural parish, though imperfect, becomes a manifestation of true communion, a witness to the possibility of unity in diversity and a prophetic sign of God's Kingdom breaking into the present age.

4.7 Conclusion

We have addressed Richard Osmer's third task of practical theology: the normative task, which asks, "What ought to be going on?" In response to the problems of domination and coexistence identified in Chapters One and Two. This chapter has developed a Trinitarian theological foundation for intercultural praxis in multicultural parishes. The

central argument has been that the relational life of the Holy Trinity, understood through the concept of perichoresis, provides both a critique of current patterns and a positive vision for intercultural communion. The Trinity reveals God as a communion of three distinct divine Persons who fully indwell one another in relationships characterized by mutuality, equality, interdependence, and particularity. This Trinitarian pattern provides the normative model for multicultural parishes.

We have shown in this chapter that perichoresis is not merely a description of God's inner life but has profound practical implications for ecclesial and social life. The Church, as the Body of Christ and a sacrament of the Kingdom, is called to reflect the perichoretic communion of God. Each parish, as a local expression of the Church, shares in this calling. The chapter has argued that interculturality, the process by which persons and communities enter into mutually enriching relationships across cultural boundaries, leading to the transformation of the parties involved, is challenging but an ecclesial imperative rooted in the very nature of God and the Church. Multicultural parishes are called to work with commitment to transcend the existing cultural domination and coexistence and to desire authentic intercultural communion where the ethnic communities mutually challenge and enrich one another, without ignoring their cultural uniqueness. The normative vision established in this chapter is challenging; it requires hard work, dedication, love, and above all, grace. It calls for conversion—conversion of heart, conversion of structures, conversion of ethnocentric practices. It calls on all ethnic communities to accept the discomfort of crossing cultural boundaries and to risk genuine encounter with others who are culturally different, though the same in Christ. It calls for patience, humility, and trust in the Holy Spirit's lead.

As we move to Chapter Four, we carry this Trinitarian vision with us as both a critique and a hope. The question before us now is: How might we respond? How can multicultural parishes move from the current reality (described in Chapter One and interpreted in Chapter Two) toward the normative vision (established in this chapter)? This is the pragmatic-strategic task to which we now turn.

Chapter Four: How Might We Respond?

5.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters, we have journeyed through Richard Osmer's first three tasks of practical theology. In those chapters, we have presented the situations of the parishes, interpreted the dominant themes with the help of social-scientific theories, and established a normative theological vision for multicultural parishes to become intercultural, reflecting the already-but-not-yet of the kingdom of God.

We now address Osmer's fourth and final task: the pragmatic stage, which asks, "How might we respond?"[219] This question requires us to make the normative theoretical propositions from the previous chapter concrete so that they can work towards transforming the current situations at Parishes A, B, and C into an intercultural parish. The question calls for concrete, actionable, radical, but realistic and achievable strategies to transform the lived reality of these multicultural parishes. Osmer emphasizes that practical theology must culminate in praxis, embodied action informed by theological reflection and responsive to the particular context.[220] The pragmatic task involves developing action strategies that address the challenges we identified in the descriptive and interpretive stages as we move toward the normative vision that we established in the theological stage.

This chapter proposes practical, reasonable, and somewhat radical steps for cultivating intercultural living in multicultural parishes. They are "practical" because they can be implemented within the existing parish structures and resources. They build on the existing best practices in the studied parishes, making them "reasonable." Yet they remain

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[219] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 4.
[220] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 175-176.

"radical" in that they go to the roots of the parish's life, to address, heal, and transform fundamental patterns of relationship, power, and belonging.

The chapter unfolds in six major sections. First, I establish the theological and practical foundations for intercultural praxis, connecting the pragmatic task to the Trinitarian and Kingdom vision of the third chapter. Second, I propose concrete strategies that start with redefining the parish identity, then cultivating intercultural leadership, recognizing that transformation begins with those who guide and shape parish life. Third, I outline structural changes necessary to create spaces of authentic encounter and shared ministry. Fourth, I present formational pathways for developing intercultural competence among all parishioners. Fifth, I address the crucial role of liturgy and worship in embodying intercultural communion. Finally, I conclude by acknowledging that the shift from "shared parish" to "intercultural community" is a long-term process that demands patience, courage, and sustained commitment.

5.2 Theological Practical Foundations for Intercultural Praxis

Before we outline specific strategies, let us first establish the theological and practical foundations for intercultural praxis in multicultural parishes. These foundations link the practical task to the normative vision we developed in our previous chapter and provide a basis for our action strategies, grounded in both theological principles and pastoral wisdom.

5.2.1 The Trinitarian Foundation: From Vision to Action

Chapter Three proposed Trinitarian perichoresis—the mutual indwelling and interpenetration of the three divine Persons—as the theological foundation for intercultural living that mirrors the Kingdom of God. The Trinity models a community characterized by

radical equality, mutual giving and receiving, and unity in diversity. This theological vision now shapes our pragmatic response. We do not pursue interculturality merely as a sociological strategy or as a pragmatic response to demographic change; rather, we pursue it as participation in the very life of God.

Leonardo Boff has argued that the perichoretic communion of the Trinity offers a prototype for a human community that respects differences, promotes equality, and builds unity through mutual love.[221] This Trinitarian foundation directly informs our pragmatic strategies. Just as the Father, Son, and Spirit remain distinct yet mutually indwell one another, intercultural parishes must honor cultural distinctiveness while creating spaces of genuine encounter and mutual transformation. Just as no divine Person dominates the others, intercultural parishes must eliminate power imbalances and establish structures of shared authority and equality. And just as the Trinity's unity flows from love rather than uniformity, intercultural parishes must build communion through relationships grounded in love that resist assimilation or a melting-pot mentality.

The pragmatic implications to be emphasized are that these parishes cannot achieve authentic intercultural living through structural changes alone. Transformation requires a profound spiritual conversion—a shift from self-centered or ethnocentric modes of being to a perichoretic way of life marked by openness, reciprocity, and mutual gifting. As Pope Benedict XVI writes, "God's being as love is also a call to us to live in love, to 'abide' in love (cf. 1 Jn 4:16)."[222] Intercultural praxis thus becomes a spiritual discipline, a way of

[221] Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 237.
[222] Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* (2005), no. 1.

participating in divine love by crossing boundaries, embracing difference, and building communion.

5.2.2 Interculturality as Transformative Praxis

In our previous chapter, we distinguished interculturality from multiculturalism. Whereas multiculturalism often settles for coexistence, interculturality pursues mutual transformation. As Anthony Gittins writes, interculturality involves "a process of intentional engagement that gradually transforms and converts to a way of living that is somewhat new and somewhat familiar to each community member."[223] His idea highlights several key elements that shape our pragmatic strategies. First, interculturality demands intentional engagement. Since ethnocentrism is a reality, individuals and cultural groups tend to retreat into their cultural comfort zones as a first reaction. Consequently, mere proximity doesn't automatically lead to integration. Parishes must consciously establish structures, programs, and opportunities that facilitate interactions between parishioners from diverse cultural backgrounds. Second, interculturality focuses on *cultural difference itself* as a site of encounter and learning. Rather than minimizing or ignoring differences, intercultural praxis promotes diversity and invites parishioners to engage their differences as gifts and opportunities to learn. Third, interculturality aims for *mutual transformation*. The goal of intercultural living extends beyond one group learning about another. It is a two-way street. Ethnic communities and individuals must change through the encounters. Finally, interculturality seeks *emergence*—the creation of something genuinely new that transcends the original cultures yet is not totally strange to them. Intercultural living is not

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[223] Anthony Gittins, *Limiving Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2015), 23.

an abstract idea; it builds on our daily living experiences and challenges the conventional status quo.

Roger Schroeder writes about interculturality as "real in-depth mutual relationships and exchanges among cultures, on both the individual and communal levels."[224] Interculturality, therefore, requires the development of intergroup and intercultural relationships that foster mutual enrichment and transformation of the individual as well as the whole community. It involves building relationships across ethnic lines and facilitating mutual critique and evangelization through the richness of diversity, ultimately creating communities that bear witness to the Kingdom of God. This challenges parishes to move beyond superficial gestures of inclusion, such as sharing food and annual multicultural Masses, to intentional cross-cultural friendships and deep structural activities, such as dialogue of difference, reconciliation, and the healing of past wounds. These activities address the fundamental issues perpetuating ethnic separation. Intercultural parishes not only introduce new cultural elements into existing activities but also modify and reshape structures as necessary to facilitate encounters and friendships that transform individuals and communities.

5.2.3 Leadership and Intercultural Transformation

Leadership is pivotal in any organizational change process, and intercultural transformation is no exception. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' document, *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers*, specifically addresses pastors and leaders working in multicultural parishes and engaging in multicultural ministries.[225]

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[224] Roger Schroeder, "Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue," in *Verbum SVD,* 54, (2013): 12.
[225] Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church, *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers* (Washington, DC: USCCB Communications, 2017), 11-15.

It emphasizes the importance of developing leadership competence in attitude and intercultural engagement. This call of the Bishops' Conference is crucial because attitudes, behaviors, and priorities of leaders in multicultural parishes significantly influence whether the parish remains multicultural, with segregated groups coexisting, or transitions to an intercultural community in which groups actively engage in mutual transformation.

Intercultural leadership diverges significantly from traditional leadership models, which often concentrate power in the hands of a select few. In contrast, intercultural leadership embodies boundary-crossing and shared authority. Diverse perspectives are integrated into governance, fostering creativity and recognizing that there's no one-size-fits-all solution, and encouraging the attitude of "everyone leads."[226] Moreover, intercultural leadership enhances communication and cooperation among ethnic groups. Intercultural team leadership cultivates mutual understanding and reduces cross-cultural misunderstandings. It encourages building trust and a network that promotes collaboration, bridging ties across ethnic groups, and creating multicultural directional plans and policies that respect multiple cultural logics. This is crucial for collaborative commitment. Lastly, intercultural leadership fosters flexibility and creative problem-solving. Its broad spectrum brings together diverse cultural ideas and emotions, enhancing charity and compassion in addressing conflicts and misunderstandings.

The USCCB's document mentioned above outlines several crucial competencies for intercultural leadership. These include cultural self-awareness, which involves understanding one's own cultural assumptions and biases; cultural knowledge, which

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[226] Chris Lowney, *Everyone Leads: How to Revitalize the Catholic Church* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

entails learning about other cultures; cultural sensitivity, which requires respecting and valuing cultural differences; and cultural skills, which encompass the practical ability to communicate and collaborate across cultural boundaries.[227] Leaders must develop, in addition to these competencies, Stephen Bevan's key attitudes of missionary leadership: "availability, approachability, presence, and vulnerability."[228] These competencies and attitudes are fundamental to intercultural transformation.

5.2.4 Contact Theory and Structural Change

Social psychology offers valuable insights for intercultural praxis, as illustrated in the second chapter. One prominent theory is Gordon Allport's "contact theory," which consistently demonstrates that intergroup contact reduces prejudice and fosters relationships under four essential conditions: equal status, shared goals, intergroup cooperation, and institutional support.[229] These crucial conditions directly inform the pragmatic strategies we develop in this chapter for multicultural parishes. Jared Kenworthy and his colleagues in intergroup research emphasize that "contact is most effective when it involves sustained interaction, personal relationships, and collaborative work toward shared objectives."[230] Taking their findings seriously, strategies for intercultural living should prioritize sustained constancy rather than sporadic multicultural celebrations. While organizing ministries, leadership, and scheduling Masses along ethnic lines can create some opportunities for intercultural encounters and relationships, it is more effective to

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[227] Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church, *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers* (Washington, DC: USCCB Communications, 2017),
[228] Stephen B. Bevans, *Community of Missionary Disciples: The Continuing Creation of the Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 2024), 347.
[229] Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954), 194.
[230] Jared B. Kenworthy et al., "Intergroup Contact: When Does it Work, and Why?" in *On the Nature of Prejudice: Fifty Years after Allport*, eds. John F. Dovidio, Peter Glick, and Laurie A. Rudman (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 282.

establish shared leadership teams, that is, organize cross-cultural ministry groups, and develop bilingual or multilingual liturgies that seek to bring people and cultures together. These structural approaches facilitate meaningful intercultural encounters that have a lasting impact on parishioners.

Gittins stresses that "goodwill alone is insufficient to facilitate intercultural living."[231] Indeed, communities are held together by systems, not just sentiments. Goodwill is often emotional and can fluctuate based on a person's energy or mood. It is therefore important that concrete structures be established to bring people together, foster relationship-building, and support ongoing intercultural dialogue within the parish community. This necessitates both a shift in attitudes (a change of heart) and structural changes (alterations and, if necessary, reorganization of parish life). The practical strategies we propose in this chapter address both dimensions, acknowledging that genuine intercultural transformation demands changes in both structures and hearts.

5.2.5 From Ethnocentrism to Ethnorelativism

We identified and discussed in our earlier chapters ethnocentrism—the tendency to perceive one's own culture as normative and superior—as a significant obstacle to building an intercultural community. Consequently, the practical task demands strategies that guide individuals and ethnic communities from an ethnocentric mindset to an ethnorelative perspective.[232] With the ethnorelative attitude, individuals and ethnic communities perceive their cultural beliefs and behaviors as just one of many viable realities. Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity offers a valuable framework

[231] Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis*, 5.
[232] Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis,* 101.

for comprehending this transformative journey. Bennett outlines six stages along a continuum, ranging from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. The ethnocentric stages encompass denial (refusing to acknowledge cultural differences), defense (recognizing differences but perceiving them as threatening), and minimization (acknowledging differences while emphasizing universal similarities). On the other hand, the ethnorelative stages involve acceptance (acknowledging and respecting cultural differences), adaptation (developing the capacity to shift perspectives and behaviors across cultures), and integration (incorporating multiple cultural frames of reference into one's identity).[233]

If the data presented in this work were to be placed on Bennett's developmental continuum, what becomes obvious is the fact that these parishes predominantly operate or are stagnated at the final stage of ethnocentrism, that is, minimization. Parish leaders and parishioners acknowledge cultural differences but tend to see them as minor, focusing more on similarities and emphasizing universal Catholic identity to avoid the challenges of intercultural engagement. But while appealing to a universal Catholic identity has theological merit, it can also serve as a defense mechanism, enabling dominant groups to avoid confronting power imbalances and cultural hegemony. Yet, the true essence of Catholicity lies in recognizing the particular and local within the context of universal communion, so claiming Catholicity in this context is at best naive—it doesn't equate to universality. Antonio Pernia ingeniously employs Jesus' image of a new wineskin for new wine[234] to underscore the intentional structural changes and the dialogue necessary for transitioning from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. A new way of living requires new

[233] Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis,* 102-112.
[234] Pernia, "Ensuring New Wineskins for New Wine. 189.

structures that support and facilitate the new vision. A structured formative pathway is essential to guide leaders and parishioners toward progressively adopting an ethnorelative mindset, which ultimately leads to an appreciation of differences.

5.2.6 From Linguistic and Cultural Hegemony to Prophetic Dialogue

We have seen in the first two chapters how language and culture can serve as capital, privileging some, marginalizing others, and perpetuating segregation. Prophetic dialogue offers a candid opportunity for addressing this difference. Prophetic dialogue involves engaging in mission or ministry in the spirit of dialogue and prophecy. Dialogue is crucial, as cross-cultural or intercultural ministry demands a mutual attitude of respect, openness, a willingness to learn, and attentiveness to the cultural context.[235] This mutual openness becomes prophetic when, through compassion, the message of the Kingdom is allowed to challenge injustices and transform ways of life that contradict the love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ for humanity.[236]

Prophetic dialogue intertwines an attitude that preserves the authenticity of the message of salvation, respects the good news' inherent power to transform individuals and cultures, and honors the dignity of every culture. Schroeder emphasizes that prophetic dialogue is a "dialogical acknowledgment of the presence of the seeds of God's movement in all cultures and prophetic acknowledgment of those elements contrary to God's Reign."[237] Therefore, prophetic dialogue does not entail a "wholesale" acceptance of every cultural element that compromises the Good News. Instead, it involves welcoming and

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[235] Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 29.
[236] Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today,* 29
[237] Roger Schroeder, "Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue," 17.

appreciating those elements that nourish our faith and the Christian community, while maintaining the "bold humility"[238] to critique the "weeds" in each culture. The inherent dialogical and communal nature of prophetic dialogue creates opportunities to build relationships and to bind people together with respect for difference. It further promotes a communal and collective approach, ensuring synodality, journeying together as one body of Christ.

God, in Godself, engages in a dialogue with the divine Persons, and dialogue has always been God's way of dealing with humanity—no coercion or imposition, because grace respects human freedom. This same principle must guide our interactions with cultural differences within a multicultural parish. Schroeder's thought-provoking image of "entering someone else's garden"[239] is crucial in building an intercultural community that values, appreciates, and dialogues with its diversity, because each time we engage another culture, we become outsiders. When entering another person's garden—in this case, a new cultural environment or encountering the "culturally other"—Schroeder emphasizes the importance of refraining from comparison or judgment. The reason is that farming methods vary by individual and place, and farmers cultivate what is significant and nutritious to them. What may seem like weeds to an outsider might actually be the most nutritious to the farmer. Therefore, attentiveness, openness, and constructive questions for understanding ought to precede judgment when we encounter or engage other cultures.

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[238] A word used by David Bosch and quoted by Roger Schroeder in his article, "Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue," 17.
[239] Roger Schroeder, "Entering Someone Else's Garden: Cross-Cultural Mission/Ministry," in *The Healing Circle: Essays in Cross-Cultural Mission*, eds. Stephen Bevans, Eleanor Doidge, and Robert Schreiter (Chicago: CCGM Publications), 147-161.

Furthermore, Schroeder and Bevans emphasize that language is inherently contextual; consequently, no single language or doctrinal expression can fully encapsulate the human experience of transcendence.[240] It goes without saying that no single culture or language possesses a monopoly on truth or on the expression of divine revelation. Therefore, the intercultural parish should strive to "foster mutual enrichment among cultures and peoples, refraining from making claims of cultural superiority or dominance by any particular group or individual."[241] The parish must commit itself to embracing a posture of continuous learning and mutual transformation, where each ethnic community actively contributes and receives, teaches and learns, speaks and listens.

With these theological and practical foundations in place, we now develop specific strategies that support the process of building intercultural living within multicultural parishes. These strategies are organized into five key areas: redefining parish identity, leadership development, structural transformation, intercultural formation, liturgical renewal, and sustained commitment.

5.3. Redefining Parish Identity

Intercultural communities require conscious creation, intentional promotion, careful nurturing, and attentive attention.[242] Formally renaming and proclaiming the parish as an intercultural community is crucial and can be likened to the parish dying to its old comfortable ethnic coexistence and being reborn as a new community sprouting forth in new life. A reidentification provides a superordinate identity. When the primary identity

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[240] Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today*, 22.
[241] Roger Schroeder, "Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue," 17.
[242] Antonio Pernia, "The SVD in the year 2012. Report of the Superior General to the XVII General Chapter," in *SVD Mission in 2012: Sharing Intercultural Life and Mission,* (Rome: SVD Publications, 2012), 36.

becomes “We are an intercultural Parish,” the secondary identities (nation, linguistic, culture) become gifts to be shared rather than boundaries to be defended. Publicly declaring the parish’s new identity establishes accountability and signifies a fundamental shift from maintaining separation to embracing a mission of unity in diversity.

Strategy 1: Establishing Intercultural Identity

Form a Discernment Team – Rather than a traditional “committee,” form a discernment team. It must be ethnically, generationally, and linguistically representative of the entire parish. Ensure equal representation, not proportional to size. Invite someone with expertise in interculturality and intercultural ministry as a facilitator to guide the discernment process. Their role is to pray together, listen and identify the “signs of the times” within the parish pews. The team must operate independently to ensure every voice carries equal weight in Trinitarian dialogue. The goal is to understand the purpose of the reidentification, what interculturality is, and its demands.

Parish-Wide Consultation – Before any changes are made, a consultation period is required. This mirrors the synodal path, walking together. After the discernment process is completed and the team has accepted the challenge, conduct separate listening sessions with each ethnic community to hear their concerns and suggestions. When this is over, have joint sessions with mixed cultural groups to assess their concerns and reactions to interculturality. Use surveys in multiple languages to solicit input on people’s fears and concerns, hopes and dreams, and expectations.

Theological and Pastoral Formation – Transformation fails if people do not understand why it is happening. Provide an initial publicity or education on perichoretic-

communion, interculturality, the paschal dimension of dying to self and rising to new life, and their implications on leadership and power imbalances. Offer presentations on the Church's teachings on culture, mission, communion, and the church as a "sign and sacrament of the Kingdom." Address fears such as: losing parish heritage, assimilation, loss of cultural identity, and dominance.

Guarantee Protection – A common fear in interculturality is assimilation. Establish formal structures to ensure no culture or language dominates or exercises linguistic hegemony. Ensure a "both/And" approach; the parish must explicitly commit to protecting specific linguistic and cultural expressions while simultaneously building communion. Guarantee equal representation in decision-making at all levels to eliminate the fear of minority cultures being swallowed by the dominant one.

Vision and Mission Statements – Articulate clearly what it means to be an intercultural parish in the vision and mission statements of the parish. Define and establish the core values and commitments that would serve as guiding principles to achieving the vision of intercultural living. Establish concrete goals and expectations, and ensure that statements are translated into all parish languages.

Founding Documents: Once the consultation is completed, the parish should draft a Founding Document that contains the intercultural identity and mission, the theological basis for the parish's new identity, a commitment to equality among all ethnic groups, and principles for decision-making and governance. It should also include liturgical commitments and structures, procedures for resolving conflicts, and accountability measures. The document can be signed by the leaders of the ethnic communities, representing a "new covenant" among communities and God. This provides a concrete

reference point for the parish leadership team, and also ensures continuity when leadership changes.

Public Symbolic Beginning – Rites of passage are a significant indicator of change. Hold a parish celebration to mark the new identity and commitment of the parish. The celebration should showcase ritual elements from all ethnic communities. Have representatives from each community publicly commit to the effort of building an intercultural parish.

Internal and external Communications - Update the parish bulletin regularly in all languages regarding decisions and activities. Have visual reminders of commitments in parish spaces, and update the parish website and social media with needed intercultural information in all languages.

5.4. Cultivating Intercultural Leadership

In the perichoretic unity of the Trinity, there is no superiority or subordination among divine persons. Perfect reciprocity and equality characterize the eternal giving and receiving of Trinitarian fellowship. No hierarchy or patterns of domination and subjugation exist, except the bond of love. Jesus states categorically that, "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26). Leadership in an intercultural parish must embody love, servant leadership, subsidiarity, and shared responsibility. Intercultural leadership cultivates the attitude of "everyone leads, everyone has something to contribute, and everyone has a piece of the wisdom."[243] The following are three crucial intercultural leadership elements:

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[243] Bevans, *Community of Missionary Disciples: The Continuing Creation of the Church,* 346.

Strategy 2: Principles for Intercultural Leadership

Radical Inclusion and Equality - All cultural groups should have equal voice and decision-making power on the parish leadership team. Leadership positions should be shared across cultures, not dominated or controlled by a single group. The parish leadership team should be structured and morally guided to avoid tendencies toward superiority or the perception that a particular culture is privileged while others are marginalized, particularly in addressing the parish's major issues and concerns.

Mutual Mentorship – Mutual mentorship or reverse mentoring assumes that every leader has something to teach and something to learn. There should be a radical reciprocity in leadership mentoring to combat cultural hegemony and any form of domination. Leaders should model openness and humility in learning from other cultures, being enriched and challenged by their values and customs.

Openness and Transparency - Without transparency, radical inclusion is often dismissed as tokenism. Leadership embodies transparency in communication, finances, and decision-making. Leaders develop basic practices for genuine discernment of the Spirit who is present in the community. Organize a seminar on leadership for missionary disciples following Stephen Bevans leadership structure.[244]

5.4.1. Intercultural Competence for Pastors and Pastoral Councilors

Leaders, in this case, pastors and their council, should have the needed competence to accomplish the task of interculturality. Intercultural competence is the "ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, drawing on one's

[244] Bevans, *Community of Missionary Disciples: The Continuing Creation of the Church,* 337-355.

acquired knowledge, skills, and experiences."[245] The Key components of intercultural competence include: *Knowledge,* that is, understanding of culture, cultural differences, and how culture shapes behavior; *Skills,* in the sense of the ability to listen, observe, interpret, analyze, and communicate across cultures; and *Attitudes,* that is, having the curiosity, openness, respect, tolerance for ambiguity, and willingness to learn.[246] Pastors, their associates, and members of the pastoral council should be committed to developing intercultural competence as part of ongoing formation to understand the demands, characteristics, and challenges involved in building an intercultural parish. This training should expose these leaders to intercultural dynamics and equip them with the necessary skills to transform a multicultural parish to the desired end. It should be required of all pastoral leaders serving multicultural parishes to complete formal training in intercultural competence with the following essential components:

Strategy 3: Essential Competencies

Cultural Self-Awareness – The training must help leaders develop a deep understanding of their own cultural background and appreciation for their own cultural values. This is because individuals can only engage meaningfully in intercultural dialogue when they have a better grasp of who they are and what they possess. The training should further lead leaders to recognize how their own enculturation or cultural socialization influences their approach to life, issues, and ministry. As well as becoming aware of their

[245] Darla K. Deardorff, "Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outside of Internationalization," *Journal of Studies in International Education* 10, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 247.
[246] Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church, *Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers* (Washington, DC: USCCB Communications, 2017), 11-15.

cultural biases and assumptions, and be able to see and understand reality from a different perspective.

Cultural Knowledge – Leaders should have a systematic, competent understanding of the cultures present in the parish. The cultural knowledge should also include an in-depth understanding of immigration experiences and associated trauma issues, as well as the various adaptation processes of different immigrants as developed by Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou. And becoming familiar with the various cultural values, communication styles, worldviews, and expressions of faith and spirituality offers them significant support in leading.

Ministry Skills – Leaders should be equipped with sensitivity, flexibility and also compassion in approaching pastoral activities in a culturally diverse context. Having the ability and skill to minister in culturally appropriate ways, adapt sacramental preparation across cultures, and, importantly, to creatively develop intercultural liturgies that honor the Church's theology and appreciate the value of cultures, facilitates the intercultural process.

Conflict Navigation - Understanding of cultural differences in conflict styles. The ability and skill to mediate cross-cultural conflicts and facilitate difficult conversations. To be patient with misunderstandings and frustrations, and to be hopeful for peaceful resolutions.

Strategy 4: Shared Pastoral Leadership Teams

Have an integrated pastoral leadership team that respects diversity with equal voice and discourages privileged historical affiliation or majority-rule leadership style. This reflects the particularity of the Persons of the Trinity in the divine dance. The constant

demographic changes can easily make any ethnic group the majority at any time, as is already the case in Parishes A and C. Thus, having a team leadership with equal representation and respect for diversity would curb the tendency of majority rule. Research on contact theory confirms that "cooperation toward shared goals significantly reduces prejudice and builds positive relationships between groups."[247] When pastoral leaders work together on shared ministry, they model intercultural collaboration that reflects the perichoretic communion of the Trinity. The shared pastoral teams should be governed by:

Equality - Equal representation of all major cultural groups with attention to emerging cultures. Each recognized ethnic group should be represented and respected for who they are. Establish parish policy to ensure equal representation. The Trinitarian perichoretic communion of equality, respect for differences, and interdependence should be the team's spirituality.

Shared Responsibility - Avoid defaulting to the Parish's dominant or age-old members as pastoral team leaders; rotate council leadership (chair, vice-chair, secretary). It fosters a sense of co-responsibility and trust and encourages full participation among members.

Respectful Communication - Create space for diverse communication and decision-making styles. When possible, invest in technologies that support simultaneous interpretation for multilingual meetings to avoid delays caused by a human interpreter.

Consensus Decision-making - Decisions should honor diverse perspectives and ensure consensus on all major intercultural initiatives. This eliminates the feeling of being

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[247] Kenworthy et al., "Intergroup Contact: When Does it Work, and Why?" 281.

imposed upon. Create a sense of co-responsibility – "this is our decision, and we are all responsible," and treat all feedback with equal respect and seriousness.

Strategy 5: Intercultural Ministry Teams

Organize intercultural ministry teams. They must work collaboratively, share a unified vision, and embrace a spirit of everyone leads. Value the multiplicity of perspectives, and trust the diversity of experiences.[248] Having a multicultural team promotes Allport's conditions of "common goals" and "cooperation," which encourage intergroup contact and relationship building. It is important to have the following intercultural ministry teams:

Intercultural Liturgical Team - As its name suggests, it should be composed of members from all major cultural communities with some knowledge or training in liturgy and inculturation. They should be trained by a liturgist on how to appropriately draw from the riches of their cultures to plan not only occasional multicultural celebrations but also to integrate different intercultural elements into regular Sunday liturgies across ethnic communities.

Integrated Religious Education Teams - Form a catechetical team comprising catechists from the different ethnic groups to design religious education and sacramental preparation programs that honor cultural diversity and build relationships across ethnic boundaries. Create an intercultural catechetical program that orients youth and young

[248] Pernia, SVD "Ensuring New Wineskins for New Wine: Leadership in Intercultural Communities" 190-191.

adults toward intercultural living and forms them as missionary disciples, courageous to cross ethnic borders.

Integrated Social Action Team - This team organizes service projects that bring together parishioners from different ethnic backgrounds, coordinates social services and advocacy initiatives that unite members of different ethnic communities to serve the parish and the broader community.

Multicultural Celebration Team - Form a substantive team to plan all parish cultural festivals. They ensure that all cultural programs are, first and foremost, parish activities and are responsible for the publicity and evaluation of all intercultural celebrations. They ensure that ethnic groups are participants, not guests, in parish multicultural activities.

5.4.3 Forming the Next Generation

Intentionally create an intercultural youth leadership to build relationships among youth from the various ethnic groups. Since most of them are pre-exposed to multiple languages and can communicate in English, working together becomes easier when they are well mentored. Youth and young adults often demonstrate greater openness to intercultural engagement than older generations, due to their bilingual dispositions. Investing in intercultural youth ministry yields long-term benefits for the parish's vision of becoming intercultural. Intergroup friendships among young people are highly effective predictors of improved intergroup attitudes because they alleviate anxiety and perceived threats.[249]

[249] Kenworthy et al., "Intergroup Contact: When Does it Work, and Why?" 289.

Strategy 6: Intercultural Youth and Young Adult Ministry

Leadership - Youth leadership should be intercultural, based on equality, collaboration, and the interdependence of diverse talents. Include young adults in parish council and leadership teams to ensure that their programs are part of the parish calendar.

Formation - Provide training on the perichoretic communion, the church's role as a "seed and sign of the Kingdom of God," and Catholic social teaching, which emphasizes human dignity, solidarity, relationality, and the common good. This training fosters their awareness of the importance of respecting differences while embracing unity.

Encounters - Organize intercultural summer camps, bible sharing groups or seminars to provide youth with opportunities to learn about and appreciate the goodness of each other's cultures.

5.5 Structural Transformation

Good leadership development should be supported by structural changes that foster authentic interactions and collaboration. Structures are very important, and although they do not necessarily change behavior, they control and inform it, thereby helping to build and shape leaders' and parishioners' attitudes toward the parish's vision. Good intercultural structures support individual goodwill and facilitate intercultural processes, while poor structures hinder efforts toward intercultural living. This section proposes some important structures that support the transformation process.

Strategy 7: New Structures

Diocesan Commitment - Bishops should make intercultural competence, or at least an interest in intercultural engagement, a criterion for assigning pastors to multicultural

parishes. This is because, as we have said earlier under leadership, the attitude and orientation of pastors are important factors in building an intercultural parish. When possible, dioceses should provide stability by allowing effective intercultural leaders to serve extended terms in multicultural parishes, building on momentum rather than starting over with each transition. Parish transition should be comprehensive, not just between an incoming and outgoing pastor, but should involve all parish leaders and include detailed information on intercultural arrangements and all parish-agreed policies.

Communication Systems - Effective communication is essential for building an inclusive, participatory intercultural parish. Language gives a sense of identity, and therefore, when it is treated as non-inclusive, it carries a connotation of not being counted. All acknowledged cultural languages should be treated with equal respect and given equal space in the parish communication outlets. Intentionally create multilingual, multicultural communication systems that make information accessible to all. Parish bulletins, websites, social media, and email communications should be available in all major languages spoken in the community in complete form. It should not be merely a matter of translating certain sections of the publications, but ensuring that all communities have equal access to information and feel equally addressed by parish communications. Parishes with two major languages should have a bilingual secretary, and parishes with more than two languages should have a multilingual secretary. If a parish is unable to find a multilingual secretary, then other options should be made available to ensure smooth communication and equal access.

Equitable Distribution - The tendency to proceed on the principle of equality, that is, to distribute or allocate parish resources according to the income generated by the

various ethnic communities in the name of fairness, can trigger conflict and division. It should be acknowledged that, despite differences in revenue income and contribution imbalances, it is ultimately one parish, and this oneness should have precedence over all. Budget allocation should be done in the name of parish activity; that is, irrespective of which group does what, it should be seen first as a parish activity that needs parish financial or other resource support and should be treated accordingly. Equitable resource sharing should be the guiding principle for parish leadership. To move away from comparisons, the parish should shift from ethnic-based fundraising to shared parish fundraising. This shifts the mind from "our community money" to "our parish shared resources," fostering a sense of common ownership and responsibility.

Intercultural Commission - Establish a dedicated Intercultural Commission to address the diverse cultural expectations and tolerances within the parish. Some cultures embrace change more readily, while others may experience cultural shocks at every turn. To effectively mediate these variations, the commission should be equipped with a team capable of understanding and addressing the wide range of cultural habits and norms.

The commission's responsibilities shall include:1) Periodically assessing the parish's progress toward intercultural living. 2) Identifying barriers to intercultural engagement and exploring solutions to overcome them. 3) Providing the necessary information and support to ethnic communities struggling to progress. 4) Proposing initiatives to enhance intercultural competence. 5) Mediating occasional conflicts arising from cultural differences. 6) Celebrating successes and communicating progress to the parish.

Intercultural living inevitably creates occasional tension, misunderstanding, and conflict because it challenges institutionalized ethnocentrism and domination. Instead of avoiding

these challenges and opting for a convenient parallel approach, the commission offers guidance to various communities on navigating intercultural dynamics.

5.6 Forming an Intercultural Parish Mentality

The structural changes and leadership development that we have discussed should be accompanied by formation that transforms parishioners' attitudes towards authentic intercultural living. This makes the intercultural transformation a communal effort rather than a problem for a group of leaders. This section outlines comprehensive formational pathways for the entire parish community.

Strategy 8: Intercultural Formation Series

Quarterly Workshops - Form a parish formation team to lead quarterly open parish formation sessions on topics such as the Kingdom of God, culture, relationality, conflict mediation, interculturality, and missionary discipleship (following Stephen Bevans book, *Community of Missionary Discipleship*).

Theological Foundations - Teaching on Trinitarian communion, trinitarian spirituality, the unity and diversity of the Body of Christ, Kingdom of God spirituality based on Revelation 7:9, and the command of Jesus to love as he has loved us.

Religious Education Integration - Incorporate intercultural themes into the curriculum by using culturally diverse materials and images, incorporating multilingual prayers and songs, and fostering partnerships among cultural groups.

Youth Ministry Programs - Encourage parents to involve their children in youth activities and embrace diversity. Cultural exchange activities and youth-led intercultural events can foster understanding and appreciation of different cultures.

Strategy 9: Building Intercultural Relationships at the Roots

True change happens where people genuinely live their faith—in small circles of relationships. While large multilingual liturgies may symbolize unity, they often fail to foster the intimate encounters necessary for genuine intercultural friendship. Therefore, parishes should intentionally develop grassroots relational structures that regularly bring families from diverse cultural backgrounds together. One practical approach is to form neighborhood family clusters.

Neighborhood Family Clusters - The parish should organize parishioners into small, neighborhood-based clusters of 6–8 families, intentionally composed of members from different cultural and linguistic communities. These clusters meet once a month, on a rotational basis, at homes for a simple shared meal, prayer, and birthday celebrations. Each cluster should have a facilitator trained in intercultural competence to guide the group. The facilitator encourages inclusive communication, helps navigate language barriers, and fosters a welcoming, warm environment for all members. This practice creates spaces for parishioners to gradually become comfortable with one another and subsequently build intimate friendships. When parishioners eat together and share stories of migration, family life, and faith experiences in small groups, they come to better understand cultural differences and are less threatened by them.

Rotating Cultural Hospitality - Each gathering should highlight the host family's cultural heritage. The hosting family may prepare a traditional meal, introduce a cultural prayer or devotional practice, or explain an important feast or tradition from their background. This rotation and cultural exchange transforms diversity from a source of distance into a source of curiosity and appreciation.

Shared Service - Clusters should be encouraged to undertake periodic small acts of charity together, such as visiting the sick, helping a struggling family, or participating in neighborhood charitable initiatives. When members work together for others, the focus shifts from cultural identity to a shared mission. Service fosters solidarity and deepens relationships through shared purpose.

Strategy 10: Addressing Ethnocentrism

Naming and Confronting Ethnocentrism - Help ethnic communities to recognize ethnocentric attitudes and their consequences, using examples from the parish context. Establish a safe space for acknowledging biases and provide a guide to alternative perspectives and interpretations.

Developing Cultural Relativism – Help ethnic communities understand culture as a "design for living" and recognize that there are multiple valid ways of being and doing. This should also include helping parishioners to distinguish between cultural differences and moral wrongs, and to develop an attitude of suspending judgment at the encounter with difference.

Moving from Ethnocentrism to Ethnorelativism - Use the developmental model of Milton Bennett as a framework to design a program that gradually transforms the mindset of parishioners from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism: 1. *Denial***:** Recognize other cultures exist, 2. *Defense:* Move from seeing difference as a threat, 3. *Minimization:* Appreciate the depth of cultural differences, 4. *Acceptance:* Value cultural differences, 5. *Adaptation:* Develop the ability to shift cultural perspective, 6. *Integration:* Integrate multiple cultural frameworks.

Building Cultural Confidence - Help minority cultures overcome feelings of inadequacy by affirming their values and gifts, fostering cultural pride, and challenging inferiority complexes.

Strategy 11: Integrate Intercultural Formation into Sacramental Preparation

Baptism preparation - Emphasize the new creation brought forth by baptism, which unites the baptized into one family, the Body of Christ. Organize joint preparation sessions for all families seeking to have their children baptized, with a strong emphasis on fostering the parish's unity.

First Communion preparation - Preparation for the sacrament of the Eucharist should emphasize the Eucharist as a unifying food that brings together our diverse backgrounds into one community in Christ, and makes us a community of missionaries to the world. Organize catechetical activities that encourage cross-cultural interactions among catechumens and foster intergroup friendships. Have an occasional common first communion celebration.

Confirmation Preparation - Confirmation classes should emphasize the Holy Spirit's unifying role in the Blessed Trinity and how receiving the Holy Spirit should lead to fostering communion in the parish community. The Holy Spirit makes the individual and, collectively, the parish community, missionary disciples led by the same Spirit across cultural boundaries, and even reaches beyond the parish to the "sheep out of the sheepfold"

into the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit should be understood as the source of the diverse individual gifts and at the same time the source of community and relationships.[250]

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) - Integrate the parish's vision and mission into the catechetical preparation for adults seeking baptism and confirmation into the parish. Include activities that build relationships across cultural boundaries, emphasizing the parish's role in building the Kingdom of God, where all are equal and are enriched by our differences.

By officially integrating intercultural formation into sacramental preparation, the parish communicates its commitment to intercultural living as an essential dimension of Christian discipleship and a kingdom value.

5.7. Liturgical Renewal: Embodying Intercultural Communion

The Sunday liturgy serves as the common ground where parishioners converge. The organization of the Sunday liturgy significantly influences the parish's identity and fosters relationships. The Sunday Mass schedule must carefully balance linguistic accessibility with the goal of fostering communion across ethnic communities. This section presents strategies for liturgical renewal that promote intercultural communion.

Strategy 11: Develop Bilingual/Multilingual Liturgies

Integrated Ethnic Mass - Instead of exclusive linguistic groups like "English," "Spanish," "Tagalog," and "Vietnamese," the intercultural liturgical team should strive to incorporate at least a couple of songs from other cultures in the respective Sunday ethnic

[250] Elizabeth Johnson, *Sho Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theology Discourse* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 134.

community Masses. This way, even during a regular English Mass, one could hear a few songs in other languages, symbolizing the mutual enrichment and openness of the celebration to other cultures.

Monthly Mass: In addition to the existing special-occasion multilingual Masses, the parish should have a monthly intercultural Mass schedule on a Sunday. This schedule should include bilingual readings, multilingual intercessions, and hymns in various languages to foster a sustained awareness of the parish's identity.

Semi-annual Unity Mass - Host a half-year "Unity Mass" that brings together all cultural communities. The theme of this Mass should be peace and reconciliation. Each "Unity Mass" should end with a cultural presentation or exposition that highlights a specific aspect of a particular ethnic group. This presentation should also provide an opportunity for a few questions or clarifications as part of ongoing learning.

5.8. Sustained Commitment: Patience, Persistence, and Hope

While this chapter has proposed concrete strategies for intercultural transformation, it is essential to acknowledge the significant challenges and obstacles that parishes are likely to face in becoming intercultural. Intercultural living is difficult; a long-term work that requires sustained commitment, resources, and patience. This final section addresses key challenges of sustaining commitment and offers realistic expectations for the journey ahead.

5.8.1 The Challenge of Time and Patience

Intercultural transformation is a gradual process. The patterns of separation described in Chapters One and Two have developed over years, or even decades, and are shaped by deep-seated cultural dynamics, power structures, and historical experiences.

Undoing these patterns and building genuine intercultural communion is as difficult as realizing any vision. The parishes undertaking the venture of intercultural living should avoid being ambitious and unrealistic about deadlines. Five to ten-year timeline should be reasonable for some significant transformation. Early wins may include structural changes (e.g., forming intercultural teams, introducing a monthly intercultural Mass), but deeper relational transformation, building trust, developing intercultural competence, and converting hearts take much longer. Parishes can sustain the process by consistently reviewing the vision, celebrating small wins and progress along the way, and providing ongoing formation and motivation to leaders to prevent burnout and maintain energy.

5.8.2 Resistance from Within

Internal resistance to change within the parish can be a huge obstacle to intercultural transformation. Three key possible internal resistances include: dominant culture resistance, minority culture resistance, and leadership resistance. First, members of the dominant cultural group and long-term parishioners may resist changes they perceive as diminishing their traditions, language, or power. Pastoral leaders must address this resistance with both compassion and "prophetic dialogue," helping dominant-culture members recognize their privilege and inviting them into a richer, more inclusive vision of the Church. Second, members of minority cultural communities may also resist intercultural integration, fearing that it will lead to assimilation and the loss of their cultural identity. They may prefer to maintain their own separate Masses, ministries, and leadership structures where they have autonomy and can worship in their own language and cultural style. Pastoral leaders must reassure these communities that intercultural living does not mean abandoning their cultural identity but rather sharing it with others while also being

enriched by other cultures. And third, pastoral staff and lay leaders may resist intercultural transformation if they lack intercultural competence, feel threatened by power-sharing, or simply find the work too difficult. Addressing leadership resistance requires establishing a culture of accountability and, at times, difficult conversations or personnel changes.

5.8.3 Resource Constraints

Intercultural ministry requires resources: financial, human, and temporal. Many parishes, particularly those serving economically disadvantaged communities, may struggle to secure the resources needed to build an intercultural parish. Intercultural ministry requires investment in interpretation services and technology, multilingual materials, intercultural formation programs, and intercultural resource personnel. Parishes should prioritize these investments in their budgets, recognizing that intercultural communion is central to the parish's mission, not an optional add-on. Also, effective intercultural ministry requires skilled, committed leaders, both ordained and lay. Parishes may struggle to find individuals with the linguistic abilities, cultural competence, and leadership skills necessary for this work. Investing in leadership formation and collaborating with diocesan offices can help address this challenge. And finally, intercultural ministry is time-intensive, requiring extensive planning, relationship-building, and ongoing formation. Pastoral staff must prioritize this work and resist the temptation to add intercultural initiatives to already overburdened schedules without first eliminating other commitments.

5.8.4 The Temptation of Superficial Multiculturalism

One of the most insidious obstacles to genuine intercultural transformation is the temptation to settle for superficial multiculturalism, token celebrations of diversity that

neither challenge the underlying power structures nor build authentic relationships. First is organizing multicultural festivals without relationships. Parishes may host occasional multicultural festivals sharing different food, music, and dance, but without deeper structural changes and relationship-building. While such celebrations have value, they cannot substitute for the hard work of integrating ministries, sharing power, and addressing conflicts. Second is calling for unity without justice. Calls for unity can be used to maintain the status quo, silence minority voices, and cover up hurting situations that need reconciliation. True intercultural communion requires not just harmony but justice, addressing power imbalances, linguistic hegemony, and cultural marginalization. Parishes must be willing to engage in difficult conversations about privilege, power, and equity, rather than just celebrating diversity in the abstract. And the third temptation is avoiding conflict. Genuine intercultural encounters inevitably involve some conflict, as different cultural communities hold different values, communication styles, and expectations. The temptation is to avoid conflict by maintaining separation or glossing over differences in the name of "peace." However, as Chapter Three argued, true communion requires the willingness to engage difference, work through conflict, and allow mutual transformation. Parishes must develop the skills and courage to engage in constructive conflict rather than avoid it.

5.9. Conclusion

We have proposed in this chapter practical, reasonable, and even somewhat radical strategies for cultivating intercultural living in multicultural parishes. We have seen the need for the parish to publicly redefine itself as intercultural, and we have addressed leadership, teamwork, structural transformation, intercultural formation, liturgical renewal,

and sustained commitment as practical ways for Parishes A, B, and C to move toward becoming intercultural parishes that glimpse the Kingdom of God. These strategies respond to Osmer's pragmatic question, "How might we respond?" by translating the Trinitarian vision of Chapter Three into concrete actions.

The journey from parallel ethnic communities to an "intercultural parish" that foretastes the Kingdom of God demands patience, hard work, courage, and sustained commitment. Most fundamentally, intercultural transformation requires conversion, a continuous transformation of hearts, minds, and structures by the power of the Holy Spirit. As Pope Francis reminds us, the Spirit is the "harmony" that enables unity in diversity, "making the Church a symphony of differences."[251] Human strategies and structures are necessary but insufficient. Ultimately, the movement from separation to communion is a work of grace, the fruit of the Spirit's action in the life of the Church.

The perichoretic parish, the parish that embodies Trinitarian communion in its intercultural life, is not a utopian ideal but an eschatological reality already breaking into the present. In parishes where members of different ethnic communities cross boundaries to worship together, serve together, do mission together, and grow together in faith, the eschatological vision of the Kingdom of God becomes visible. When power is shared, voices are heard, and all are valued as beloved children of God in the parish, the prayer of Jesus "that they may all be one" (John 17:21) begins to be answered. When cultural diversity is not merely tolerated but celebrated as a gift that enriches the whole community, the Church becomes a compelling sign of God's reconciling love for all humanity.

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[251] Pope Francis, General Audience, October 9, 2013.

The three parishes studied in this thesis are at different points on this journey. Parishes A and B have made some progress in fostering intercultural relationships, while Parish C is just beginning. But they are all called to the same vision: to become communities where people from every nation and tongue stand together before the throne of God, united in their diversity, reflecting the perichoretic communion of the Trinity. The strategies proposed in this chapter offer a roadmap for that journey, adaptable to each parish's unique context but always guided by the conviction that the Church is meant to be a home for all, a family of God where all are welcome, all are valued, and all belong.

Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

This thesis project has explored a pressing ecclesiological question that asks how the persisting ethnic coexistence in many multicultural parishes in the United States can become intercultural parish communities of brothers and sisters that anticipate the Kingdom of God. To address the question, this study, following Richard Osmer's practical theological method, examined three multicultural parishes. What was revealed were the challenges and potentials inherent in these parishes to fulfill their calling to be "a sacrament…of the unity of the whole human race" (LG 1).

Chapter One described the contextual reality of Parishes A, B, and C, documenting patterns of ethnic community worship, ministries, and leadership structures. Chapter Two interpreted these patterns through the lenses of social-scientific theories, identifying the underlying dynamics that sustain ethnic community segregation. Chapter Three articulated a normative theological vision grounded in Trinitarian perichoresis, proposing interculturality as the ministerial praxis that helps multicultural parishes to gradually participate in the "now-but-not-yet" reality of the Kingdom of God as revealed in Jesus' ministry and expressed beautifully in the Book of Revelation (Rev 7:9, 21:1-22:5). Chapter Four proposed concrete, practical strategies to guide the process of multicultural parishes moving toward becoming intercultural communities. This conclusion now synthesizes these findings, reflects on their implications, and points toward future directions for research and pastoral practice.

6.2. Major Findings and Contributions

6.2.1 The Reality of "Shared Parishes."

This study confirms and extends Brett Hoover's concept of the "shared parish" as the dominant model of multicultural parish life in the United States. Parishes A, B, and C have shown that ethnic communities can indeed share the same parish space while remaining divided through administrative and ministry structures. It has also been shown that demographic diversity without intercultural structures and intentionality to engage the cultures would never result in intercultural communion. Without intentionality, the right structures, practices, and procedures to promote intercultural encounters, multicultural parishes will operate in what this study terms "communities of strangers," appearing to be one on the outside but divided on the inside.

The descriptive findings illuminate several key patterns that characterize shared parishes. First, linguistic and ethnic liturgical schedules reinforce ethnic separation by creating limited opportunities for cross-cultural encounters. Second, ministry structures operate as parallel systems serving distinct ethnic communities with minimal collaboration and no shared plan and vision. Third, leadership remains ethnically homogeneous, limiting opportunities for cross-cultural mutual mentorship and shared responsibility. Fourth, social activities and interactions remain largely an ethnic ingroup affair, with few occasional structured multicultural activities. These patterns reveal that while the "shared parish" model pragmatically responds to the needs of new immigrants and cultural preservation, it fundamentally contradicts the Church's nature as a communion of diversity united in Christ.

6.2.2 The Dynamics Sustaining Cultural Separation

The interpretive analysis identified five interlocking dynamics that underpin and sustain cultural boundaries in multicultural parishes: ethnic boundary maintenance, linguistic hegemony, structural segregation, ethnocentrism, and power imbalances. These dynamics operate simultaneously at multiple levels, creating invisible walls that resist attempts at cross-cultural encounters and intercultural transformation. Ethnic boundary maintenance, informed by Fredrik Barth's boundary theory, revealed that ethnic groups actively construct and maintain boundaries to preserve their distinct identities. The boundaries are further reinforced by the parish's organizational structures, which, unconsciously, support ethnic distinctiveness rather than a shared parish identity. Linguistic hegemony, analyzed through Pierre Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, revealed how language functions as a symbolic power that marginalizes other languages and reproduces inequalities among ethnic groups. The dominance of the English language in administrative communications, decision-making processes, and parish documentation privileges English-speaking communities while rendering other language groups dependent and marginalized.

Structural segregation, examined through Gordon Allport's contact hypothesis, showed that physical cultural proximity alone, without the appropriate conditions, cannot automatically reduce prejudice or build relationships that ensure communion. The research confirms that meaningful intergroup contact requires equal status, common goals, collaboration, institutional support, and opportunities for personal acquaintance. Ethnocentrism, understood through Boris Bizumic's integrated perspective, manifests in both overt and subtle forms, from explicit preference for one's own cultural group to the

unconscious biases that shape ministry priorities and resource allocation. Power imbalances are evident in all three parishes; decision-making authority is concentrated in the hands of either the dominant cultural groups or the founding ethnic group, making others feel “secondary” in parish matters.

These ingrained systemic factors explain why good intentions and occasional multicultural celebrations fail to produce transformation. Dismantling these systems and reconstructing a new community to ensure true growth toward interculturality requires a comprehensive intervention that addresses all five dynamics simultaneously.

6.2.3 A Trinitarian Vision for Intercultural Praxis

This work makes its most significant theological contribution in Chapter Three by grounding intercultural praxis in the doctrine of the Trinity. The study proposes that the perichoretic communion of the three divine Persons provides both the theological foundation and the practical model for intercultural living that help transform multicultural parishes from ethnic coexistence into signs of the Kingdom of God. The vision of the Triune God has been, from the beginning, to gather all people into one family to share in his life and mission; this mission became tangible in the incarnation and mission of Jesus and was carried forward by the Holy Spirit through the apostles and to our time.

The concept of perichoresis, drawn from the Greek Fathers and developed by contemporary theologians like Leonardo Boff, Catherine LaCugna, Paul Fiddes, and others, describes the dynamic interpenetration of the three divine Persons without confusion or domination. This research extends the perichoretic theology to ecclesiology, arguing that parishes are called to participate in and reflect the Trinitarian communion through intercultural relationships. Just as the Trinity maintains perfect unity while

preserving the distinct identities of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, multicultural parishes are called to cultivate communion that honors cultural distinctiveness without allowing it to become a source of division.

The study identifies four essential elements of interculturality that correspond to Trinitarian life, they are: mutual enrichment through the exchange of cultural gifts; equality that rejects domination and honors the inherent dignity of each culture; unity in diversity that respects and honors differences; and interdependence and cooperation that create relationships of giving and receiving. These elements distinguish interculturality from both pluralism (which celebrates diversity without demanding relationship) and assimilation (which demands integration into the dominant culture).

The theological vision articulated in this work connects intercultural praxis to the Kingdom of God. Drawing on the eschatological vision of Revelation 7:9, "a great multitude…from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne," the study argues that multicultural parishes possess a unique vocation to mirror this eschatological reality through intercultural living. Thus, interculturality, as dealt with in this work, is not merely a practical, pastoral strategy, but a participation in God's mission to reconcile all peoples, and indeed, all creation into one family. Hence, this work elevates intercultural living from a pragmatic necessity to a theological imperative, grounding it in the very nature of God and in the Church's identity as a sacrament of unity.

6.3 Practical Pathways Toward Intercultural Living

Chapter Four translates the theological vision into concrete strategies, acknowledging the difficult process of turning a vision into a reality. The study proposes a framework organized around five key areas to serve the process of transforming ethnic

coexistence in multicultural parishes into intercultural communities. This includes: parish reidentification, leadership development, structural change, formational pathways, liturgical renewal, and sustained commitment.

The research argues that intercultural transformation must begin with reidentification of the parish. This involves publicly articulating a new self-understanding as an intercultural community of brothers and sisters from every nation, worshipping "Our Father" in heaven. By explicitly naming its intercultural identity, parishioners build a new sense of identity and, consequently, evoke a sense of communal responsibility. After the reidentification, the parish leadership must undergo intercultural competence formation focused on self-awareness of cultural biases, knowledge of diverse cultural communication styles, and skills in facilitating prophetic dialogue and conflict resolution. The study advocates shared leadership models that distribute authority across cultural communities, ensuring that decision-making bodies reflect parish diversity and that all voices participate in shaping the parish's vision and priorities.

Furthermore, as part of structural transformation, the study proposes creating intercultural team ministries that serve the entire parish, planning regular occasions for intercultural encounter and collaborative projects, and redesigning communication systems to ensure linguistic accessibility and equal participation. These structural changes recognize that good intentions need good systems and structures to thrive. In the light of forming a parochial intercultural mindset, the research outlines programs for cultural awareness training, integrated catechetical programs, immersion experiences that allow communities to enter one another's cultural worlds, and theological reflection on diversity as a gift rather than a problem.

Liturgical renewal recognizes and acknowledges worship as both a symbol shaping the parish identity and a catalyst for intercultural living of belonging to the Body of Christ. The study proposes multilingual liturgies that honor linguistic diversity while creating shared worship experiences and incorporating diverse cultural expressions in music and ritual into the ethnic community Masses. Finally, the sustained commitment addresses the long-term process of intercultural transformation. The research highlights the challenges in transitioning from an institutionalized "shared parish" to an "intercultural community," as Stephen Bevans figuratively compares the difficulty to recovering from addiction.[252] This underscores the necessity of patience, courage, and institutional support.

6.4 Theological and Pastoral Implications

6.4.1 For Ecclesiology

This thesis project challenges the prevailing model of ethnic segregation that characterizes many culturally diverse parishes. The research demonstrates that the "shared parish" model, while responding to linguistic diversity, fundamentally compromises the Church's nature as communion. Parishes that allow ethnic communities to exist in parallel without intentional efforts to build relationships toward communion fail to embody the Church's divine identity as "a sacrament of unity" and need to examine themselves critically.

The study contributes to an ecclesiology of communion-in-mission (community of missionary disciples)[253] by showing how Trinitarian theology grounds intercultural praxis. The perichoretic communion of the divine Persons provides both the theological

[252] Fr. Steve Bevan made use of this expression in one of our discussions to demonstrate and emphasize the difficult process of transitioning from established coexistence toward intercultural living.
[253] Stephen Bevans, *Community of Missionary Disciples: The Continuing Creating of the Church.*

foundation and the practical model for parishes seeking to honor diversity while building authentic communion in unity. This Trinitarian framework offers a middle way between the assimilationist models that force minority cultures to integrate into the dominant or the host culture, and the pluralist model that acknowledges and celebrates diversity without demanding relationship. Interculturality, grounded in perichoresis, maintains the tension between unity and diversity that characterizes both the Trinity and the Church.

The research also contributes to missiology by connecting intercultural living to the Church's mission of evangelization. Parishes that successfully cultivate intercultural communion become powerful witnesses to the Gospel's reconciling power in a world torn by ethnic conflict, xenophobia, heterophobia, and cultural fragmentation. The study argues that an intercultural parish does not merely accommodate demographic change; instead, it actively participates in God's mission, crossing cultural and geographical boundaries, gathering peoples of every nation into the one redeemed family of God. This missiological dimension elevates intercultural praxis from internal parish concern to essential expression of the Church's evangelizing mission.

6.4.2 For Pastoral Practice

This work offers parish leaders a framework for addressing the challenges posed by cultural diversity and ethnic segregation. The study's four-stage methodology equips leaders with analytical tools, theological foundations, and practical strategies that they can contextualize for their communities.

The identification of the underlying dynamics sustaining cultural separation: ethnic boundary maintenance, linguistic hegemony, structural segregation, ethnocentrism, and power imbalances, provides pastoral leaders a diagnostic framework for probing and

understanding their parishes. This framework moves beyond surface-level conflicts to identify underlying causes, enabling effective intervention. Parishes can assess which dynamics operate most prevalently in their contexts and design targeted strategies to address them.

Again, the study's emphasis on systemic change challenges the tendency toward superficial multiculturalism that fails to address structural barriers. Although occasional multicultural festivals are valuable, they do not effect structural transformation; leadership transformation, and sustained commitment are required for true intercultural living. The research demonstrates that intercultural transformation can be realized by attending to the root causes: leadership structures, ministry organization, liturgical practices, and patterns of relationship, rather than focusing on surface-level conflicts and interactions. Also, the identified practical obstacles to parish intercultural transformation - resistance from established communities, reluctance among leaders, resource constraints, and the temptation to settle for superficial diversity - are of great guidance to parishes pursuing interculturality. By explicitly naming these obstacles and offering strategies for addressing them, the study provides realistic guidance for the challenging work of interculturality.

6.4.3 For Diocesan Leadership

This research has significant implications for diocesan offices that support multicultural parishes. The study reveals the need for collaboration between parishes and the diocese in bringing about intercultural transformation. Parishes require diocesan support in the form of training programs for intercultural competence, consultation services for parishes navigating cultural conflicts, and policies that ensure the assignment of pastors ensures intercultural continuity in multicultural parishes. Importantly, this work contributes

to the USCCB's existing literature on interculturality by providing a theological foundation drawn from the Trinity that is not found in these documents.

Furthermore, the work urges diocesan formation programs for seminarians and clergy to place significant emphasis on intercultural competence. The research reveals that pastors' cultural awareness, leadership style, and commitment to intercultural vision profoundly shape the parish's effort to become intercultural. Seminaries and formation programs must therefore equip future priests with the theological foundations, practical skills, and personal dispositions necessary for leading multicultural parishes. This formation should include immersion experiences in diverse cultural contexts, theological reflection on diversity and communion, and practical training in cross-cultural communication and conflict resolution.

6.5 Limitations and Areas for Future Research

While this work makes significant contributions to understanding and transforming multicultural parishes toward intercultural living, several limitations suggest directions for future research. First, the study focuses on three parishes in Southern California, a region with particular demographic characteristics and migration patterns, and mainly with demographic compositions of Hispanic, Vietnamese, Filipino, and Anglo communities. Future research should examine multicultural parishes in other geographical contexts with different ethnic communities to assess whether the findings apply across different regional cultures and immigration histories. The dynamics of intercultural relationships may vary significantly depending on which cultural groups are present and their relative power within both the parish and broader society.

Second, the study's fourteen-week timeframe, while sufficient for initial description and interpretation, limits the ability to observe the parish's annual cycle and to understand other aspects of intercultural encounters. Longitudinal research that covers the parish's annual activities could document other details that require different approaches to intercultural living. Third, while this study draws on social-scientific theories to interpret the data, it does not employ quantitative methods to measure the prevalence of identified patterns across a larger sample of parishes. Future research using survey instruments and statistical analysis could test whether the dynamics identified in Parishes A, B, and C operate similarly across a nationally representative sample of multicultural parishes. Such quantitative research would strengthen the generalizability of these findings. Fourth, the study focuses on Catholic parishes, leaving unexplored how other Christian denominations and religious traditions address cultural diversity. Comparative research examining non-Catholic Christian communities would illuminate whether the dynamics identified here are distinctively Catholic or reflect broader patterns in religious communities.

6.6 Final Reflections

The journey undertaken in this study began with a practical pastoral question but has ultimately led to a deeper theological insight about the very nature of the Church. Multicultural parishes are not merely sociological realities produced by migration and demographic change; they are ecclesial spaces where the Church is invited to embody more visibly the mystery of communion at the heart of the Gospel. When people from different nations, languages, and cultures gather around the same altar, the parish becomes a living testimony of the Kingdom of God. In such communities, the Church is challenged to move

beyond the comfortable arrangements of parallel coexistence toward the more demanding call of intercultural communion.

The research presented in this dissertation demonstrates that the prevailing "shared parish" model, while pastorally practical, remains ecclesiologically deficient. It allows cultural communities to coexist within the same institutional structure but without relationships of mutual encounter, shared responsibility, and reciprocal transformation that characterize authentic ecclesial communion. Separate liturgies, parallel ministries, and culturally segregated leadership structures risk creating a federation of ethnic communities rather than a true Body of Christ. The Church's identity, however, cannot be reduced to a kind of ethnic apartheid. From its very beginning, the Christian community has been called to embody a deeper reality: a communion in which difference is not erased but reconciled and integrated through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

This study proposes that the theological key for understanding this vocation lies in the doctrine of the Trinity. The Christian God is not solitary or uniform but a relational communion. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in a dynamic relationship of mutual indwelling, self-giving, and shared life, described by the Christian tradition as *perichoresis*. In this divine communion, unity does not suppress distinction; rather, distinction enriches unity. Each divine Person exists fully in relation to the others, and the life of God unfolds as a continuous exchange of love in community. When the Church confesses the Trinity, it does not merely articulate an abstract doctrine but encounters the deepest pattern of relational life that it is called to reflect in history.

Multicultural parishes, therefore, find in the Trinity both their theological foundation and their pastoral orientation. If the Church participates in the life and mission of the triune God, then parish life and activities should increasingly mirror the relational dynamism that characterizes the divine communion. Intercultural living becomes the ecclesial form through which this Trinitarian participation is embodied. It invites cultural communities to work against isolation and enter into relationships marked by mutual recognition, reciprocal learning, and shared responsibility for the mission of the Church. Such relationships do not demand the disappearance of cultural identities; rather, they create a space where identities are offered as gifts that enrich the whole community.

Seen from this perspective, interculturality is not merely a pastoral strategy for managing diversity. It is a theological vocation rooted in the very identity of the Church. The Church exists as a sacrament of communion, a visible sign and effective instrument through which God gathers humanity into unity. When parishes cultivate relationships across cultural boundaries, they participate in God's own mission of reconciliation. They become living witnesses that unity among diverse peoples is not only possible but already emerging through the transforming power of grace.

The eschatological vision in Revelation 7 illuminates this calling with particular clarity. The seer of Patmos, John, describes a great multitude standing before the throne of God, a community drawn "from every nation, tribe, people, and language." This vision does not portray the evaporation of cultural difference; rather, it depicts a redeemed diversity gathered into worship. The Kingdom of God is not a monochrome uniformity but a symphony of peoples whose distinct voices join in a single song of praise to "Our Father."

Multicultural parishes are uniquely positioned to anticipate this future. When communities from different cultures pray together, share leadership, and collaborate in mission, they relive the first Christian community in Acts of the Apostles (Acts 6:1-7) and offer a foretaste of the reconciled humanity that God promises for the end of time.

Yet this transformation does not occur automatically, nor does it come on a silver platter. As this research shows, cultural boundaries, linguistic hierarchies, structural segregation, ethnocentrism, and unequal distributions of power often prevent genuine encounters from occurring. These forces do not disappear simply because communities share the same building or participate in the same sacramental life. Intercultural communion requires deliberate effort, institutional conversion, common goals, institutional support, and sustained pastoral commitment. Parishes must develop structures that encourage encounter, cultivate leaders capable of navigating cultural difference, and nurture a spirituality that recognizes diversity as a gift rather than a threat.

The process of intercultural transformation is therefore both spiritual and institutional. It requires a conversion of hearts that allows parishioners to encounter one another not as strangers or competitors but as brothers and sisters of the same Father. At the same time, it demands structural changes that ensure participation, equity, and shared responsibility among cultural communities. Without such changes, even the most sincere aspirations toward unity can remain unrealized. Practical theology plays a critical role in this process by helping faith communities interpret their lived realities, discern the presence of God within those realities, and imagine concrete pathways toward transformation. I have

discovered as well that it leads to a deeper understanding of theology itself—in this case a deeper understanding of the catholicity and missionary nature of the Church.

The vision that emerges from this study is neither utopian nor naïve. The path toward intercultural communion inevitably encounters resistance. Communities accustomed to cultural autonomy may fear the loss of identity. Leaders accustomed to decision-making authority may hesitate to share power. Linguistic differences and cultural misunderstandings can create tensions that challenge even the most committed communities. Yet these challenges should not be interpreted as signs of failure but as evidence that the community has begun the difficult work of genuine encounter, and it is on a pilgrimage as a fallible community. Intercultural communion is not the absence of conflict but the ability to navigate difference in ways that deepen relationships rather than fracture them.

Pope Francis's image of the Church as a polyhedron offers a powerful metaphor for this ecclesial vision. Unlike a sphere, which reduces all differences to uniformity, the polyhedron preserves the distinctiveness of each face while forming a single unified structure. Each facet contributes its unique shape and perspective, yet all belong to the same whole. Multicultural parishes are called to become such polyhedra—communities where cultural particularities remain visible and valued, yet integrated into a larger communion that transcends every boundary.

When parishes embrace this calling, they become prophetic signs within a fragmented world. Contemporary societies are increasingly marked by cultural polarization and the fear of difference. In many contexts, cultural diversity is experienced as a threat

that must be controlled or resisted. Against this backdrop, intercultural parishes offer a radically different narrative. They demonstrate that people from different histories, languages, and traditions can live together in relationships of mutual respect and shared purpose. Their witness proclaims that the Gospel possesses the power to reconcile divisions that human efforts alone cannot overcome.

The future of the Church in many parts of the world will depend significantly on its ability to cultivate such communities. Migration continues to reshape societies, bringing cultures into contact in unprecedented ways. The parish increasingly becomes the place where these encounters unfold within the life of faith. If the Church responds merely by accommodating diversity through parallel structures, it risks perpetuating the same divisions that fracture the broader society. If, however, the Church embraces the challenge of intercultural communion, it can become a living sign of the reconciled humanity that the Gospel proclaims.

Ultimately, the pursuit of intercultural communion is an act of hope. It rests on the conviction that the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church toward deeper unity. The Spirit who gathered diverse peoples at Pentecost continues to work within multicultural communities today, inviting them to cross boundaries, share gifts, and discover new forms of solidarity. Every act of hospitality across cultural lines, every shared ministry, every conversation that bridges linguistic or cultural divides becomes a small participation in the Spirit's work of reconciliation.

For this reason, the transformation envisioned in this dissertation cannot be reduced to a set of pastoral techniques. It is fundamentally a spiritual journey in which communities

learn to see one another through the eyes of Christ. It invites parishioners to recognize that the stranger who speaks another language or practices unfamiliar customs is not an outsider but a member of the same ecclesial family. In this recognition, the Church rediscovers its deepest identity as a people gathered from every nation and sent to witness to the unity that God desires for all humanity.

The journey from "shared parish" or "community of strangers" to "intercultural community" therefore represents far more than an organizational adjustment. It is a movement toward the fuller realization of what the Church is called to be. When parishes embrace this path, they become signs of the Kingdom already breaking into history—communities where the many become one without ceasing to be many, where diversity is transformed into communion, and where the life of the Trinity finds a living reflection in the everyday relationships of believers.

In this sense, the task of building intercultural parishes remains unfinished and ongoing. It calls for continued reflection, commitment, and humility from pastors, diocesan leaders, and parishioners. Yet the promise that sustains this work lies in the Gospel itself: the God who gathers humanity into communion is already at work within the Church. As communities respond to this divine invitation, they participate in a mission that extends far beyond the boundaries of any single parish. They become living signs that the Kingdom of God is among us—a Kingdom where every people and culture finds its place within the boundless communion of God's love.

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