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Building a multicultural congregation at Central park United methodist church: paradigm shift from Ethnocentrism to Ethnorelativism

Kanunu Emmanuel Busambwa
Interdenominational Theological Center

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BUILDING A MULTICULTURAL CONGREGATION AT CENTRAL PARK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH: PARADIGM SHIFT FROM ETHNOCENTRISM TO ETHNORELATIVISM.

by

Kanunu Emmanuel Busambwa
Bachelor of Divinity, Africa University, 2002
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A Doctoral Dissertation
submitted to faculties of the schools of the Atlanta Theological Association
in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of Doctor of Ministry
at The Interdenominational Theological Center
2009
ABSTRACT

BUILDING A MULTICULTURAL CONGREGATION AT CENTRAL PARK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH: PARADIGM SHIFT FROM ETHNOCENTRISM TO ETHNORELATIVISM.

by

Kanunu Emmanuel Busambwa

May 2009

108 pages

The writer of this dissertation was in a very unique situation within the United Methodist Church. He was faced with as the first part of his title says, "Building a multicultural congregation." In Chapter I we find that he lifts up the fact that the most segregated hour in the United States of America is the hour of worship for Christians every Sunday morning.

In particular the writer was specifically concerned with Central Park United Methodist Church in Birmingham, Alabama where he was assigned as senior pastor. He was immediately faced the issue of a church in a community that had changed due to white flight.

Chapter II looks at the ministry issue that faced Central Park. The researcher had to honestly look at how to respond to a dying church, a church that has a sanctuary that seats 500 people but only welcomed 45 – 50 people to service on Sunday. Previously, the church had failed to look at the change of environment and had not made any steps towards inclusivity of the changed neighborhood that was now predominately African American.
The researcher look at a systematic way offered by Robert Dale and Martin Sarrinen of tracking the growth of the church. As well as Mark Chaves’ book *Congregations in America*. It was in the reading of the aforesaid book he found the undergirding of how to deal with the issue of racism by providing for Central Park a model for racial reconciliation in worship. It was determined that a ministry of empowerment and spiritual growth was needed in order for Central Park to make any transition. Other resource material used to help address the ministry issue were *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (American Society of Missiology)* by David Bosch and *The Church Enslaved: A Spirituality of Racial Reconciliation*.

We find the literature review in Chapter III that considered for addressing the issue of multiculturalism and diversity in the society at large. Donald McGarvan was looked at for his missiological perspective and Charles Taylor for the empirical perspective. For the theoretical perspective the researcher looked at Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. He reviewed the theological perspective from Alfred North Whitehead’s point of view.

The researcher was drawn to the Book of Matthew (28:18-20) in regards to the biblical perspective. For the purpose of clarity and understanding he used the Contemporary English Version for interpretation.

It is in Matthew where the great commission from the Lord is lifted about disciple making. Jesus talked about nations that need to be discipled, thus people from all different backgrounds, ethnics, colors and genders were included. The researcher felt that Matthew brought another alternative to the two existing contexts at Central Park.
Chapter IV looks at A Strategic Model for Ministry. With a white congregation located in a 95% black community there was a need to build a multicultural congregation at Central Park.

The preliminary consideration was that Central open her doors to the community surrounding the church and that they become a visionary church. A church that will own responsibility for her geographical location. This was done in phases. Phase one dealt with inside the church and phase two dealt with outside the walls of the church.

A qualitative and quantitative survey was conducted which led to the proposed strategy for Central Park. Thus, implications of the project were reviewed.

The final chapter of this dissertation Chapter V is the summary and conclusion of the project itself. The researcher looked at what was learned from the project and gave an evaluation of the process.

He concluded that the project demonstrated that there is a need for a paradigm shift in how we do ministry in the church.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is primarily dedicated to the Church, the body of Christ at large as we are striving to become the Church that God wants us to be, may we find in these pages an effort toward the goal of celebrating unity and diversity.

I dedicate this dissertation to my lovely wife, Dr. Odette Kasang, my children, Emgra Kanunu, Baraka Kanunu and Rukat Kanunu. Thank you for your support and your unconditional love. You have been patient with me throughout this journey. I will forever be grateful to you. May you find in this work to be, the product of persistence, hard work and determination.

I also dedicate this work to my dad Kanunu Bangela Djemakoy, and my mother Suzane Ntambwe Busambwa, my siblings Charles Mandingo Kanunu, the late Noela Veleda Kanunu Mudimbi, Mushya Kanunu, Papicho TIN Kanunu, Jolie Kanunu, Lulu Kanunu, Pati Kanunu, Kapi Kanunu, the late Gentie Kanunu, and Nancy Kanunu, who live in Africa. I want you to know that I love you all and I miss you. I wish you were here for this graduation. I know, you will all be proud for this achievement.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would never have been able to come forth without the help of so many people who provided different assistance to me during this journey. I would like to thank in particular my dear friends who played a very significant role in my life, Vic and Connie Walters for their financial assistance throughout this program, words cannot express my gratitude to you. I just say thank you for your love and your support.

I also thank Drs. Edward Smith, the chair of my committee, and Love Henry Whelchel Jr. who were the members of the committee. To all my professors at ITC, who instructed and guided my path toward excellency in theological scholarship, I say thank you.

To all my friends near and far who helped the realization of this work, I say thank you, a special thanks to Mrs. Cecelia Dixon who provided editorial work for this project, and to Dr. Stephen Rasor for his leadership. Thank you to my friend Rev. Tyrone Gordon who introduced me to Dr. Walter McKelvey, President Dean of Gammon Theological Seminary who made my coming to the United States of America a possibility.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Most of us notice and feel uncomfortable about the yawning gap between what we have been taught to believe the church is, and what it ought to be, and the way we actually experience the church, especially when Sunday morning still is the most segregated hour in the United States. Where is the unity of the church? Where is the brotherly and sisterly love? Where is the common struggle for justice? Where are the Christians who set up good example? If we believe that all of us will get to heaven some days, there is no segregation in heaven, is there a way we can all get along now? So when we start thinking about a multicultural congregation we are juggling, so to speak, many brightly colored balls: Our diversity, our traditions, our culture, our unity in Christ, our suspicions of each other, our idealism about ecumenism, our hope for being a witness to the world, our disagreements and agreements. As these balls fly around entertaining in our juggling hands, is there any way to make them form a pattern that would amount to a useful and faithful understanding of what the church should be?

The ministry issue that formed the basis of this doctoral project was a vision of building a multicultural congregation at Central Park United Methodist Church (UMC) a white congregation located in an African-American neighborhood in order to help the congregation re-claim, and re-affirm her mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ.
Two of the greatest challenges of the church in America are parochialism and ethnocentrism, church members have the tendency to view the world through their own eyes and perspective. The church in America mirrors the reality of the American society, a society that is divided over race, class, and gender. There is a need for the church to reinvent herself as a multicultural community of redeemed sinners in order to bear witness to the reign of God, and become the body of Christ, because the Gospel of Jesus Christ compels the pursuit of racial reconciliation and the celebration of cultural diversity.

Dan Sheffield stated that, “The promise of Christian Scripture is that world history is proceeding toward a time when people from every nation, tribe, people and language will stand worshipping together before the throne of God and the risen, sacrificed, Lamb (Rev 7:9-10.)”

As Central Park United Methodist Church is striving to become the body of Christ by transitioning from a monocultural congregation to a multicultural congregation, what is the church’s response to the state in which American culture finds itself? How does a changing social milieu shape the way this church carries out mission and ministry? Does this church have anything to say in response to the dividedness of American society? Is reconciliation part of this church’s ministry in the American society? Manuel Ortiz argues and the writer agreed. We live in a racist and ethnocentric society that wants us to ignore our neighbors, especially if they are different from us, and to believe that some way or another that our culture is superior. At the present time in our history we are asking the question, how do we come together as diverse people in a manner that honors

---

the Lord and his word?²

A new phenomenon has suggested that younger generations are yearning for answers to the problems associated with cultural differences. Is McGavran’s theory of Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP) relevant for the twentieth first century church? According to McGavran “People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers.”³

If the church is going to reach all people in this gigantic and diverse world there must be a paradigm shift in our theology of mission. Manuel Ortiz wrote; “The Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP) has been the paradigm for missions and church planting for so long that it is difficult for Christian institutions, Christian colleges and seminaries to get away from it. . . However, HUP has been a hindrance to race relations and racial and ethnic reconciliation in the Christian community.”⁴

How should the church maintain a counterbalance that emphasizes unity while celebrating the riches that are present in cultural diversity?

Assuming that the church acquires a new model in which people of different cultural backgrounds gather in worship together to be a scripturally valid pattern, how will the church transcend cultural differences to become a multicultural congregation and be able to sustain the vision of a multicultural community of faith while at the same experiencing growth? The right analyzed research that has been done at those churches

² Manuel Ortiz, One New People: Models For Developing a Multiethnic Church (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 42.

that have moved in the direction of becoming multicultural churches in order to evaluate the theoretical framework, and the biblical and theological foundation that have sustained these churches. It was unfortunate, that many churches that are multicultural have started from the very beginning as multicultural churches. The vision of these churches had been realized early on and the people embraced the idea of multiculturalism. Central Park United Methodist Church is not a new church start rather it is a turnaround situation. This has made the process arguably more difficult and challenging.

Ministry Context

The ministry context of this dissertation project was Central Park United Methodist Church located in the Central Park suburb of Birmingham, Alabama. Birmingham is a wonderfully diverse city that offers homes to fit any life style. There are loft condos in converted warehouses downtown, houses in the country with cattle grazing in the back. Mansions sit magnificently on estate lots in neighborhoods as exclusive as any in the States. Birmingham is located in north central Alabama and in the geographical heart of the Southeast. Birmingham is two and half-hours by interstate from Atlanta, and four hours from Nashville. Birmingham lies within 500 miles of 60 percent of the nation’s population. The Birmingham area has: Ten institutions of higher education, five county and 13 major city public school systems. Birmingham has more than 50 private and, denominational schools, and over 20 hospitals with a combined total of approximately 6,500 beds.5

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4 Ortiz, One New People, 42. It is important to note that Peter Wagner was the one who called McGavran’s idea the “Homegeneous unit principle.” McGavran used the concept of homogeneity as a tool of social analysis not a theological one.
Birmingham’s planned communities combine residential, retail and commercial development. Birmingham is a dynamic, progressive urban center of great natural beauty. Almost a million people live in the metropolitan area. Birmingham is the cultural and entertainment center of the state. Because of its rapid growth in the late 19th and 20th centuries, Birmingham has an international flavor and ethnic diversity that are unusual in the south. This diversity has been enhanced in the last two decades by the phenomenal growth of the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB).

Health care and education have replaced other types of industry as Birmingham’s economic base, and UAB is now the city’s leading employer. Birmingham’s economy is very diversified, with rapid growth in services, financial, insurance and real estate, wholesale trade, and construction accompanied by rapid suburban growth and massive revitalization and renovation of historic structures downtown.

Birmingham is a city of contrasts. It is one of the nation’s fast-growing, world class medical centers, yet one of the nation’s fastest-shrinking cities. The metro area’s growth lags, but many suburbs prosper. Middle class flight has left pools of concentrated poverty. Just four miles away from the city hall, in Birmingham’s Central Park and Ensley neighborhoods, abandoned houses and businesses scar block after block. Today, 18 rusting smokestacks stand sentry there above fields of waist-high grass. Both areas show the realities of life today in metropolitan Birmingham, longstanding distrust that crosses racial, economic and community lines, a high level of blight and poverty left in the central city after much of the middle class moved out, and a lack of strong, unified

---

political, corporate, civic and religious leadership.\textsuperscript{6}

In the 80 years from 1890 to 1970, the city of Birmingham including the suburb of Central Park had a population mix that was 40 percent black and 60 percent white. Most black residents were segregated into poorer housing areas near industrial sites. Beginning about 1970, the mix began to change as whites left the city. By 2000, Birmingham’s population had flipped to 76 percent black and 22 percent white.\textsuperscript{7}

Central Park United Methodist Church is an urban white congregation and one of the oldest churches in Birmingham, Alabama. The church started in the summer of 1908 as a local congregation to serve the community. Since its inception there have been more than three church buildings, each one bigger than the one before to accommodate the growing community. Central Park United Methodist Church has been one of the leading congregations of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church. During the 1950s, the church purchased adjacent houses, and remodeled them for use as nursery and educational buildings. Central Park United Methodist Church has always been a church with a heart for the community. Over the years there have been several youth programs to meet the needs of teens in the community. The many ways the church engaged the youth in her history were the starting of a drama team, a baseball team, a softball team, a Boy Scout troop, and bowling teams.\textsuperscript{8}

Two major significant events occurred in the life of the church were construction of the first church parsonage and the purchase of a pipe organ. One tragic event was the


\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{8} McKay, 15-20.
burning of the church building in 1990, but the resilience of the congregation and its determination to be a presence in the community prompted the re-building in the same geographical location. This is very significant because the members could have chosen to relocate, but they chose to stay even though they knew the demographic had already changed. One may ask why they did not invite a black preacher at that time to deal with the issue of integration of the church. Why invite a black preacher in 2007, 17 years later? The writer thought that it could be the product of the resistance that members had in terms of crossing racial line, but at the same time, it could be the issue of leadership, those pastors who were there before did not initiate the move. The write would like to acknowledge that the last pastor, a white preacher, who served the congregation from 2004 to 2007 did initiate the move by preparing the congregation to accept their first black preacher.

The demographics of the community have changed, in large part due to the white flight phenomenon. The numbers of white people has steadily declined as the number of black people in the community increased. There are three elementary schools in the vicinity of the church; two of these are public schools and a private Christian school. There are two high schools in the area, and several businesses. The church is facing a major road in the city of Birmingham. There are more than 8 denominations in the area with neither having major part of the community as members. Despite all these challenges, the church members still believe they are a presence in the community. The current programs of the church are: a traditional service every Sunday at 10:30 am, a monthly meeting for men, and for women’s circle, and a weekly program of Bible study
and prayer. 

The membership of Central Park UMC has declined from 2000 to 75 members. This decline is due to the change in the demographics of the area. Central Park’s population used to be 100 percent white, today it is 94 percent black. Members have died, and no one is joining on confession of faith. The church is in big trouble.

The leadership of the church requested the bishop to appoint a black preacher to help them open the door of the church to the community and become a community church. They believe if they do not succeed in this their church will die. The conference appointed a black preacher from the Congo, Africa in order to build a multicultural congregation that will minister to both white and black in the Central Park area. The current situation is a white church in a black neighborhood with a black pastor.

Demographic of Central Park Community

Central Park Community is located in the town of Birmingham, Alabama. The current demographic of the central park area, a 3.0 mile radius of the Central Park United Methodist Church can be summarized as follows. (See Table 1)

- The total population is about 16,072. Among these 45.3% are male and 54.7% are female, estimated decrease from 17,572
- 94% of the population are Black or African American
- 6% of the population are White
- 85% of the households are headed by a female

---

9 Ibid., 137-148.

- 65% of the residents are 21 years and over
- 12% of the residents are 65 years and over
- Median household value $55,220
- 75% of the residents have incomes between $10,000-25,000 per year
- 5 rental, subsidized housing developments

TABLE 1

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**RACE**

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Race alone or in combination with one or more other races

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<td>Asian</td>
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**HISPANIC OR LATINO AND RACE**

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<td>Mexican</td>
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Puerto Rican 11 0.1  
Cuban 3 0.0  
Other Hispanic or Latino 61 0.3  
White alone 1,412 8.0  

**RELATIONSHIP**  
Total population 17,572 100.0  

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<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>2,259</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>6,284</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own child under 18 years</td>
<td>4,242</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other relatives</td>
<td>1,767</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 18 years</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonrelatives</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried partner</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In group quarters</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalized population</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noninstitutionalized population</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE**  
Total households 6,561 100.0  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Type</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family households (families)</td>
<td>4,660</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With own children under 18 years</td>
<td>2,413</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married-couple family</td>
<td>2,259</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With own children under 18 years</td>
<td>1,131</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female householder, no husband present</td>
<td>2,093</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With own children under 18 years</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No family households</td>
<td>1,901</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Householder living alone</td>
<td>1,710</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Householder 65 years and over</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Households with individuals under 18 years 2,863 43.6  
Households with individuals 65 years and over 1,417 21.6  

Average household size 2.67 (X)  
Average family size 3.21 (X)
A cursory view of these demographics reveals a clear picture of why Central Park United Methodist Church needed to open her door to the community, embrace the community, and redefine herself as The Community Church. On one hand, if Central Park United Methodist Church had remained where it was, as it was, a white congregation, it would have died. According to the demographics, there are about 4% white people living in the Central Park community. There was a significant need, actually an imperative for the church to change the course of doing ministry. On the other hand, the demographics also helped the writer to focus on a particular group of people as target for the ministry issue. The group was African-American people.

Change in the context of Central Park United Methodist Church was to undergo a cognitive redefinition of what it means to be the church in the Central Park community area. It required self-examination of programs the church offered in spiritual
development, and programs for the community in terms of social services. The style of worship, the liturgy and mission emphasis of Central Park UMC had to be reexamined again and again. A new vision and a rededication to the missio dei was to take place at Central Park UMC for this church to continue ministry in this environment.

**Definition of Terms**

The title of this research project was “Building a Multicultural Congregation at Central Park United Methodist Church: Paradigm shift From Ethnocentrism to Ethnorelativism.” The scope of the researcher’s focus was limited to Central Park United Methodist Church in the Central Park suburb of the greater Birmingham area of Alabama.

Several scholars use some of the same terms to describe different or overlapping phenomena. It will be relevant to offer some working definitions of different key terms for the sake of clarity.

**Race:**

Contemporary research in both the behavioral and empirical sciences has shown that the idea of race is based on faulty assumptions and that race has no basis in physical science. Susan Davies states that; Racism begins with the belief that race exists....Race is a social construct, which some have traced to the period of European imperial expansion during the fifteenth century. Prejudice results when an individual or group holds that some races are by nature superior to others.¹¹

America is one of the most color conscious nations in the world. Race as reference to skin color and other readily observable physical characteristics continue to

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play a significant role in the way we relate to one another in American society. Biblical speaking, there is only one race, the “Human Race.” The Book of Genesis 1:27 states “God created the human race in the image of God.” One may suggest that out of one blood, God created humanity. If we are believers of the Bible, then we should not have trouble understanding that there is only one race. The aim of this project was to help Central Park UMC to begin a process of redefinition of core value, which was to move away from the old way of viewing color as a way of separation and to consider our differences as a starting point of celebration of diversity as a gift from God.

The only way Central Park UMC was able to embrace the community was to start a change in the core value. Central Park United Methodist definition of race and understanding was a determining factor in its ability to minister to the community, and to become a community church. To sum up, in this project the writer affirmed that there is only one race but different ethnicity. The writer has rejected terms like multiracial or interracial that sometimes have been used to imply the existence of many races.

Culture:

Various authors have forwarded different definitions of what culture may be. It could be a shared assumption of values, or beliefs of a given community that result in characteristic behaviors and way of life. Nancy Adler stated; "Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their

12 This is the writer’s interpretation of Genesis 1:27 bases on the Hebrew understanding of Adam as (Adama) humanity.
Nancy’s understanding of culture was very insightful in laying down a key principle in our understanding of culture; thus, culture is acquired through the process of enculturation. For Central Park United Methodist Church, this way of thinking had helped our members to understand that no one was born a racist, people learn to become racist. Geert Hofstede stated that; “Culture is the collective programming of the mind, a collective phenomenon. Culture is learned, not inherited, it derives from one’s social environment, not from one’s gene. Culture shapes behavior and structures one’s perception of the world.” Culture in the light of the above definition may be understood as a conceptual design by which we order our behavior, and understand and interpret our experience. One important aspect of these definitions is that culture is always in flux. The writer argued that culture is not static but dynamic. Thus, human beings, if they want, have the ability to deprogram and reprogram culture in an attempt to create a new reality and experience around themselves.

In this project, the term culture was used as the shared ideas, assumptions, values, behaviors, and material products that are constructed and computed by different groups of people as they interact with each other. The writer argued also that there is no such thing as inferior or superior culture.

**Ethnicity:**

Richard Schaefer defines an ethnic group as a group set apart from others because of

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their national origin or distinctive cultural patterns.\textsuperscript{15}

This way of defining ethnicity has brought some scholars such as Glazer and Moynihan to observe that the term ethnicity may be confusing and misleading:

- It may be either a residual category, designating some common group tie not identified distinctively by language, color, or religion but rather by a common history and coherence through common symbols, or it may be a generic term which allows one to identify loosely any minority group within a dominant pattern, even though the particular unit of identification may be national origin, linguistic, racial or religious.\textsuperscript{16}

The writer used the term Ethnicity in this dissertation project as the understanding a group of people holds about themselves, and the understanding a group has about another group even though this understanding may be true of misleading.

**Multicultural:**

Some scholars suggest that the terms multicultural, multiracial or multiethnic describe the same phenomena, which refer to churches whose membership is diverse. Among these are: Curtis De Young who prefers the term multiracial when referring to churches with diverse membership, while Manuel Ortiz favors the term multiethnic.\textsuperscript{17} To a certain degree, these three terms multicultural, multiracial and multiethnic may explain the same phenomena; the writer preferred to use the term multicultural instead, for the following reason. Biblically and anthropologically there is only one race, so multiracial may be misleading because it suggests the presence of different skin tones. Multiethnic suggests the presence of different groups each with their own distinct lineage, but does


\textsuperscript{17} The writer favor the term multicultural because it seems to be different with the American “Melting Pot” Concept, known as assimilation.
not suggest the idea of interaction of shared ideas and assumptions. In this project the writer used the term multicultural to describe a local church that has different ethnic groups.

One may define a multicultural church from both biblical and theological viewpoints. For this project, the writer adopted a working definition suggested by Ken Davis in his work *Multicultural Church Planting Models*. Davis stated that, A multicultural church is a biblical community of believers who intentionally recruit, recognize, and embrace diversity of people. This community is committed to racial reconciliation, and working out administrative structures that assure the continuation of both unity and diversity.18

The goal of building a multicultural church at Central Park United Methodist Church was not homogenizing the group, but a calling for a new model of the church making intentional choices to mix up, and recognize all ethnic groups, and celebrate unity and diversity

**Ethnocentrism:**

Milton Bennett has developed a model known as Development Model of

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Ken Davis proposed a functional definition. We should note that with the understanding of an intentionally heterogeneous church we are not calling for (1) assimilation (the blending of one culture into another, usually the majority one); (2) mere integration (being just “open” to everyone to come); or (3) syncretism (the bringing together of two or three cultures—or religions—to create a new culture/religion). The goal is not homogenizing or Anglo-Americanizing the group until the expression of Christian faith is incredibly tasteless, offending no one, and satisfying to no one.
Intercultural Sensitivity in which he describes ethnocentrism as the experience of viewing one’s own culture as “central reality.” In other words, beliefs, values and behaviors acquired through our primary socialization are seen as adequate descriptors of the way things are.19

In this project, this concept was very important as we were trying to understand where Central Park UMC was, and what other alternative could be. There was general observation that members of the Central Park UMC, as generous as they were not prepared to deal with the issue of knowing who and whose they were as individuals and as a community within the larger community of Central Park area. Even though they wanted the community to join the church, they wanted to understand and deal with the people in the community from their own perspective.

This point was very important to both the writer, and the congregation in shaping our awareness of our own biases. Many times we do not want to deal with ourselves, yet we want to engage other and expect them to be like who we are, we want the community to join our church, but let them learn what we know so that they can do like we do, sing like we sing, and pray like we pray. The writer argues, this is where Jesus Christ’s ministry was very different from ours. Jesus Christ became like us before He asked us to be like him. The scriptures talk about the incarnation of God into a human being. The journey to know us, and our willingness to be like those in the community was the first path in the process of becoming a multicultural congregation.

Ethnorelativism:

By the same way of explanation, Milton Bennett referred to ethnorelativism as the

19 Milton Bennett, “Towards ethnorelativism: A development model of intercultural sensitivity.” In Education for the Intercultural Experience, Michael Paige
experience of viewing one’s own culture as just one organization of reality among many legitimate possibilities. Like Bennett, in this project, the writer used the suffix “relativism” not referring to moral relativism, but precisely to the notion that different cultural perspectives should not be seen as superior to one another, but as relative. The researcher wanted to reinforce his previous theory that there is no such thing as superior or inferior culture. This was important to understand if Central Park UMC was to be effective in her endeavor of reaching out to the community of Central Park, since this community has a different ethnicity from the people who are currently members of the Central Park United Methodist Church.

**Methodology**

The writer used the Phenomenological approach, which involved using theoretical concepts to explain patterns that emerged from systematic observation.

Phenomenology is the philosophical perspective, founded by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, that concentrates on phenomena as objects of perception in attempting to examine the ways people think about and interpret the world around them. In contrast to positivism or ‘scientific’ philosophy, phenomenology sees reality as essentially relative and subjective, and uses such tools as ethnmethodology and symbolic interactionism to focus on the structure of everyday life.

To do this, the writer examined the practices and theology that enable multicultural churches to function, and experience growth. In addition, the writer introduced the theoretical framework and research methodology that guided the project. These theories were Berge and Lukmann’s classical work, *The Social Construction of* ed. (New York: University Press of America, 1993), 21-66.

Ibid.

Reality,\textsuperscript{22} and Milton Bennett’s work, \textit{The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity},\textsuperscript{23} which enabled the writer and the members of Central Park United Methodist Church to pursue the question of how would the congregation construct an alternative perception and experience of reality so that the idea of a multicultural congregation could become a possibility in thought and a subsequent reality. Furthermore, the writer made use of Alfred North Whitehead’s idea of process theory, \textit{The concept of becoming and self-determination}\textsuperscript{24} together with Edward L. Smith’s work “\textit{Prehension: The Relationship of Primary Dependence on God},” to engage the congregation in the process of becoming.

\textbf{Conclusion and Implications}

It is true that one size cannot fit every situation; the researcher writer of the project was the appointed pastor of Central Park United Methodist Church. Because, every phenomenon is contextual, and can change with the context, the writer had studied some churches that are multicultural in attempt to understand the phenomenon known as multicultural church. However, this dissertation project was limited to one location, and one context, thus, Central Park United Methodist Church, as a case study. The writer, in this context was a participant observer. The results of the project were affected by the


\textsuperscript{23} Milton Bennett, 21-66.

\textsuperscript{24} Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) developed his process theory at Harvard in which he brought subjective experience back into science, and brought science into the new world of subatomic processes. His process theory attempts to encompass science and non science, and provided a theoretical basis for nonsensory perception and action at a distance. In Whitehead’s process theory, there is only one thing in the universe, creativity. That is, the universe is a “creative advance into novelty.” The concept of self-determination and creativity were very important.
bias and the agenda of the pastor as he tried together with the congregation to bring to reality an ideal, and a vision, both the congregation and the writer articulated and desired to see the church become a multicultural church for the spiritual growth of this local congregation.
CHAPTER II

THE MINISTRY ISSUE

The challenge was how to minister to people inside the church, and at the same time open the doors of the church to the community and build a multicultural congregation. Central Park United Methodist Church needed to grow. The issue was what type of direction, or ministry should the congregation use to reach out to the Central Park community?

In the writer’s opinion, any church that is unable to respond to the change in its environment is a dying church. He observed Central Park’s inability to respond to the change in its environment. A church that can seat more than 500 in its sanctuary in the midst of a growing population, but welcome only 45 to 50 people to service on Sunday is a problem.

The church needed to grow. The writer argued that growth in the context of Central Park United Methodist Church should not be based on the size of the bank account, or numbers of people but on the quality of spirituality that was to bring change in the attitude of people. This change will ultimately manifest itself in the ability of the church to respond to change in the environment by opening the doors of the church to African American members and becoming a multicultural congregation.

Robert Dale and Martin Saarinen in different books offered a systematic way of tracking the growth of the church (See: Figure 1). In their works, they suggested that every congregation starts at birth, and goes through infancy, adolescence and prime. They
compared this process as dreams, belief, goals, structure and ministry. This is the stage of vitality, and then there is the stage of decline followed by death. In between the stage of decline and death, they have identified some precursor signs of decline and death such as nostalgia, aristocracy, bureaucracy and polarizing. The writer observed that Central Park UMC was in the stage of decline.

FIGURE 1.

Tracking the growth of the church (Saarinen 1986 and Dale 1981)

Mark Chaves in his book *Congregations in America* suggests that among the things that churches do in America, worship is number one. Based on this assumption, the writer believes that the church as a spiritual and social community can take the lead and deal with the issue of racism by providing a model for racial reconciliation in worship. Unfortunately, our churches are still segregated on Sunday morning.

Among the historical issues that may be the causes of Central Park UMC's inability to respond to change in its environment and recruit African American members could be the issue of racism. Birmingham, Alabama is well known for its racism, and was a *Ku Klux Klan* stronghold. Birmingham is also known for the activities of Bull Connor, a man who believed in segregation. Birmingham is notorious for the church bombing which killed four schoolgirls. On the other hand, perhaps whites Christians are afraid to be with their black Christian brothers and sisters because their presence reminded them of these unfortunate stories of the past.

Many white churches do not want to talk about racism because it is an embarrassment to them. Many white brothers and sisters have benefited from the racist unjust structure. America is one of the most color conscious nations in the world. Dr Martin Luther King Jr. observed that 11:00 o’clock is the most segregated hour in the United States.

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4 The original source of this observation is unclear. Dr. King himself credited this observation to Liston Pope, who set it off with quotation in his book *The Kingdom Beyond Caste* (1957,105), and did not attribute it to anyone.
The writer thinks that building a multicultural congregation at Central Park UMC could enhance and promote racial reconciliation in Birmingham. This is the reason the writer argued that if we were to be successful, we were to avoid looking at Central Park as a church in transition just because the neighborhood has changed. We needed to find a model of building a multicultural ministry rather than a transitional ministry, so that white brothers and sisters would not leave or transfer their membership elsewhere. We wanted them to stay and built the ministry at Central Park UMC as a multicultural congregation.

A ministry of transition at Central Park United Methodist Church would have killed the church. Taking care of things as they were, was incompatible with the teaching of Jesus Christ. A ministry of transition presupposed the inability of the church to adapt to change. What we needed was a ministry of empowerment and spiritual growth.

Carlyle Fielding Steward III is his book The Empowerment Church talks about "a conversion experience." According to him:

The church, believe it or not, needs to be converted to Christ. We presuppose that the church is practicing the teaching, presence, and mind of Christ, but this is not always the case. In many instances, what is often practiced are organized forms of institutional ecclesiology, which sponsor the praxis of original religion. We thus practice religion that is organized and regulated by church institutions. Being religious does not mean we are spiritual. Belonging to the church and practicing ecclesiology does not mean we have been converted to Christ. Churches need to be reconverted from old habits that die hard and behaviors that thwart the Holy Spirit’s presence and power to convert, save and change lives.5

We needed to grow at Central Park United Methodist Church, but growth in this context, meant the ability to respond positively to the change in the environment. Central Park United Methodist Church was stuck in the time period of their founding year. The
question before us was, what is the future of Central Park United Methodist Church? One can sit in the sanctuary on a Sunday morning and look over a congregation of graying and balding heads. Unless there was a surge of new recruits, the rising death rates will diminish the membership of the church even further in years to come. The membership has declined because older members are dying, and no one was joining the church either on confession of faith or membership transfers.

The congregation is still conducting a traditional worship service, singing the hymns from *The United Methodist Hymnal*, which may not appeal to the people in the geographical area, especially the young people.

There was an urgent need for the membership at Central Park to take advantage of the opportunity given to them to build a bridge with the community by creating programs that will be appealing to the community. This urgent need must be expressed in how the congregation translates her dreams or vision ideas into possible practical programs that will help the church fulfill her calling and her mission.

**Motivation For Addressing the Ministry Issue**

From a biblical perspective, the first time the church gathered at Pentecost, the church was a multicultural gathering. Acts 2:5-11 lists fifteen ethnic groups present.

“Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. [6] And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. [7] Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? [8] And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? [9] Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, [10] Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, [11] Cretans and Arabs--in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.”

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Matthew 28:19-20 talks about different ethnic groups.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

In Acts 10:34 God sent a powerful vision to Peter to correct the racism and encourage outreach to Gentiles.

Acts 10:34
Then Peter began to speak to them: I truly understand that God shows no partiality.

According to the Scripture, we are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28
There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

The concept of a multicultural church is a picture of eternity. Rev 5:9 talks about every tribe and language, people and nation standing before God.

Revelation. 5:9
They sing a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;

In his foreword in the book of Michael Hawn One Bread, One Body: Exploring Cultural Diversity in Worship Justo L. Gonzalez got it right when he said:

When we look at the story of Pentecost, we see a story of extraordinary communication....In its root meaning, the Latin communicare actually means to make common that is to share ...And to a degree that too often we fail to acknowledge , to share is to relinquish control. Thus, true communication of the gospel means that it is no longer the exclusive property of the original messenger, but is now fully shared with other. When the Spirit let the various people in
Jerusalem hear the message in their own tongues, the spirit also paved the way for a church that would no longer be controlled by the original disciples in Jerusalem or their cultural successors. What happened at Pentecost was that at the very moment of its birth, the church was crossing cultural boundaries in such a way that it would be just as much at home on one side of the boundary as on the other. The church is multicultural by birth.⁶

When Bishop Willimon appointed the writer to Central Park United Methodist Church, the writer started praying and reading around the topic of evangelism and multicultural churches. The following literature has also motivated the writer’s understanding of multicultural ministry. The writer was motivated by Karl Barth’s redefinition of the concept of ecclesiology of the church. In his work *Church Dogmatics*, Barth argues that the church is an institution and organization into a community with a task. The writer used this category as a starting point in the process of addressing the issue of why there was a need to build a multicultural congregation at Central Park United Methodist church. The church is the body of Christ, God’s family. It is not a nucleus connection but an extended family, a web of interconnection. Karl Barth’s ecclesiology was used as a relevant motivator in an attempt to shape the awareness and the consciousness of the current membership at Central Park that the congregation exists for those that are outside of its church walls.⁷

The writer considered the work of David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* in which Bosch argues that “Mission” in the singular refers primarily to God’s mission (*missio dei*). In the context of Central Park UMC, racial reconciliation is part of God’s mission. The responsibility of the members is to join God in what God is doing. This is


what Bosch called "Missions" (missiones ecclesiae) the missionary ventures of the church related to a specific time, place or need. 8

By building a multicultural ministry at Central Park UMC, the congregation will assume ownership and responsibility of its geographical location, thereby becoming true witnesses of God’s reign.

Tony Campolo in his book The Church Enslaved: A Spirituality of Racial Reconciliation provides some serious guidelines that both black and white people need to consider for a genuine reconciliation. Both white and black people need each other because the encounter between their spirituality can result in a critical analysis of the Traditional Christian Theology in the light of God’s revelation in Christ. 9 The writer argued that such critical analysis will lead to the recovery of theological dimensions present in biblical witness of faith that have been obscure and lost due to Christianity cultural captivity by the Anglo-European civilization.

Furthermore, the writer was motivated by the fact that, Central Park United Methodist Church is an urban white congregation whose membership is in decline because of the phenomenon of white flight. Adopting the concept of a multicultural church can help this declining congregation to survive.

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CHAPTER III

APPLYING THE LITERATURE REVIEW TO THE CASE STUDY

Some of the literature under review was used to respond to the issue of multiculturalism and diversity in the society at large, other was profitable to the over all work of the dissertation project under consideration, as the writer attempted to understand and build a frame of reference in addressing the issue of building a multicultural congregation at Central Park United Methodist Church.

Missiological Perspective of Donald McGarvan

For growth to occur at central Park UMC, there is need for the membership to understand that the church is God’s divine family, which is multicultural. People should not turn inward and focus on themselves. A failure to deal with this way of thinking has led people to consider the church as a club. This is where the writer thinks the church at large has fallen short. There is an urgent need to break away with the club mentality in our churches the majority of our churches are dying because they function as clubs instead of function as the church.

Some scholars of the church growth movement have put forward a theory that the writer thinks is misleading people. This theory is the “Homogenous Unit Principle.” This theory was the thesis of the Church Growth Movement that started from the 1961 when Donald McGavran opened the Institute for Church Growth at Fuller Theological
Seminary in Pasadena, California.¹

Donald McGavran, the founder of the church growth principle, in his work
*Understanding Church Growth* argues that people like to become Christians without
crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers, for McGavran the church will growth if we are
to create more homogenous unit church.² The writer strongly disagreed with McGavran
because if we were to follow this way of thinking we will never build multicultural
congregations that will embrace multiculturalism. The church will be monocultural and
irrelevant to a multicultural world. In fact there is only one God and one church, the body
of Christ in which all acquire a new identity. Christ has destroyed the wall of separation,
and it is immoral to rebuild the walls of separation.

In one meeting the writer attended as we were working on the possibility of
doing ministry with both black and white people in the same congregation, someone told
the writer that we would be more effective if we remain separate but equal, and you will
be the pastor of the circuit instead of asking black and white people to come together as
one congregation. He said we would grow much more if we can be with people who look
like us, in kind and substance. The writer told him that this was a wrong approach even if
sociologically and psychologically it may seen to be a valid argument. This argument
even though valid, does not sound. The person went on telling the writer about the
strength of the separate but equal principle as a more productive category in marketing.

² Ibid.
The writer explained that this way of thinking is not the right way. This is not what we need when it comes to building a multicultural congregation. One can see how some people justified segregation as a desired end. This is based upon a misinterpretation of John 4 that suggests the separation of Jews and Samaritans was a proof that homogeneity is desirable even though the emphasis on one Spirit and one worship is under emphasized.

Ephesians 2: 14 suggests that,

“For Jesus Christ is our peace, in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.”

Christ has established a new community, a new society in which both cultural richness and heterogeneous fellowship are to be expressed. This is the church of Jesus Christ.

The writer argues that the thesis of McGavran is a distortion of the Gospel, and the claim that congregation must be built from homogeneous group of people is incompatible with the nature of God, and the teaching of Jesus Christ. The writer may even argue that Donald McGavran lived in India for more than 30 years, he observed and studied the caste system from the perspective of sociology and anthropology however, he missed the point when he applied some of the core principle of the caste system in his theology of church growth. For the writer, the homogeneous unit principle sound like a footnote of the caste system. One may argued that it was unfortunately for McGavran to present his theory in a racist society where people are divided on the basis of skin color or class.

Indeed, Jurgen Moltmann argued and the writer agreed, in his work Religion, Revolution and the Future, Moltmann suggests that the church, to be authentic, must be heterogeneous, reconciling the educated and the uneducated, black and white, high and
low, the underdog and the aristocracy. Moltmann sees the church at its best when it contradicts the natural grouping of human beings, while McGavran sees the church at its best when it conforms to such groupings. Furthermore, Moltmann argued that McGavern gave attention to the work of H. Richard Nierbur, *The Source of Denomitionalism* to contradict the work of Liston Pope *Kingdom Beyond Caste* and Gibson Winter *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches* in order to under gird his thesis that the church ought to accommodate itself to social and caste system.

The writer’s critique would be that McGavran’s way of thinking has been an attempt to give moral support and to defend the institution of slavery, and to justify the sin of racism, classism and sexism. The writer believes where there is God all people being equal. Valleys will rise and mountains will reduce to size. All people will live in equality, the wolf and the lamb dwells together. This is the eschatological image of the multicultural congregation that is called to anticipate on earth the life of heaven, and thus to develop both cultural wealth and heterogeneous fellowship.

**Empirical Perspective of Charles Taylor**

As we were in the process of developing an alternative for Central Park United Methodist Church, we have said that building a multicultural congregation was not a call for integration. In this project, our sense of multiculturalism rejects integration, because integration is known as the effort of African Americans in the United States to eliminate racial segregation and achieve equal opportunity and inclusion in the United States

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society. This was the effort of the civil right movement and the United States
government, public schools and public places were integrated. But the church was not
integrated because church people felt that it was not their responsibility to do so.

Historical speaking, the word multiculturalism was used in the early 1980s in the
context of public school curriculum reform, in attempt top move away from an unhealthy
ethnocentrism and racist attitude in the West in order to accommodate diversity.  

Charles Taylor in his work *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*
addressed a concern about how a democratic society should deal with its members. In
Taylor’s view, all members of the society must be treated, as equal and their specific
culture must be recognized because these elements are very important to the dignity of a
person. Taylor focused more on recognition as an underlying principle in his
understanding of multiculturalism. The writer thinks Taylor is right; multiculturalism
would not function properly at Central Park United Methodist Church without
recognition.

Taylor argues:

The demand for recognition is given urgency by the supposed links between
recognition and identity, where this latter term designates something like a
person’s understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining
characteristics as human being. The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by
recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person
or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society
around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible
picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm can be a
form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode

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5 The term *integration* is most commonly used in association with the efforts of
African-Americans in the United States to eliminate racial segregation. In the context of
Central Park UMC, the term integration may be misleading.

6 Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and The Politics of Recognition* (New Jersey:
of living.\(^7\)

This is true, especially in the context of African Americans who lived in Central Park area in Birmingham, Alabama during those days when segregation was the law of the land. How should Central Park United Methodist Church re-introduce herself to the community? What type of preparation needs to take place both inside the church and in the community? On one hand, there is a community that has a depreciatory image of themselves imprinted by the larger society. Some of the African Americans have internalized a picture of their own inferiority; some have rejected Christianity as the religion of the white men. What should Central Park United Methodist Church do in order to become a community church? Taylor suggests that this type of work is not a courtesy we owe people, but a vital human need.\(^8\)

The writer is of the opinion that Central Park United Methodist Church has a moral obligation to help the people in the community in the process of resisting and rejecting the idea of self-depreciation. Otherwise, as Taylor said, self-depreciation is the most potent instrument of one’s own oppression.\(^9\)

Taylor uses his politics of recognition, coupled with Hegel’s philosophy of religion and the spiritual community, to advocate a politics of equal recognition, which has taken various forms over the years and has now returned in the form of demands for the equal status of cultures. The writer’s point here is that all cultures are equal. This is the cognitive redefinition of core values needed in the mind of the membership at Central

\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^8\) Ibid, 26.

\(^9\) Ibid.
Park United Methodist Church as we tried to introduce the idea of a multicultural church. The writer argued that for change to take place in a community, it is important that the members of that community are open to the idea of self examination, and the willingness to amend whatever will be shown as shortcoming.

**Theoretical Perspective of Berger - Luckmann**

Moving Central Park UMC from a monocultural congregation to a multicultural congregation requires that we struggle with the following questions: How should the church re-create another reality so that the idea of a multicultural congregation becomes a realized experience? Assuming that the church acquire a new model in which people of different cultural backgrounds gather in worship together to be a scriptural valid pattern, how will the church transcend cultural differences to become a multicultural congregation and be able to sustain the vision of a multicultural community of faith while at the same time experiencing growth? People have the power to construct their own experience and reality. To help Central Park United Methodist Church in dealing with the issue of reconstruction of a new reality, the writer considered a theory known as “*The Social Construction of Reality.*” Berger and Luckmann are known for a proposition they developed which stated that reality is socially constructed.

The central idea of Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality was that actors interacting together form, over time, typifications or mental representations of each other's actions, and that these typifications eventually become habitualized into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other. When these reciprocal roles become routinized, the typified reciprocal interactions are said to be institutionalized. In the process of this institutionalization, meaning is embedded and institutionalized into
individuals and society - knowledge and people's conception of (and therefore belief regarding) what reality 'is' becomes embedded into the institutional fabric and structure of society, and social reality is therefore said to be socially constructed.  

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in this classic text, *The Social Construction of Reality*, describe their work as "a systematic, theoretical treatise in the sociology of knowledge." This theory was very important because it provided to the members of Central Park UMC the challenge of how to reconstruct new reality in the church in order to fulfill the vision and the mission of the church.

Peter and Thomas provided to Central Park United Methodist Church a strong premise, thus “reality is socially constructed” meaning that all knowledge of all types is developed, transmitted, and maintained in a society.

How can Central Park United Methodist Church recover from decline, serve the immediate community and grow? It must minister to its community and it also must take responsibility of the geographical location in which it is located. Building a new reality became a sine qua non condition for growth.

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11 There is a phenomenon of fear or of loss of personal or collective identity for the congregation. May be the members are afraid to cognitively redefines some of their shared basic assumptions and espoused values in the light of what being the church could mean to them. I think, reconstruct new reality will require willingness to accept change. Change is very difficult to accept, because in dealing with change people know that they have to unlearn some of their old ways of doing things and thinking, and also to engage in the process of learning new ways of thinking and acting. Being a disciple is a call to join God in the process of becoming. Paul understood it well in 2 Corinthians 5:17 when he said that if a person is in Christ he or she is a new creation. New Creation for me is a paradigm in which we are to engage in the process of becoming the *imago dei*. 
If reality is socially constructed, there is need to pay attention to what Berger and Luckmann called *The Plausibility Structure*. Perception and understanding of reality are subjective and they depend on the plausibility structures of their maintenance. Berger and Luckmann argue that as far as religious identification is concerned, one can maintain one’s self-identification as a person of importance only in a milieu that confirms this identity. It may be accurately argued, that a person’s self perception as a member of a multicultural community faith requires maintenance and continual reaffirmation. This is what the writer called intentional willingness.

The sociology of knowledge was very important for this project because it recognized that culture and identity are socially constructed. Berger and Luckmann explained that the sociology of knowledge seeks to understand the process by which “human knowledge” is developed, transmitted and maintained in social institution. This is true, and the writer may argue for instance, that because race and racism are linguistic and social constructions, one cannot claim racist behavior as a core value of the society.

In this project, the theory of “Social Construction of reality” helped Central Park United Methodist Church understand how multicultural churches frame reality such that it becomes plausible for people of different cultural backgrounds, ethnic groups enter together into a common body of believers.

**Theological Perspective of Alfred North Whitehead**

Many people do not realize that a persons’ understanding of the nature of God has an impact on how he or she understands the church and the ministry of the church in the world. The writer is of the opinion that understanding the sociality of God becomes a very important key. For so long we have considered God’s nature as changeless. As a
consequence of this way of thinking, we spend time building strategies of maintenance because we do not want to accommodate the idea of God being in the process of becoming.

Christian churches have built ministries that are there to uphold the status quo and to accommodate things as they are. The world is changing, everything around is changing, but yet the church is static. Central Park United Methodist Church was not growing because of her inability to respond to the change that was taking place around her geographical location, and her cultural context.

Alfred North Whitehead in his work *Process and Reality* argued that God has two natures God is dipolar. Thus, God has a primordial nature and a consequent nature. In the case of Central Park UMC, God in God’s primordial nature had a plan. A divine plan of God was to prepare a place of worship for all people in the Central Park area in Birmingham, Alabama.

Whitehead talks about the primordial nature of God as the concrescence of the unity of the conceptual feelings. This nature is conceptual in the sense that it is the valuation of the entire multiplicity of eternal objects as being the primordial envisagement of pure possibilities. This is the mental pole of God in which God envisions all eternal objects. In this primordial nature God had decided to appoint Central Park UMC to be the place of worship for all people. This had been manifested when the members of Central Park UMC chose to rebuild the church after the fire, instead of relocating. God was at work in the life of this church.

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13 Ibid.
The writer argued that God was leading the church, because when God gives vision, God provides the provision. This is why no matter the opposition and hatred of some members (Dream killers) God’s divine providence for Central Park UMC could not be stopped by anybody. Central Park UMC ‘s appointment with destiny had already been conceptualized in the primordial nature of God, as Edward Smith suggests: “God retains the entire history of the world in God’s memory.”

Whitehead suggests that the primordial nature gives God the nature of transcendental and supreme influence on all occasions of experience and the limit of their creativity. God does however influence our creativity in the process of becoming. This is true for Central Park UMC, as members were involved in prayer striving to prehend God’s proposition for the church. Prayer in the context of Central Park became what Edward Smith called, “The relationship of primary dependence on God” as he stated:,

A relationship of Primary Dependence on God comes about through being in purposeful harmony with God’s creative lure for feeling and thus is the initial opening to creative transformation knowing that God has the ability to transform the human condition.15

Whitehead further suggests that God communicates with humanity through God’s consequent nature. This is the nature of God known as the concrete nature of God which is those aspects of God that are attained through God’s interaction with the world. God’s concrete nature is a “living person” in process of an everlasting succession of divine events or occasions. This is the physical pole of God by which God feels the completed

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14 Edward Smith, Prehension: The Relationship of Primary Dependence on God, (Atlanta: The Research Center Press, 1999), 5-15. Smith’s position is that God’s guidance works through prehension, which can also be called “feeling.”

God in the consequent nature is in the process of becoming. Whitehead assumption that to become is to be synthesized by others, is very fundamental for Central Park United Methodist Church in the sense that it helped the church to understand the necessity of opening the doors of the church to the community. The writer may suggest that God prehended the leadership of Central Park UMC by giving them a proposition, and the leaders prehended God and receive God’s leadership by accepting God’s proposition. They went to see the Bishop, and requested a black preacher to be appointed to their church in order to start a multicultural church.

Whitehead suggests that God is capable of transmitting feelings to every subject-temporal entity in the entire world based on the ontological principle that states there is nothing which floats into the world from nowhere. The writers argued that God is at work in the world, and it is God’s subjective aim of beauty and harmony that the Central Park United Methodist Church engages in the process of reconciliation.

Whitehead’s way of thinking helped the members at Central park UMC realize that the church is a living organism in a constant process of changing, because change is the only reality that is. In Whitehead’s system human beings are called occasions of experience, as they participate in the living organism.

The soul is nothing else than the succession of my occasions of experience, extending from birth to the present moment. Now at this instant, I am the complete person embodying all these occasions. They are mine. On the other hand it is

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16 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*.


18 Ibid., 19-43.
equally true that my immediate occasion of experience, at the present moment, is only one among the stream of occasions, which constitutes my soul.\(^{19}\)

If our souls are just the succession of occasions of experience, there seems to be a reality here, which was fundamental at Central Park UMC. All people are occasions of experience, and an occasion of experience does not have any color, therefore we are occasions of experience with God, capable of partaking in the process of creation, in other word co-creator with God because we can be in line with God’s subjective aim of beauty and harmony in the church. This is where the writer had a strong case, that there is no racism, classism or sexism in the nature of God. If Central Park United Methodist Church will adopt this way of thinking, we all see in each other the image of God, and we all can affirm together that we are God’s children.

Whitehead considers time and space, there is deity, which is that factor in the universe whereby there is importance, value, and ideal beyond the actual. It is by reference of the spatial immediacies to the ideals of deity that the sense of worth beyond ourselves arises. . . . There must be value beyond ourselves. Otherwise every thing experienced would be merely a barren detail in our own solipsist mode of existence. We owe to the sense of deity the obviousness of the many actualities of the world, and the obviousness of the unity of the world for the preservation of the values realized and for the transition to ideals beyond realized fact. Whitehead says that the division of experience into self and other is primarily based on the sense of existence as a value experience. Namely, the total value experience is discriminated into this value experience and those value experiences. There is the vague sense of many, which are one; and of one that includes the many. Also there are two senses of the one—namely, the sense of the one which is all, and the sense of the one among the many.\(^{20}\)

The writer has taken this concept of the two natures in God, to suggest the unity of the divine in different aspects. The writer suggests that unity and diversity are part of the divinity, and if the church is to become the body of Christ, unity and diversity have to be

\(^{19}\) Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 134.

\(^{20}\) Ibid, 245.
celebrated. This is an expression of the sociality of God that can also be explained by the doctrine of the trinity that is found in Whitehead’s Metaphysics. Thus, there is the immanent trinity of the primordial nature (the Father), the Eternal object (the Son), and the consequent nature (the Holy Spirit).\textsuperscript{21}

The doctrine of the trinity was a valid paradigm because one can understand the sociality of God. The social doctrine of the trinity is in a position to overcome the notions of ethnocentrism, the discrimination, and individualism that characterized human society especially at Central Park UMC, because of the unity that is reflected in the doctrine. All the members of the trinity are one but express themselves as three persons who are co-equal, and co-essential.

The trinity is not a monarchic, but a sharing of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit at equal terms. The church, the body of Christ, was born through the sending of Jesus Christ, God’s proposition to the world, and the persuasive power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Thus the church was born through the Eternal Object (The Son) in the consequent nature of God (The Holy Spirit) by the communication already made in the primordial nature of God (The Father). The writer used the triune God as the basis of a multicultural society and a way of intercultural communication, since the triune God is not an expression of individualism, but social relationship; and the church is called to become the reflection of the trinity.

Biblical Perspective of Matthew 28:18-20

Dunn James in his work *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, dealt with the question of Gentiles acceptance at equal terms in the church. His main thesis was that “God does not show partiality” Acts 10:34.

The writer considered an exegetical possibility of Matthew 28:18-20 known as the great commission to under gird the dissertation project at Central Park UMC.

Matthew 28:18-20 (Contemporary English Version)

“Jesus came to them and said: I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth! Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with always, even until the end of the world.”

Matthew 28:18-20 (King James Version)

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

Matthew 28:18-20 (English Standard Version)

“And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”.

For the purpose of clarity and understanding the writer used the Contemporary English Version. This version seems to interpret Matthew 28:18-20 in such a way that it includes everybody. *The people of all nations* suggests non Jews as well as Jews. This paradigm parallels the Central Park ministerial context since the agenda is to build a biblical foundation that will advocate a celebration of unity and diversity, and preach that the Gospel message is for all people of all nations. Therefore, the writer’s thesis was
that the church, which is the primary custodian of the Gospel must be multicultural in nature and substance.

All Christians believe that there is only one God, one salvation, one baptism and we even sing a hymn "When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be!" Yet we are divided here on earth because of culture, race, class, gender, ethnicity and so forth. The gospel of Matthew reflects so many polemic and contradictions like our society, yet, it also provides the church with another alternative, that if well understood can be the biblical and theological foundation for the body of Christ. "The Church," is the congregation of faithful women and men from all ethnics, genders, and classes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28:18-20 known as the great commission has been misused to justify religious imperialism, colonization, slavery, and dehumanization by the dominant class in an attempt to impose their political, economic and social control on the weak. As a result of this machination, a segregated and monoculture church has been born and continues to perpetuate a distortion of the true gospel. The writer would like to suggest that if we read again Matthew 28:18-20 and do justice to the text, we will understand that for the church to be "The church," it must be multicultural.

When the author re-read Matthew 28:18-20 in the context of Central Park United Methodist Church provides a validation of the case for a multicultural church.

Matthew is to be considered as a redactor or editor, not as the author of the Gospel of Matthew. Whoever the editor was, he or she compiled the book from different sources already in existence. These scholars argue that Matthew gathered the contents of his
Gospel from four principal sources: (1) the Gospel of Mark, (2) a collection of the teachings of Jesus, known to Luke but apparently not to Mark, (3) a source from which Matthew collected material appearing only in the Gospel of Matthew, which may have come from the oral tradition of Israel, and (4) the Hebrew Scriptures.

We do not know who actually wrote the Gospel of Matthew or compiled it. However the writer may argue that the Gospel of Matthew can be the work of a Jewish Christian, one who brings the faith of the new movement and the traditions of Israel to the new covenant. The audience could have been that of Jewish Christians congregations in a time of controversy between the followers of Christ and the Jewish priestly establishment of the late first century.23

Various estimates have suggested that the date of Matthew’s composition could be around A.D. 70 and 100, sometime around the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans. It is believed that at the end of that century, Christians were expelled from the synagogues. Suffice it is to say that the Gospel of Matthew comes out of the crucible of the first century when the followers of Christ faced both persecution and apocalyptic judgment.24

As the writer tried to juxtapose Matthew’s ministerial concern and that of Central Park United Methodist Church, it seems that the writer of the gospel of Matthew wrote this book to his community to nudge them toward a missionary involvement with their

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environment. Some historical and contextual arguments suggest that Matthew is a missionary text, and that Matthew 28:18-20 is the theological program of the entire Gospel of Matthew.\textsuperscript{25}

Based on the rule of understandability, the writer argued that Matthew could have been written to a community in crisis in an attempt to provide a new paradigm of mission and identification. Like Matthew, Central Park United Methodist Church is doing ministry in an environment of crisis, and like Matthew’s community, Central Park UMC is in a search for a new identity.

The great commission in Matthew is about disciple-making. It is a commission from the Lord not a suggestion. Jesus is talking about nations that need to be discipled, thus, people from all different background, ethnics, colors, and genders. Matthew provides a relevant paradigm for Central Park United Methodist Church.

We need to start with discipleship. One cannot be a disciple of Jesus and at the same time, be a racist, sexist or practice classism. True discipleship stands against any dehumanizing approaches. Discipleship is different from colonialism and imperialism. As we plan to do evangelism and discipleship in Central Park, there is need to be aware of the Protestant missionary enterprises of the past centuries in which European missionaries went to other places of the world claiming Matthew 28:18-20 as the basic biblical foundation of their ministries and did some serious damage to Christianity.\textsuperscript{26}

European missionaries equated the word Christianization to be synonymous with civilization. So westernization, Christianization and civilization went hands in hands. By

\textsuperscript{25} David Garland, \textit{Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary}, (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 89.

\textsuperscript{26} Shropshire, \textit{The Church and Primitive Peoples}, 368-413.
so doing, these missionaries were looking at those that they wanted to evangelize as in need of civilization. They started a process of acculturation and enculturation.27 Discipleship did not take place. Cultural imperialism and the myth of white supremacy were used in the process of sharing the Gospel. This is some thing we do not want to see as we are thinking to fulfill the great commission in the Central Park community. When one uses the great commission, the basic foundation for that ministry should not be an attempt to achieve global Christianity, but world Christianity instead.28 In global Christianity, the assumption is that those who do not articulate faith the way faith has been shaped by the Europeans are “pagans.” In world Christianity, one goes out with an open mind, and a catholic spirit that encourages dialogue.

The text suggests that we are to go to the nations to share with them about how the reign of God has transformed our lives. We are to witness the practical manifestation of the presence of God in our lives. For instance, where there is the Spirit of Jesus, there is love. One may not love God, if one does not love one’s neighbor. Matthew is trying to bring a new alternative to two different contexts. The first is the Pharisaic Judaism, and the second is the Hellenistic Jewish Christianity.

The writer thinks Matthew 28:18-20 will bring another alternative to the two existing contexts at Central Park. The Euro-American context and the Afro centric context will have the opportunity to experience a rebirth, and at the same time strive for new identity. The writer may argue that, going to make disciples was a challenge to the Jews who used to think that they were a special race, a special class or the chosen ones.

27 Ibid.

For the process of disciple making to take place, these Jews were supposed to undergo a process of cognitive and spiritual redefinition. They were supposed to unlearn many things they knew and learn new things, as they would be going to other nations. First, they had to be transformed, and then teach others to do what the Lord commanded them. They were to teach by example as they were living the gospel.

After 100 years of existence, Central Park UMC has been a monoculture church, providing ministry to people of European descent. Now that we would like to start a multicultural church, what does the gospel of Matthew tell us? The writer believes the gospel of Matthew provides a way for us to learn to grow. In fact, even Jesus himself, experienced growth and transformation when he encountered a gentile woman in the gospel of Matthew (Matthew 15:21-28). Going out to the nations for Central Park UMC is an opportunity for growth.

The context of the periscope is by its very nature missionary, sent to all. As the church is responding to the commission, the church becomes missionary. Some preliminary awareness will be necessary to understand the context of the Matthew community in terms of social location, economic and political situation. When one understands these parameters, then one may build a bridge of understanding between the two contexts. There is also need to proceed with biblical contextualization knowing that this process is rooted in the fact that God’s revelation is not timeless. God’s revelation always comes to specific people in concrete situations by means of particular cultural symbols and criteria. This mean that as we go and make disciples we need to be open to the possibilities of God.
Matthew 28:18-20 has attempted to solve the polemic and contradiction in the gospel of Matthew. However, even though it is a missionary text, one must not use this text to justify or to support religious hegemony, religious imperialism, or the patronization of the poor and the weak. The text challenges those who are to present the gospel, asking them to be truthful to the gospel before they share it. In addition, there is also evidence of transformation when we go to other people and invite them into a conversation about our discipleship. This text provides a biblical and theological foundation of the church as a multicultural community.
CHAPTER IV

A STRATEGIC MODEL FOR MINISTRY

The ministry issue addressed in this dissertation project was directed toward the need to build a multicultural congregation at Central Park United Methodist Church, a white congregation located in a 95% African-American community. The project was focused on the Central Park area in Birmingham, Alabama. The objective was to help the Central Park UMC congregation to create a new reality as a ministry model and strategy that would assist them in re-introducing the church to the community, and by so doing become a community church.

Preliminary Consideration

The writer proposed that Central Park UMC open her doors to the community surrounding the church in order for the membership to minister to that community. Building a multicultural ministry is the greatest need of Central Park. We need to change the image of the church in the community. The church should be known as Central Park Community church rather than the white church. People should be able to refer to the church as a place where our children go to study in an after school program, or the church where our parents go for a parental training program. Central Park UMC needed to be known in the community as a church where all of God’s people are welcomed to worship God.

The writer proposed that Central Park become a visionary church, a church that will own responsibility for her geographical location. The ministry issue addressed in this
project focused toward the necessity to create a new reality, inside the church first, and then outside of the church walls.

The project was focused primarily inside the church, in its phase one, then outside the walls of the church in its phase two. The objectives were to initiate a new paradigm, and a strategy of doing church in a new way that would include and reflect the demographics of the Central Park community, which is 95% African Americans, and 4% white people. The targeted groups are both white people inside the church and black people outside the church.

Phase one of the project that addressed the issue inside the church focused on the spiritual needs of the congregation. To identify the spiritual needs of the congregation; a ministerial inventory was conducted with about 50 people through a personal and primary social survey research technique, coupled with qualitative research.\(^1\) The instruments of the inventory were developed based on William Easum’s Growth Principles as explained in his work *The Church Growth Handbook*.

At the end of this conversation, the plan was to create a re-visioning committee of about 20 people, whose responsibility was a special task force on strategic planning. The re-visioning committee was to collect the data from two consecutive months, and conduct surveys in worship services for two months (See Appendix A). In addition to these two tasks, this committee was to gather all the church historical files of all the financial, and administrative board decisions and study these data in the light of Easum’s Ministry Audit. This committee was co chaired by the pastor and one lay leader, who

\(^1\) Qualitative research method strives to understand the epistemological nature of the phenomena through subjective experiences of the persons who are concerned with such a phenomena. Devika D. Choudhuri. “Conducting Culturally Sensitive Qualitative
were to meet with all the church elected leaders of the Central Park United Methodist Church to answer questions about the surveys and engage into conversation around the following concern:

Where are we as a church, and what is it that we want to become?

What difference would it make in this community if Central Park United Methodist Church ceased to exist?

Are people in this community going to miss this congregation?

The Inventory was done as following:

There were two conversations that took place, with the leadership of the church.

During the first conversation, the writer and the leadership of the church used the following instruments: The Five Conversations for Church Leadership and Their Pastor.

Adapted from The First Ninety Days: Critical Strategies for New Leaders At All Levels by Michael Atkins.
Table 2: (Adapted from Michael Atkins Work<sup>2</sup>)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Start-up</strong></td>
<td>• Building structures and systems from scratch without a clear framework or boundaries.</td>
<td>• You can do things right from the beginning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Welding together a cohesive high-performing team.</td>
<td>• People are energized by the possibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Making do with limited resources.</td>
<td>• There is no preexisting rigidity in people’s thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Turnaround</strong></td>
<td>• Reenergizing demoralized members and staff.</td>
<td>• (Almost) everyone recognizes that change is necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Handling time pressure and having a quick and decisive impact.</td>
<td>• Affected constituencies (ministries, outside groups using facilities, etc.) may offer significant external support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Going deep enough with painful cuts and difficult leadership and personnel choices.</td>
<td>• A little success goes a long way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Realignment</strong></td>
<td>• Dealing with deeply ingrained cultural norms that no longer contribute to high performance.</td>
<td>• The congregation has significant pockets of strength.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Convincing members and staff that change is necessary.</td>
<td>• People want to continue to see themselves as successful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Restructuring the leadership team and refocusing the congregation.</td>
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</table>

The situational diagnosis conversation

In this conversation we tried to understand how the congregational leadership saw the church's situation. This required mature evaluation on the part of the church's leadership that was willing to deal with the reality of the church's situation and not their perceived reality.

- **Is it a turnaround, start-up, realignment, or sustaining-success situation?**
- **How did the church reach this point?**

As the members of the congregation began to understand our situation they recognized that the church is in both a turnaround and realignment. They determine this had occurred for the following reasons:

1. Lack of vision.
2. Lack of outreach and passion.
3. Congregation not willing to change.
4. Lack of leadership.
5. Lack of prayer.
7. Congregation too comfortable.
8. Little ownership of mission/purpose.
9. Resistant power structures.
10. Church unwilling to adapt to a changing culture.

Figure 2. Central Park UMC identified herself in between unrealized and realized decline.³

Congregational Life Cycle (Compton, 2003)
Figure 3. The church wants to grow; the members are striving for vitality.\(^4\)

Congregational Life Cycle (Compton, 2003)

The second conversation centered on church growth principle: The discussion covered the following:

**Growth Principle:** Growth is not concerned with numbers, but with meeting the needs of the people. Questions such as "Do we meet the needs of the people in this community or only focus on ourselves?"\(^5\) This dialogue was very important because the law of congregational life is like the law of physics argues Easum, as he suggested that

\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) Ibid.
Churches, like people, are healthiest when they reach out to others rather than worry about themselves. Churches grow because they intentionally reach out; and churches die because they dwell on their own internal problems.\(^6\)

According to Easum, churches are dying because of four reasons:

**One:** The church is more concerned about survival as an institution than meeting the spiritual and physical needs of people. **Two:** The importance of worship is misunderstood and downplayed. **Three:** Many of the church members and institutional representatives have a bias against church growth. **Four:** Few members are willing to pay the price of hard work necessary for the church to grow and be healthy.\(^7\)

A significant number, about 85% of the membership, believed that the church was on the stage of realized decline, struggling to preserve what they have so that it can remain the way it used to be, 95% believed that the church had to change the direction otherwise they will die; 3% did not want to take a new direction; they choose an easy way out by transferring their membership to other United Methodist Churches or other denominations.

In addition to the ministry inventory done in phase one, a different social research survey was done as phase two. The objective of phase two was to find out what was the way to build a bridge between Central Park United Methodist Church and the community of Central Park area. One-on-one interviewing methods as well as group techniques were conducted in order to process the qualitative surveys among those who had been selected

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\(^6\) Ibid.,13-14.

\(^7\) Ibid.
randomly. (See: Appendix B)

Qualitative Research- Milton Bennett Process

Among the 85% of the 50 members who believed that the church needs to change direction, there is a group of those who went to see the district superintendent at the end of year 2007 when the previous preacher was about to retire. This group requested that a new black preacher be appointed to their church so that they can reach out to African Americans in the community. This story is very important in terms of the desire of the membership. The challenge in this story is that the members of Central Park United Methodist Church did not engage in serious study about what it means to be a multicultural church. Some critics of the church would suggest that the move to purposefully invite African Americans, was a survival move, and not a genuine action taken in terms of mission.

There had been no serious study of race relationships, or of how much the membership of Central Park United Methodist Church understood about themselves, the history of their community and the history of the people they wanted to invite into their church. Nor had the church members learned about the spirituality of African Americans, and about their liturgy and worship style. The members of Central Park United Methodist Church wanted the community to join their church and were expecting the people of the community to be like them, do things such as singing the same music, the same way they have been doing them.
In order to create a friendlier environment, the writer initiated a community event in which all the children, parents and families were invited to a community Christmas breakfast at the church. The community responded very well, about 150 people attended the events. The members of Central Park took the opportunity to introduce themselves to them, and served breakfast to the children, while the committee on Re Visioning provided a questionnaire with inquiries such as: what does this church mean to the community? What would you like to see happening at this church for the community? (See Appendix B)

After this event, the members agreed that this was a very renewing experience since this was the first activity they did for the community and not for themselves. They felt that doing more of this kind of events would be a very good way to reach the community.

The writer favored this approach, it seems that this strategy was working; the writer referred to this type of outreach ministry as the ministry around the table. This is the ministry where the church organized fellowship with the intentional motive of eating together with the members of the community.

The writer began engaging the people of the congregation as to how they perceived the community around them. Some members had a positive opinion about the community, but the majority had a very negative opinion. Central Park area is also known as a place of crime and drug abuse in the Birmingham metropolitan area and some church members would even accuse the members of the community as the cause of the trouble and confusion happening in there.
At this point, the writer discovered that the qualitative research should be applied to the members of the church about the community at large. If the members of Central Park United Methodist would be effective in reaching out, there was an urgent need for them to acquire enough cultural capital in the community. The term cultural capital was introduced by George B. Thompson Jr. in his book How to Get Along With Your Church: Creating Cultural Capital for Doing Ministry to suggest that pastors are to invest themselves deeply in their congregation in an attempt to understand how their church does its work and goes about its ministry because each congregation is unique in terms of its customs, history, conventions and procedure. A failure to develop cultural capital will result in an unsuccessful ministry.

Thompson focuses on the significance of pastors becoming students of culture, He argues that a grasp of the complexities of culture will help any pastor to understand better the behavior patterns and relationships in the life of the church.8

The writer used Thompson’s way of thinking, and applied it to the church. He asked the following question to the congregation. How well do you know this community? This question was very significant in terms of doing ministry, because Central Park United Methodist Church will not be able to launch and maintain a successful ministry without understanding the complexities of culture around the congregation, and the community.

There are at least three levels of understanding culture. First, the micro culture of the church, this is the culture of the congregation. Second, there is the macro culture of the American society in which both the congregation and the community operate, and

third, there is the meso culture, which is the culture of the people in the Central Park community area. Becoming a multicultural church required that we understand this paradigm because Central Park United Methodist Church will only lead its community in authentic, and effective ministry by investing in her community’s culture.

In addition to the question, how well do you know your community? Another question was asked, how much intercultural sensitivity does the members have acquire? In other words, what is the image of the church in the community? This question was very important because every church has an image in the community, and this image can either help the church grow or decline and die. Jeffery Spiller got it right when he said:

Most churches have two images. There’s the image they have of themselves, and then there’s the image that the community has of them. Some churches have very positive images in their community, and some churches have very negative images in their community, and some churches have no image at all in their community. The only good choice out of these three is the first one. The image that a church has in a given community has a great deal to do with whether or not it grows or declines in membership. ¹⁰

In an attempt to determine the image of the community held by members of Central Park United Methodist Church, the writer introduced the intercultural development inventory with the tools that Milton J. Bennett provided in his work: The Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity.¹¹ The intercultural development model

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⁹ Ibid., 7-14.

¹⁰ Jeffery R Spiller, Becoming a Regional Church from the Ground Up: How One New Church Grew Into a Regional Church, (Mobile, AL: CUC Press, 1994), 57.

inventory provided a worldview profile of an individual or group of individuals based on a scale that provides an overall perceived intercultural sensitivity and an overall developmental intercultural sensitivity. About 75 people in the congregation participated in this survey.

The intercultural development inventory (IDI) is unique in several aspects. It measures how a person feels and thinks about, and thus reacts to, cultural difference. It is, therefore, measuring how a person construes and organizes events, guided and limited by their cultural patterns. This is called one’s “worldview” regarding cultural difference. Equally unique is what IDI does not do. Unlike many other instruments, it does not compare a person to typical behaviors and it does not analyze behavioral reactions. IDI operates at the worldview level of how a person feels and thinks about cultural difference. This deeper level of one’s cognitive experience is what guides and limits behavior. Thus, IDI helps answer the frequently-asked “so what” question stemming from use of other instruments, “So now that I know more about my behavior and how I compare to others, what should I do next?” The answer is to understand and develop one’s intercultural competence, which will generate cognitive and behavioral change.12

Bennett argues that an individual or groups of individuals confront cultural differences in predictable ways as they develop or learn to become more competent intercultural communicators. According to him, one’s experience of cultural differences becomes more complex (less stereotypic and more adaptive), as one’s competence in intercultural relations increases.13

The Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity identifies six development orientations toward cultural differences that are assessed by the intercultural development inventory (IDI). These vary from ethnocentric levels of competence to more ethnorelatival


intercultural relations.\textsuperscript{14}

The first three stages in the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity Denial, Defense, and Minimization are ethnocentric, meaning that a person’s own culture is experienced as central to reality. Central Park United Methodist Church was operating under the first stage, in their dealing with the community. Behavior such as isolation, separation, denigration, superiority were observed. This way of operating generated a bad image of the community in them. Dr Milton Bennett explains this paradigm, as following:

\textbf{Denial} of cultural difference is the state in which one’s own culture is experienced as the only real one. Other cultures are avoided by maintaining psychological and/or physical isolation from differences. People in Denial generally are disinterested in cultural difference, although they may act aggressively to eliminate a difference if it impinges on them.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Defense} against cultural difference is the state in which one’s own culture (or an adopted culture) is experienced as the only good one. The world is organized into “us and them,” where “we” are superior and “they” are inferior. People at Defense are threatened by cultural difference, so they tend to be highly critical of other cultures, regardless of whether the others are their hosts, their guests, or cultural newcomers to their society.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Minimization} of cultural difference is the state in which elements of one’s own cultural worldview are experienced as universal. Because these absolutes obscure deep cultural differences, other cultures may be trivialized or romanticized. People at Minimization expect similarities, and they may become insistent about correcting others’ behavior to match their expectations.\textsuperscript{17}

Table 3. This charter indicates a worldview at Central Park UMC that simplifies and

\textsuperscript{14} Ib\textit{id}.

\textsuperscript{15} Ib\textit{id}, 30.

\textsuperscript{16} Ib\textit{id}, 34.

\textsuperscript{17} Ib\textit{id}. 41.
polarizes cultural differences. (Before the execution of the project: See Appendix C &D)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denial</th>
<th>Defense</th>
<th>Minimization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65% Unresolved</td>
<td>55% Unresolved</td>
<td>67% Unresolved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This charter explained the attitude of the members of Central Park United Methodist Church it shows why it was a challenge for the members to invite in people from the community who do not look like or act like them. It was difficult to be the church with such worldview. As we started to talk about what the church is and what is God calling Central Park United Methodist Church to do, the second stage provides a different reality.

The second three stages of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, Acceptance, Adaptation and Integration are ethnorelative, suggesting that a person's own culture is experienced in the context of other cultures. This is the new paradigm Central Park United Methodist Church has embraced. The members of Central Park UMC have engaged the congregation in the process of becoming the Community Church. The following behaviors have been observed: respect for behavior difference, respect for value differences, empathy, pluralism, contextual evaluation and constructive marginality. The congregation is in the process of building a very good image of the community in their perspective.
Bennett explains these observations as following:

**Acceptance** of cultural difference is the state in which one's own culture is experienced as just one of a number of equally complex worldviews. Acceptance does not mean agreement—cultural difference may be judged negatively—but the judgment is not ethnocentric. People at Acceptance are curious about and respectful toward cultural difference.\(^{18}\)

**Adaptation** to cultural difference is the state in which the experience of another culture yields perception and behavior appropriate to that culture. One's worldview is expanded to include constructs from other worldviews. People at Adaptation are able to look at the world “through different eyes” and can intentionally change their behavior to communicate more effectively in another culture.\(^{19}\)

**Integration** of cultural difference is the state that expands Adaptation to include a movement of one's own "identity" in and out of two or more cultures. People at Integration often deal with issues of their own sense of “cultural marginality.” This state of deeply internalizing two or more cultures requires significant international cultural competence and may be common among non-dominant minority groups, expatriates, and global nomads. The IDI specifically measures this sense of "cultural marginality" as a separate yet distinct orientation.\(^{20}\)

Table 4. This charter indicates a worldview of the members at Central Park UMC that can accommodate complex cultural differences and can incorporate a multicultural identity.

(After the execution of the project: See Appendix C&D)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acceptance</th>
<th>Adaptation</th>
<th>Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85% Resolved</td>
<td>78% In Transition</td>
<td>80% Resolved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is where the writer believed was important to lead the congregation, because at this stage, the congregation is willing to welcome the strangers, but they can also

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 47.

\(^{19}\) Ibid, 51.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 59.
interact with the community in reaching out.

**Community Needs Assessment: Quantitative Survey**

Ministry is done in a social setting. Every church that is concerned about ministry should be concerned about her context, competency and community. What should the church know about the changing world? What skill does the church need? What types of relationship are necessary?

It was important for the writer and the congregation to carry out a quantitative research survey in the Central Park community in order to know the need of the community so that the congregation may provide a pastoral response and an effective ministry. These assessments were done with the help of the Intensive Survey, that are based on a methods of intensive interviews done in the community in an attempt to sought extensive information on the demographics, residential histories, current habitation, stressful life events and everyday life experiences and challenges of the people in the community based on their personal stories. The time of to complete the surveys averaged 30 minutes, and ranged from 45 to 60 minutes. The sample of the intensive survey was 200 people. This data collection activity was conducted for a period of 100 days at the rate of 2 persons a day on a one-on-one base. These interviews were considered as instruments which provided an insight into the way different people in the Central Park community live and what they care about, their religious preferences, faith involvement, and their primary concerns, and insight into community preferences for church programs, how a church can meet the needs of the community, the style of worship in terms of taste, and how one can communicate with the community, in other
words how a church can build a bridge of understanding with the community.

The response rate for the intensives surveys was positive. Of the 200 people
approached for interviews, 15 % walked away before the interviewer could introduce
himself about 80 % completed the interview. Thus, the response rate of 90 % was
exceptionally high for a walk up interview.

These instruments provided Central Park United Methodist Church its ministry
area profile, and a good introduction and overview of the ministry area.
The writer used the following questions in the interviews to understand and answer the
following questions:

1. How many people live around the church?
2. Who is moving into the area? Who is leaving? How many two-parent families are
   there?
3. How many single parents?
4. Is there a need for a church day care?
5. How educated are the adults?
6. What do they care about?
7. How do we relate to them?
8. What kind of ministry should we have?
9. What kind of programs do people want?
10. Should we offer recreation programs?
11. Divorce recovery? Bible Study?
12. Do we need to provide a youth social program?
13. Should we offer a contemporary worship service?
14. What is the best way to tell the community about our church? Should we knock on their doors?

15. What do you feel is needed in the Central Park community?

16. What church do you attend?

17. What is your image of that church?

18. What church are you most aware of?

**Summary Findings: Qualitative and Quantitative Survey**

A critical observation of the study area definition of 1.5 mile radius of the Central Park United Methodist church has suggested the following:

1. Inside the congregation 95% believed that we were an isolated church, and that there was a need to change the direction of the church. Another significant need was the necessity of finding again our place in the community by redefining our vision, and our mission as a congregation. The congregation was to evaluate the interest and the developmental potential of the Central Park community for effective ministry. The congregation was to determine the preference of worship style for an effective growth. The interest of having a local congregation of the United Methodist Church in the Central Park community required that the congregation invest enough cultural capital, by studying the culture of the community around, and engage the community in conversation, and provide more community events that were welcoming to the members of the community.

2. The largest age group in terms of numbers is Survivors about 35% of the total population of the area under study. The population by generational groups is represented as following.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>30,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivors</td>
<td>35,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boomers</td>
<td>26,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silents</td>
<td>8,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builders</td>
<td>5,2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seventy-five percent (75%) of the current membership at Central Park United Methodist Church is in the category of the Silents. For Central Park United Methodist Church to remain in ministry the current membership must struggle with this question: Does the ministry of Central Park United Methodist Church reflect the language and cultures of the surrounding community? In order words, does the ministry of Central Park United Methodist Church provide opportunities to other groups of people to participate, create and experience different worship styles?

3. The interest of seeing Central Park United Methodist Church becoming a multicultural church that meets the needs of the Central Park community was extremely high. The overall faith involvement level and preference for historic religious affiliations was very high. Religious preference indicator showed that 46,6% likely prefer to be Baptist, 11,9% Methodist, 9,9 % catholic, 7,8% non-denominational, 3,1% Pentecostal, and 2,5% Holiness. Sixty-five (65%) of the people in the community said that it is good to have a community church, where all are welcome. Fifty-four percent (54%) are strongly involved with their faith.

4. The indicator for the primary concern of the community suggests five categories.

*The Basics: In the community, 38% are concerned about maintaining personal health, 29% finding and providing health insurance, 48% day-to-day financial worries, 60
% finding employment opportunities, 45% finding affordable housing, 50% providing adequate food, and 35% finding child care.

*Family Problems: The indicator suggests that 35% of people have a problem in dealing with alcohol and drug abuse, 23% have a problem in dealing with teens pregnancy, crime and child problems, 37% deal with abuse relationships, 40% deal with the issue of divorce, 70% have a female head of household, 45% hopes and dreams to achieve long term financial security, 35% would like to develop parenting skills, 40% deal with stress, 25% would like to find companionship, 23% would like to find a good church.

*Community Problems: The indicator suggested 55.5% are concerned about neighborhood crime and gangs, 22.8% are concerned about the school systems, 28% are dealing with racial and ethnic prejudices, 35% are dealing with social injustice, 65% believe that the government should be the primary provider of human welfare services, 82% believe that the role of churches is to help form and support moral values, 75% believe that churches and religious organizations should provide more human services, 55% believe that there is need for change in dealing with the issue of race and ethnicity, we can learn to live together, 91.3% said that it is important to preserve the traditional American family structure.

*Church program preference. The indicator suggested that 73% would like to participate in a Bible study discussion and prayer group that will help them grow spiritually, 25% want to participate in marriage enrichment opportunities, 45% want to attend a parent training programs, 37% want to participate in a twelve steps programs, 30% want to participate in a divorce recovery programs, 30% would like to attend a personal or a family counseling programs, 55% would like to have more food and
clothing resources, 35% would like to have a church sponsored day school, 40% want to have day care services, 38% would like to have a youth social program, 32% would like to have a cultural programs (Music, Drama, Art), 35% would prefer a traditional worship program, compared to 43% who would like to participate in a contemporary worship program.

**Proposed Ministry Strategy**

As a result of ministry inventory, a Twelve Month Strategy Ministry Plan was developed using the data collected in the process of inventory. The following strategies were formulated.

Christian Spiritual Formation: We had four workshops events. These workshops were conducted every Wednesday from 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm; the all congregation was invited about 55 people attended on average. We always started with a meal, the moderator lectured on the topic, next we broke into small group for discussion. At the end of every discussion, a prayer for commitment was offered. These workshops were meant to address the ministerial issue coupled with the internal need of the congregation and the community at large. At the end of these workshops, we have seen the birth of a community Bible Study that Central Park provide to the community with a meal every Wednesday, in addition to the Bible Study, there is a Children Choir that practice on Wednesday, parent bring their children to the children choir and they have an opportunity to attend Bible Study.

The Bible was the major source and, each moderator was asked to provide their personal didactic material. The following is a summary of the workshops:

(1). Workshop: Theme: The Church as the Community of God’s People. This workshop
covered topic such as: What is the Church? What does the Church looks like? Who are the members of the church? This workshop helped Central Park UMC to explore the images of the church in the New Testament. At the end of the workshop, the members of Central Park UMC have enlarged the circle of their understanding that the church is more than a club, or a social organization where we only welcome our own kind.

(2) Workshop: Strategic Plan for Biblical Church Growth. The plan of this workshop was to be very intentional about the way we do ministry. Our ministries program should be designed to maximize the discipleship process in the lives of people we minister. The aim of this workshop was to emphasize on the state of the church in terms of spirituality. This is where, we talked a lot about prayer as a mark of discipleship. We have organized a prayer ministry, and the more people prayed together, the more comfortable they felt toward each other. The wall of separation was removed, because each time after prayer, people were sharing laughter, and tears together. We started a Bible Study that runs every Wednesday at 6:30 pm.

(3) Workshop: On Race Relationship. This workshop addressed the issue of racism and classism. At the end of this workshop, we have addressed the issue of power and control in the church.

(4) Workshop: On Evangelism: This workshop explored the Theological Models of the church. We used Karl Barth's idea of the church as a community with a task assigned to her by the Lord.

Model 1: The Church as Sacramental Means of Grace

Model 2: The Church as Herald of Good News

Model 3: The Church as Servant.
A plan for an outreach ministry allowed Central Park UMC to build a bridge of communication with the community. This phase’s objective was to do what we can in order to open the door of the church to the community, and become a multicultural church

**Strategy 1.** We started a Children’s Ministry. Central Park Public school is located six blocks from the church. Recently the school requested the use of the church parking space and the sanctuary for the kindergarten graduation ceremony. The pastor met with the principle of the school and offered his availability to speak at the open house at the beginning of every school year. The pastor spoke three times at the school addressing parents at the open house. This was very significant in trying to build a bridge between the church, children and parents.

**Strategy 2.** Put ads in both The Birmingham News and the Birmingham Times (an African American owned newspaper), and have built a Web Site to advertise our church (www.centralparkumc-al.org). We have invited the community to use our parking space for the community yard sale. Our goal was to have at least 15% of those who attended the yard sale to visit our church.

**Strategy 3.** Our Kitchen Committee cooked breakfast for all the children of our community one Saturday morning feeding about 55 children. We took their name and any contact, and invited them to our children’s ministry. We have set other breakfast event to reach 200 children. These events were held to build a relationship between the church and the children of the community. We have hired a part time children’s minister who will focus on this ministry. It is always good to hire someone rather than to rely on the volunteers.
Strategy 4. We started a New Worship Service at 11:00 am every Sunday (A Contemporary - Praise and Worship Celebration), and changed the current time schedule for worship. We moved the current 10:30 worship service to 9:00 am becoming the First Worship Service (Traditional) to accommodate those who like the traditional worship style. We changed the time for Sunday School to 10:00 am so that both groups the traditional and contemporary groups meet as one group for Sunday School classes. We hired a band to sing at 11:00 am.

We started the second service on July 6, 2008. This service was a praise and worship contemporary service. The aim of this service was to respond to the spiritual needs of the immediate community in order to provide a place of worship for the people around Central Park. So far, we are satisfied with the result. At the first Sunday there were 45 people in our first service and 65 people in the second. The second Sunday, there were 48 in the first service and 39 in the second service. We have received almost 120 new visitors in the past two-months of July and August. Currently, the average worship attendance to our first service is about 50, and 30 to our second service.

Strategy 5. We began a Men’s Ministry Outreach program. This ministry’s aim was to create an environment that could allow the church to reach the men in the community. Once every month, we have a men’s ministry program. We always start our men’s gathering with dinner. This was away to accommodate those who came from work and also make the meeting interesting. Then we have a prayer session, testimonies and music. This ministry was very instrumental in reaching the men of our church and the community. We were able to reach men in rehabilitation programs; by using the church bus and providing transportation for as about 25 every month when we have our
meetings.

Implications of the Project for Central Park UMC

These strategies have helped Central Park UMC to achieve the primary goal of the dissertation project, to be a multicultural church, and to reach out the community. However, for growth to be sustained Central Park needs to engage in social ministry as described in Matthew 25:31-46 such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and prisoners, and welcoming the strangers, because the Church has a moral obligation to address socio-economic issues.

To create an environment of growth and self determination at Central Park United Methodist Church, the following proposed plan for ministry will sustain the vision and the mission of Central Park UMC, and in so doing help the congregation toward vitality and growth.

Central Park United Methodist Church’s vision is to become a multicultural church under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Her mission statement is to make disciples for Jesus Christ.

Central Park UMC must be engaged in the process of Reaching out.

We learned from the surveys that a high percentage of the people in the Central Park community were interested in having a church in their community. Central Park UMC must therefore:

- Provide a variety of worship opportunities and community education
- Provide community events for our neighborhood
- Make recreation available to persons of all ages at all times of the day and year
- Serve in the role of referral and advocacy
• Reach out to potential members
• Service the varying needs of persons in our community
• Provide a recovery ministry
• Provide social services to the community
• Address the issue of drug abuse
• Address the issue of poverty
• Address the issues of parenting, and female heads of households
• Take part in the community economic development process (See table 5)
Table 5: Short, Medium and Long Term Action Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Short term</th>
<th>Medium term</th>
<th>Long term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Worship</td>
<td>New worship opportunities</td>
<td>Space to accommodate</td>
<td>Sustain them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Community Education</td>
<td>Children’s Leadership Institute- Mentoring Program-After School Program</td>
<td>Space to accommodate</td>
<td>Expanded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Referral</td>
<td>Assess what’s available</td>
<td>Do it</td>
<td>Sustain it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Recovery Programs.</td>
<td>Address the issue of addiction in the community</td>
<td>Do it</td>
<td>Sustain it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Recreation</td>
<td>Start given current spaces Inviting playground</td>
<td>Expand space and facilities</td>
<td>Total recreation program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Reach out</td>
<td>Personal contacts</td>
<td>Ecumenical approach that recognizes those in our community.</td>
<td>Evolving and growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Service needs</td>
<td>Children and Youth program</td>
<td>Other group needs</td>
<td>Continued programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Community events</td>
<td>Mix and mingle events (fish fry, ice cream social, sales, Dinner, Community Breakfast)</td>
<td>Programs in new spaces</td>
<td>Sustained program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 **Central Park UMC must be engaged in the process of Caring and Nurturing**

- Connect new members/regular visitors

- Staffing model fits ministry plan
• Express a clear vision of what our nurturing needs are

• Revitalized educational processes

• Take advantage of our location

• Maintain a strong sense of inclusiveness and diversity (multi-cultural)

• Provide enhanced small group opportunities for all members of our faith community

• Help our church to discern God’s will for our congregation

• Help our church to understand the needs of those we serve

• Provide a vehicle by which individuals, small groups, and the congregation can grow in their faith through exploring how God can be at work through them
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Short term</th>
<th>Medium term</th>
<th>Long term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mentoring connections for new members</td>
<td>Intentional monitoring of new members</td>
<td>Expansion to a systematic program of mentoring</td>
<td>Sustained new member mentoring program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Concise printed vision of Central Park’s nurturing/caring needs</td>
<td>Creation of plan that supports vision for nurturing/caring needs</td>
<td>Plan becomes standard by which congregation measures our success for nurturing/caring</td>
<td>Evolving vision continues to drive our ministries for nurturing and caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Small groups (Sunday School, Choir, Disciple, Prayer, Grief)</td>
<td>50% of our church involved in small groups</td>
<td>75% of our church involved in small groups</td>
<td>90% of our church involved in small groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Revitalized Educational plan</td>
<td>Overall educational mission statement prepared &amp; distributed</td>
<td>Development of wide variety of educational programs for all ages</td>
<td>Continued evaluation and redevelopment of opportunities for spiritual growth via mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Individual reflection for discernment of God’s will</td>
<td>Individual study guides prepared and distributed</td>
<td>Ongoing opportunities for reflection and growth</td>
<td>Continued reflection and growth opportunities to maintain openness in discerning God’s will.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Congregation</td>
<td>Sermon series on determination of God’s will and opportunities for service</td>
<td>Retreats and workshops for groups to experience spiritual discernment</td>
<td>Sustained learning as a body of faith about God’s plan for His people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Understand and minister to the hungers and needs</td>
<td>Growth through individual, group, and community experiences</td>
<td>Expansion of opportunities and experiences</td>
<td>Sustained opportunities and experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Central Park UMC must be engaged in the process of Sending and Serving

- Develop and express a vision for intentional and programmatic approaches to Sending and Serving that allows prioritization of the many opportunities available
- Provide diverse and numerous opportunities for ministry service near and far
- Help members of our church family to understand their gifts for mission
- Encourage members to participate in missions in a variety of ways on a daily basis
- Offer training/mentoring for learning how to do outreach service
- Reach out to the homeless and needy of our own community
- Link with and assist other people and other churches in the world
- Help the congregation take part in advocacy issues
- Provide education about cultural, social justice, advocacy and current conditions for all ages
- Partner with institutions in our neighborhood to do outreach
Table 7: Short, Medium and Long Term Action Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Short term</th>
<th>Medium term</th>
<th>Long term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 3-month agenda to assess local needs</td>
<td>Develop the 3-month plan</td>
<td>Execute the 3-month plan</td>
<td>Revisit and redo the 3-month plan regularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Training sessions for members on mission opportunities</td>
<td>Plan training session</td>
<td>Execute repeat training sessions</td>
<td>Regularly provide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Diverse mission opportunities</td>
<td>Provide a mission opportunity every quarter</td>
<td>Add other mission opportunities</td>
<td>Frequent opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 100% apportionment</td>
<td>Pay the 10% of the total income of our church</td>
<td>Budget 100% of apportionment</td>
<td>Continue to support the apportionment for our connectional ministries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Increase budget beyond local church</td>
<td>Increase by 10%</td>
<td>Include 10% of the capital campaign for outreach</td>
<td>Continue to grow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish relationships</td>
<td>Continue and sustain</td>
<td>Incorporate their suggestions</td>
<td>Evaluate how we’re doing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Central Park UMC must be engaged in the process of Enabling and Empowering

- Promote stewardship
- Align staffing with programmatic needs
- Grow the financial resources of the church (Operating funds, Capital Funds and Trust Fund)
- Provide proper spaces for public gathering
- Provide appropriate means to enable people to come to our facilities
- Provide a Bible Study for the community.
- Organize more opportunity for the community to learn about the African-American culture (Support program for Black history month)
Table 8: Short, Medium and Long Term Action Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Short term</th>
<th>Medium term</th>
<th>Long term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Giving per person is lower</td>
<td>10% growth</td>
<td>15% growth</td>
<td>20% growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage members to give their tithes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sunday School attendance grows</td>
<td>10% more attendance, two new classes</td>
<td>New classes begun for every 10 new members</td>
<td>Sustained growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Visitors who join</td>
<td>10% growth</td>
<td>25% growth</td>
<td>50% growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Larger % of church budget for ministries</td>
<td>5% higher as a %</td>
<td>10% higher as a %</td>
<td>50% higher as a %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of the Problem

At the beginning of this dissertation project, the stated problem how could Central Park United Methodist Church build a multicultural congregation, and what should be done to reach out to the community in the Central Park area. Central Park UMC was a monocultural church; a white congregation located in a 94% African-American community. The issue was raised in terms of: “How can the building of a multicultural congregation at Central Park UMC help the church recover from declining and reach a stage of vitality in order to grow?”

What we have learned from this research project can be explained as follow: First, a group does not need to be homogenous to grow; it can grow as a heterogeneous group. This way of thinking has helped the members of the Central Park United Methodist Church to transition from an ethnocentric approach to a more welcoming ethnorelative perspective in doing ministry. Second, we have learned that for Central Park United Methodist Church to become a community church, it has to provide ministry programs that respond to the needs of the community around the church, in other word, it must minister in the context of the community’s culture with sensitivity to the community’s perceived social, and spiritual needs. To do this, Central Park UMC went through a process of development using a model of intercultural sensitivity learning that for
ministry to be effective, it has to be done in the context of the social, economic and political environment of the geographical location of the congregation.

Van Engen got it right in his book, when he talked about the contextualization of the gospel as an attempt to engage the Christian witness of faith and the reality of human existence.

Contextualization involves the shape, style, way-of-life, and organization of the local congregation in relation to its own unique setting, as it seeks to be prophetic, priestly, and kingly in the context. The church itself must become fully and completely contextualized as prophet, priest, and king for the sake of, in dynamic interaction with, and in the midst of the culture.

Third, using both Berger and Luckmann theory of social construction of reality, we have learned that reality is socially constructed, therefore, every congregation for it to be effective must learn to create a new reality, by re inventing itself through the process of actualization. We used Taylor’s politics of recognition and Whitehead’s process theology of becoming and self-determination, to show that every congregation has the potential to engage itself in the process of becoming something new at any given time. Furthermore, re-inventing and re-creation of a new reality is a God given gift to all human beings. A person, or a group of people have the potential to create a new experience and a new reality within the community, and so does Central Park United Methodist Church. This is true; Central Park United Methodist Church has re-invented herself as a community church, and a multicultural congregation. One can come and see people from all different ethnicities and backgrounds sitting and worshipping together in the same congregation as one church. In fact, the vision of Central Park United Methodist Church was formulated to the effect that Central Park United Methodist Church’s vision

was to become a multicultural congregation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Central Park UMC has re created another reality within the context of the church, inside within the members themselves, and out side in the community.

Above all, it was hoped that building a multicultural congregation in the Central Park area would show that the members of the Central Park UMC care for the people in the community at large.

**Evaluation of the Process**

The dissertation project was divided into two phases:

The first phase was to focus inside the church by providing leadership in terms of assessing where the congregation was in the life cycle of congregational life using the tools provided by Saarinen and Dale (see figure 2) and Compton (see figure 3). We learned that the congregation was in the stage of decline and that something had to be done in order to help the church recover from declining to vitality and growth. In the first phase, the congregation was invited into some conversations in the form of workshops which dealt with issues that were necessary to address before reaching out to the community. The pastoral and lay leadership were invited to participate in interviews, read selected material, and respond to questionnaires developed to reveal the needs of the church, and the needs of the community. (See: Appendixes A, B, C, &D)

The second phase was a strategic ministry in which the congregation had to participate in things that were supposed to be done in order to reach the community. The implementation of the strategic model for ministry dealt with the practical involvement of the congregation in responding to the great commission assigned by our Lord Jesus Christ. The following evaluation process was used in the execution of the project: survey
questionnaire, focus group interview, testimonies from members, and direct observation. (See: Appendixes E&F)

The results of the dissertation project were very positive. After the project, we witnessed the formation and birth of a multicultural congregation at Central Park United Methodist Church. This new phenomenon at Central Park United Methodist Church has positively affected and transformed the lives of members of the congregation and lives of people in the Central Park community. One example of this transformation is the enhancement of race relation in the Birmingham community. Central Park United Methodist Church is no longer known as the “White Church,” but as the Multicultural Church, the Church of Everybody.

**Future Implications for Ministry**

This dissertation project, so far, has helped the congregation reinvent itself and re create another reality within the congregation, and has helped the Central Park United Methodist Church create another image in the community. A model of this strategy will be made available through seminars and workshops to other local churches, and districts through the North Alabama Conference where there are many white churches in communities that have experienced demographics transition. This dissertation project is a practical example of a congregation that refuses to die, and chose instead to pay the price of discipleship in doing all they can, to the best of their ability in order to fulfill the great commission of our Lord Jesus Christ, stated by Matthew 28:18-20: “Jesus came to them and said: I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth! Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with
always, even until the end of the world.”

**Conclusion**

This dissertation project has demonstrated that there is a need for a paradigm shift in how we do ministry in the church. First, the Church is the body of Christ, and must be in form, kind and nature a multicultural community of all people. Second, the church does not need to be homogenous for it to grow; there is evidence of growth even when the church becomes heterogeneous. Third, the church is in the process of becoming, in other words, to be born again, which is that process of reinvention, and defining a new experience of human existence by creating new reality around through the power of the Holy Spirit. To support this statement, we have shown through the implementation of this dissertation project how members of Central Park United Methodist Church were willing as individuals and as a congregation to undergo a process of cognitive redefinition, in order to create a new reality in the church that has helped them to move from a monocultural congregation to a multicultural congregation.

In view of this, the challenge facing the congregation in the future is to be more intentional in engaging in the process of becoming multicultural. This phenomenon is an event, but for this event to sustain itself, it has to become a process. There is a need for research and documentation of the role of pastoral leadership in order to understand what the pastor can do, and what the profile of the pastor should be in order to sustain the vision of a multicultural church. The writer proposes one image that may be the profile of any pastor in any similar environment. “*The Pastor as: A Community Organizer*” This image has helped the writer to function in an effective way. There is need for research that would look at this model in order to provide the biblical and theological implication
In addition, because the targeted group was African American, there is a need in the future for research that will study the input of black theology and liberation theology for multicultural congregations. These types of theology came to being as reaction and a critique to the main line theology (western theology), there is need to reexamine some of the underline assumptions of these theologies. Black and liberation theology challenge the powerful, and empower the powerless by putting God on the side of the powerless. What would be the significance of the inputs of black and liberation theology on the church as a multicultural community since building a multicultural congregation requires that one deal with the question of relinquishment of power and control?
APPENDIX A

SPECIAL TASK FORCE ON STRATEGIC PLANNING

(Adapted from the Alban Institute: This instrument was used as a guideline for conversation within the congregation for inventory purpose)

History and Heritage

- How do we value our past?
- What have we incorporated into our story of being a congregation from our successes and crises and from our failures?
- How did we evolve into our current set of norms and values, which primarily set the boundaries and determine our way of being a faith community?
- Have we been enriched by or imprisoned by the events of our history?
- When there have been bad experiences, have we had sufficient closure so that we are not limited by our shame about those experiences and our fear of repeat failures?
- How well do we value our past without letting it determine our present and future life together?

Christian Community

- Who are we as a corporate "body of Christ"?
- What is our culture or ethos?
- What kind of climate do we provide for people when they come together?
- Is there an atmosphere of caring and support?
- Is this a place where people can feel they belong and are accepted, regardless of their current or past circumstances?
- Are all people welcome here?
- Do we present an openness that invites strangers into the community of gatherings?
Discernment

- How do we seek to be open to God’s call to us as a faith community?
- What distinguishes us from any other human organization?
- Do our efforts to worship help us discern God’s word and call to us as faithful disciples?
- How well do we employ our spiritual disciplines of prayer, study of Scripture, meditation, worship, and stewardship?

Shared Vision

- What is our way of “being the gospel”?
- Do we regularly engage in efforts to rethink our vision of how we fulfill our mission as a faith community?
- Do we regularly collect information from our setting and look to understand the needs of people around us?
- Do we engage in prayer, meditation, and study of the Scriptures to help us develop our vision?
- How do we determine priorities for using our limited resources?

Making Disciples

- How well do we perform the continuing task of helping people grow in their religious life?
- Do we help individuals discover and claim their particular gifts, skills, and talents?
- Do we help them connect with the faith in ways that contribute to the mission and ministries of the faith?
- How well do we prepare our members to engage in conversion efforts with people who are not part of a faith/belief community?

Ministries in the Community

- What will we accept as our rules and responsibilities to the people who inhabit our geographic space?
- What services do we provide as part of our discernment of what God is calling us to be and do?
- Does our vision include ways in which we can be engaged both corporately and as individual members in mission endeavors?
• How well do we make use of our resources (facilities, wealth, time, and members) to respond to the needs of those in our “defined mission area?”

**Worldview**

• How big is our world going to be?
• How well do we raise awareness of the concerns and needs in the world and of our interdependence and responsibilities?
• Do we offer members opportunities to respond in a variety of ways to the myriad needs in the world?
• Has our vision included concerns that reach beyond our natural day-to-day interactions?

**Relationships**

• How do we value differences and deal with conflicts in congregational life?
• Do we encourage individuals to articulate their own opinions and beliefs and to respect those of others?
• Do we seek to provide ways for people to get their interests and needs cared for without denying others that same privilege?
• Do we intentionally teach ways of framing conflict in win/win rather than win/lose strategies?

**Facing Daily Life**

• How does the congregation help people in their daily routines of work, family, and community activities?
• Does the congregation help provide moral and ethical codes by which members are expected to relate to others?
• How does the congregation provide guidelines in the areas of health, finances, life transitions, and mundane routines?

**Stewardship**

• How do we teach responsible use of resources by individuals and by the community of faith?
• Do we provide help for our members to understand how money and other financial resources are a gift from God?
Leadership

- How well is the congregation developing mutual support and ministry in a partnership between clergy and laity?
- How do we share authority and responsibility?
- Do we provide effective ways to define relationships and roles?
- How do we work together to fulfill our vision of being a faith community?
APPENDIX B

SEED QUESTIONS USED FOR THE QUALITATIVE SURVEY

1. How many people live around the church?
2. Who is moving into the area? Who is leaving? How many two-parent families are there?
3. How many single parents?
4. Is there a need for a church day care?
5. How educated are the adults?
6. What do they care about?
7. How do we relate to them?
8. What kind of ministry should we have?
9. What kind of programs does people want?
10. Should we offer recreation programs?
11. Divorce recovery? Bible Study?
12. Do we have to provide a youth social program?
13. Should we offer a contemporary worship service?
14. What is the best way to tell this community about our church?
15. What do you feel is needed in the Central Park community?
16. What church do you attend?
17. What is your image of this church?
APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE USED TO ASSESS THE INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT INVENTORY IDI

The author used the following 24 questions querying the ability of the Congregation to deal with diversity. The questions would be posed as follows: On a scale of one to five please rate your ability do deal with ...

Your ability

- to deal with frustration, (very poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (very good)
- to deal with interpersonal conflict,
- to deal with unfamiliar situations,
- to deal with changes in lifestyle,
- to deal with stress,
- to deal with pressures to conform,
- to deal with stranger,
- to deal with social alienation,
- to deal with different political systems,

Your ability to

- to communicate in the language of a different culture, (very poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (very good)
- to deal with different social customs,
- to deal with unforeseen problems,
- to initiate interaction with a stranger,
- to enter into meaningful dialogue with other people,
- to deal with communication misunderstandings between myself and others,
- to develop satisfying interpersonal relationships with other people,
- to deal with anxiety,
- to understand another person's point of view,
- to deal with different communication styles,
- to deal with a different educational system,
- to maintain satisfying interpersonal relationships with other people,
- to accurately understand the feelings of another person
- to empathize with another person, and
- to work with other people.
APPENDIX D

EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE IDI
(Scale 1 to 5, 5 being the highest)

How good was the Congregation in terms of their.....

Ability to effectively communicate in.....

1. starting meaningful dialogue with strangers?
(very poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (very good)

2. understanding of a person from who holds another point of view?
(very poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (very good)

3. dealing with misunderstandings?
(very poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (very good)

4. dealing with different communication styles?
(very poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (very good)

Ability to establish interpersonal relationships in ....

1. developing good personal relationships with someone from a different ethnicity?
(very poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (very good)

2. maintaining good personal relationships with someone from a different ethnicity?
(very poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (very good)

3. accurately understanding the feelings of some from a different ethnicity?
(very poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (very good)
APPENDIX E

THREE CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Where are we?

Give your church Analysis

What are we doing well, where do we need to improve?

Where do we want to go?

Do we articulate our mission to meet the Mission of God?

Does the Vision we hold to will hell the church achieve her mission?

How will we get there?

Strategy

1. How do we develop a strategy to reach our community?.

2. How do we develop a strategy to make disciples?.

100
APPENDIX F

EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

_ Do you have a welcoming and hospitality team that is culturally sensitive?

_ Do you have an orientation program for helping new members understand the church and get to know the other members?

_ Do you hold regular social events where all members gather and share food and their cultures with each other?

_ Do you intentionally foster an atmosphere of welcome in and around your church, using diverse visual images and clear information that communicate warmth and openness to all people?

_ Do you pray regularly asking the Holy Spirit to open the hearts of each member to love and respect each other as unique gifts from God?

_ Do you explore, biblically and theologically, God’s call for inclusiveness in church and community?

_ Do you offer training resources and seminars on racism awareness and cross-cultural relations for church and community?

_ Do you provide opportunities for your church community to encounter and develop relationships with people of different cultures and ethnicities?

_ Do you consider the gifts and skills of the diverse members of the church in mission planning and developing church programs?

_ Do you require your leadership to take racism and cross-cultural awareness training, including rites of passage and pastoral care where the church is multi-ethnic?

_ Do you as a church have a strategy for sharing concerns and issues and develop ways to live out the vision?

_ Do you have a multicultural youth program or forum?
_ Do you provide opportunities for younger and older generations, especially 1st and 2nd generations of minority ethnic people to share ideas and concerns, and to develop a better understanding of each other?

_ Do you sponsor or develop programs for young people not only to experience different cultures but also to learn how different cultures care for the elderly?

_ Do you reflect and seek to discern the mission to which God is calling you? Do you encourage the voices of minority ethnic members to be heard in this process?

_ Do you consider seriously the gifts and needs of all members as you priority and resource your mission tasks?

_ Does your worship reflect the languages and cultures of your congregation and the surrounding community?

_ Do you use more than one language during your worship?

_ Do your worship leaders have access to and use multicultural resources?

_ Do you welcome a variety of worship styles that draw on the experiences and practices of different ethnic groups whether or not your actual membership includes minority ethnic people?

_ Do you provide your young people with opportunities to participate, create and experience different worship styles?
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


