

InterVarsity's Commitment to Biblical Multiethnicity

By InterVarsity's Multiethnic Task Force

In 1992, Steve Hayner (then InterVarsity/USA president) and Samuel Escobar (former IVCF/Canada president) convened a task force of about 30 people, both within and outside of InterVarsity, to develop a theological foundation for multiethnicity in InterVarsity as a movement. The following article is the product of their work.

OUR COMMITMENT

InterVarsity's commitment to multiethnic ministry flows from the person and work of Jesus Christ and the nature of our mission field. It is our study of the Scriptures and our vision of the Kingdom of God which has led us to engage the university in all its ethnic diversity.

Since our founding, our Fellowship has strived to live out our commitment to multiethnicity. In the 1940s, our first president, C. Stacey Woods, allowed no distinction in staff assignments based on race. For over four decades both white and non-white speakers at Urbana have raised issues of justice and racism. Both staff and students fought segregation in the 1960s. During the past three decades numerous staff have looked inward as well as outward, challenging their own unconscious bias and inconsistency, and enabling the Fellowship to grow in its resolve and its experience of multiethnicity.

The times call us once again to a deepening of our sensitivity to multiethnic issues and to a reaffirmation of our commitment to train multiethnic leadership for universities and colleges, churches and society as a whole. InterVarsity's commitment to multiethnic expressions of faith, fellowship and worship is rooted in the desire to apply biblical principles to the ways we relate to one another and to the ways we carry out our ministry.

The changing demographics of American society, college campuses and InterVarsity campus fellowships increases the challenge for InterVarsity to become more biblically consistent and to fulfill its evangelistic mandate. As campuses reflect greater ethnic diversity, InterVarsity students, faculty and staff must embrace God's vision for the whole world, so that we can become more multiethnic in our outreach. If we do not, we should recognize that we would be abandoning both our Scriptural mandate and also an increasing proportion of the university.

OUR DECLARATION

1. The God-given Value and Dignity of All Humanity

We affirm the worth of all peoples and the creativity expressed in all ethnic groups. All men and women are created in the image of God for a life of harmonious relationships with God, other human beings and creation. As God's children, we honor the Creator by cherishing people, regardless of ethnic or national origin, and valuing them as created beings able to enhance life through their unique creative endeavors and insights. In acknowledging that all peoples have much to offer and to learn from each other we recognize that those with whom we have daily contact are gifts of God to be welcomed and embraced. In supporting each other and creating contexts in which all may flourish we reflect the Creator's love for all people.

(Genesis 1:26-29; 9:1-3, 18-19; 10:4, 20, 31-32; 11:4-9; Isaiah 40:25-31; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17)*

We affirm this because:

- Biblical truth is always clothed in the particulars of culture. Everyone lives out his or her faith in the context of some group and its heritage. We proclaim a gospel which is needed in and applicable to any culture or people.
- Throughout the Bible, God emphasizes his love and concern for all peoples, often disrupting the exclusiveness of homogeneous groups in order to reveal himself to peoples of all ethnic groups.

It is appropriate and timely for InterVarsity to affirm our commitment to ethnic diversity because:

- We rejoice in the ethnic variety exhibited in the university and our campus groups, and in the cultural gifts which staff, students, faculty and supporters bring to InterVarsity.
- Christian community has full expression only when ethnic heritage and individual giftedness are valued.

(Acts 10-11; Jonah 1-4; Daniel 1-7, 9; Acts 15:1-21; Acts 15:22-35; Colossians 3:10-11; Revelation 5:6-10; 7:9-11; Acts 6:5-7; 10:34-38, 44-48; 11:18; 15:7-11, 22-35; Revelation 7:9-11)

2. Humanity's Need for God's Redemption and Transformation

We acknowledge human failure to achieve reconciliation, and the need for every culture to be transformed. Everyone, everywhere, has rebelled against God and his created order. The inherent ethnocentricity and prejudice of both individuals and ethnic groups are expressions of the sin of pride which has separated people from God and also from one another. This has led to racism and

injustice. One way that both majority and minority people express sin is to use power to oppress those who are different rather than to build them up. We are also prone, subtly and even unwittingly, to perpetuate racism and prejudice in the fabric of our society and its structures. This happens in all cultures, reflects our common fallenness and prevents people from flourishing according to God's intention. We all need to repent of these unbiblical and unrighteous attitudes and actions.

(Genesis 3; Isaiah 10:1-2; Habakkuk 1-2; Romans 1-3; Galatians 2)*

We affirm this because:

- Many Christians have been blinded to the ways in which homogeneous groups limit and distort our way of thinking, including our perception of Scriptural teaching about multiethnicity. Even sincere believers have maintained a vested interest in not seeing.
- Society's institutions in general and Christian organizations in particular, have moved all too slowly to offer means for crossing ethnic and cultural barriers. Neither majority nor minority Christians have taken full advantage of existing means nor been sufficiently vigorous in creating others.
- Ethnocentric arrogance has tended to squelch the identity and diminish the worth of those who are different by establishing unbiblical, racist categories; such prejudice has robbed individuals, communities and churches of a sense of their true dignity before God, of the honor and affirmation they rightfully deserve, and of the opportunity and resources to serve God and others.
- Believers need each other to resist fallen humanity's natural tendencies to consider ethnocentric viewpoints as the presuppositions for determining truth or establishing privilege.

It is appropriate and timely for InterVarsity to affirm our commitment to transformation because:

- We affirm the value of diverse ethnic heritages on campus, while desiring to submit all our conclusions to a holistic understanding of Scriptural norms.
- Students, faculty and administrators have become inhibited from taking a Christian stance by the prevalence on campus of moral relativism and a misguided militancy which, in seeking to affirm diversity, have instead fostered isolation and distrust among groups.

(Galatians 2:1-21; Jonah 1-4; John 4:4-42; 1 Corinthians 1:10-31; Acts 10:23-28; 11:1-2; 15:1-5; 26:1-11; Galatians 2:11-14)*

3. The Power and Example of Christ's Atoning Sacrifice for Reconciliation

We embrace Christ's call to foster both divine and human reconciliation. Christ's atoning death is the basis for restored human community as well as restored fellowship with the Father. Through the cross God calls human beings to be reconciled with himself and with one another. All the walls of division that separate people and suppress their flourishing are torn down. God calls his people to follow Christ in humbling themselves and bringing reconciliation, even at the cost of personal sacrifice.

(Ephesians 2; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21; Galatians 3:22-29)*

We affirm this because:

- Christ has called his disciples to be his ambassadors and ministers of reconciliation.
- In Christ, peoples of all cultural and ethnic heritages dare to confess sin, and to forgive one another, creating a visible community united by mutual love, working together in service and mission.

It is appropriate and timely for InterVarsity to affirm our commitment to reconciliation because:

- Humility and partnership will cause us to continually reassess our ministry goals, staffing strategies and funding priorities in light of our biblical commitments and mission.
- Creating partnerships with believers and organizations whose ethnic background is different from our own can promote a spirit of innovation and affirming trust.
- We honor God and his people everywhere in the world by becoming more open to ethnically diverse forms of worship and methods of evangelism and training.

(2 Corinthians 5:11-21; Colossians 3:8-17; Acts 1:8; 26:12-23; Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 7-8; John 4:4-42)

4. God's Intention for His People to be a Multiethnic Witnessing Community

We commit ourselves to be living signs of God's Kingdom. God's intention is to create a new humanity from every people and nation. In the power of God's Spirit, followers of Jesus are to become a multiethnic and diverse community that expresses the unity of the body of Christ as it lives out the values of the Kingdom. We yearn for all peoples to flourish in the context of renewed relationships with their Creator and with each other. Although our efforts will always be imperfect we seek to embody intentionally in the here and now the qualities of the new community which God one day will bring in its fullness.

(Genesis 12:1-3; Daniel 1-6; Galatians 3:26-29; Colossians 1; 1 Thessalonians 1; Ephesians 2; Acts 8-15)*

We affirm this because:

- The distinguishing marks of a Christian have become blurred in modern society, and it is essential to model authentic Christian community.
- The challenge to overcome prejudice and racism begins with ourselves and in the communities in which we worship and serve.
- Believers of all ethnic backgrounds are called to follow Christ in ministering together to the full range of human needs which demand compassionate response.
- Christians are called to be a prophetic people working vigorously at righting injustices and healing the wounds of oppression.
- Our understanding of Scripture, community and of God himself is enriched by insights originating in diverse ethnic heritages.
- Multiethnic expression of the Body of Christ offer hope for the fulfilling of the Great Commission through the kinds of partnerships which the new missionary situation demands.

It is appropriate and timely for InterVarsity to affirm our commitment to multiethnic witness because:

- We endeavor to be peacemakers, serving as bridges toward the reconciliation of people separated by suspicion and hatred, and demonstrating biblical patterns for mutual empowerment, and service.
- We support InterVarsity's commitment to multiethnicity as an essential expression of the Kingdom of God, irrespective of the pressures of current ideologies (such as "political correctness").
- We reaffirm InterVarsity's commitment to "engage the campus in all its ethnic diversity" as essential to the Church's mission of proclaiming Christ to the whole world.
- We affirm InterVarsity's commitment to train students and staff in multiethnic realities.
- We are open to formulating strategies for campus engagement which will explore diverse and functional models of both structure and leadership.

(Acts 6; 8; 10-11: 15; Acts 2:42-47; 4:25-37; Romans 12; Isaiah 61:1-11; Luke 4:14-30; 6:17-36; Matthew 25:31-46; James 5:1-6; Revelation 21:1-8; Genesis 20; 41:50-52; 50:15-5 1; Joshua 2:8-14; Ruth 1-4; Job 1-42; Matthew 4:23-5:16; Matthew 8-9; Mark 7-8; Luke 10:25-37; John 4:4-42; Acts 2; Romans 11:11-36; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21; John 3:16-17; Acts 2; Revelation 7:9-11; Acts

1:8; Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 7-8; John 4:4-42; Acts 6:1-7; 11:19-26; 13:1-3; 14:26-28; 15; Galatians 2: 1-10)*

CONCLUSION

As followers of Christ engaged in reaching an unbelieving yet searching segment of society, we are convinced that a wide variety of multiethnic expression in worship and witness offers inviting, visible evidence of the reality of God's kingdom. We look forward to the fulfilling of the Great Commission together, and together to be counted among that "great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9).

FOR MORE RESOURCES, VISIT

<http://www.mem.intervarsity.org/res>

** The passages selected are not exhaustive, nor are they proof-texts. Whole chapters and parts of chapters have been included to encourage further study.*