Models That Move Diversity

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Author Note

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I have no known conflict of interest.

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand and describe how youth leaders perceived the effectiveness of their youth ministry in engaging multicultural teenagers in Europe. Data were collected from 24 participants in 14 European countries using semi-structured interviews. Each interview was approximately one hour in length, recorded, and transcribed. The transcriptions were imported into NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis tool, and coded using initial and focused coding. The findings discovered four church models that helped or hindered participants’ ability to engage ethnically and culturally diverse youth. The churches in each model had shared commonalities that impacted the cultural diversity of the church. Some of the commonalities included perceptions of the diversity in their city and perceptions of mission. The models revealed by the data include Multicultural Churches with Multicultural Youth Groups (Multi-Multi), Multicultural Churches with Monocultural Youth Groups (Multi-Mono), Monocultural Churches with Monocultural Youth Groups (Mono-Mono), and Monocultural Churches with Multicultural Youth Groups (Mono-Multi). Based on the findings, implications for practice are offered to those who wish to engage culturally diverse teens.

*Keywords*: Europe, Youth Ministry, Multicultural Youth, Church Models, Church Diversity.

# Introduction

Several years ago, I was combining two of my favorite pastimes— talking about youth ministry and drinking coffee. That this was occurring in Vienna, Austria, was an added bonus. For the past hour, I had been attentive to Karl (pseudonym), a national youth leader who was sharing about the challenges of youth ministry in an Austrian national church. Since I led the youth ministry at an international church in the city, there were many similarities between our churches and youth groups.

Knowing that my church and youth group was diverse, with over 100 nationalities represented, Karl segued the conversation to multicultural youth ministry. Curiously, I asked Karl how many youth ministries in Austria were multicultural. He paused momentarily and put down his coffee, deep in thought. Finally, he replied, “I cannot think of any.”

His response and similar responses of youth leaders in other European countries prompted me to explore how youth leaders in Europe perceive multicultural youth ministry. As I researched this topic, a surprising finding emerged from the data. There seemed to be church models that moved the diversity in the church. Some models moved the diversity to increase, while others seemed to decrease the ethnic and cultural diversity in the church and youth group.

# Method

# Problem Statement

Since World War II, the population of Europe has grown increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse.[[1]](#endnote-1) The influx of immigrants and refugees from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in 2015 and the recent wave of Ukrainian refugees have brought many new people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds into Europe— many of these under 18 years old.[[2]](#endnote-2) While cross-national research related to adolescent health and psychological well-being is abundant[[3]](#endnote-3), research to understand and describe perceptions of youth leaders on effectiveness of their youth ministries engaging multicultural teenagers in continental Europe is lacking.

# Purpose Statement

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand and describe how youth leaders perceive the effectiveness of their youth ministries in engaging multicultural teenagers in continental Europe.

# Research Question

The central research question for this study was: How do youth leaders describe their youth ministry’s effectiveness engaging multicultural teenagers in continental Europe?

# Scope

The scope of this study was delimited to continental Europe. In total, 24 participants from 13 European countries participated in this study. The participants selected for this study were in or near cities with large populations due to the higher concentrations of ethnic minorities and immigrants.

The study focused on Protestant Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches in continental Europe. This focus was based on denominational differences in youth ministry praxis. Kageler’s study between Baptists and Anglican churches indicated small yet significant differences in youth ministry praxis between churches that practiced pedobaptism and those that did not.[[4]](#endnote-4) According to Kageler, churches that practiced infant baptism tended to do less outreach to teenagers.[[5]](#endnote-5) Given the purpose of my study, Protestant Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches were fertile soil for data. Related, there is significant growth among Pentecostal and Charismatic churches worldwide.[[6]](#endnote-6)

The study participants were male and female youth leaders with a minimum of one year of ministry experience at their current church or at least five years of youth ministry experience before changing church.

# Limitations

The a priori evidence suggested that male youth leaders outnumber female youth leaders in continental Europe. Finding female youth leaders in cities with the requisite number of cultures and ethnicities was challenging. To mitigate this limitation, I leveraged network sampling by asking participants to recommend female youth leaders. Another limitation included the inability to travel due to the pandemic. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions in Europe, I conducted interviews using Zoom. The interviews were conducted in English; however, two participants requested the presence of a translator to help when necessary.

# Participant Selection

To select participants for my study, I used two types of purposeful sampling: maximum variation and network sampling. In total, 24 youth leaders from 14 countries participated in the study. Study participants included 16 male and eight female youth leaders with a minimum of one year of ministry experience at their current church or at least five years of youth ministry experience before changing churches. As previously noted, the churches from which I selected participants included a mix of youth leaders from Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches. Most of the participants were from national churches. However, two participants were from international churches. Table 1 details the demographics of the study participants.

Table 1. Study Participants

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Pseudonym | Sex | National identity | Country of ministry | Years  in ministry | Group size | Church structure |
| Alois | M | Czech | Czech Republic | 10-15 | 15-25 | Mono-Mono |
| Andreia | F | Portuguese | Portugal | 25-30 | 75-100 | Multi-Multi |
| Carmen | F | Scot | Spain | 1-5 | 20-30 | Multi-Multi |
| Ciprian | M | Romanian | Romania | 10-20 | 15-20 | Multi-Multi |
| Dalibor | M | Czech | Czech Republic | 1-5 | 8-10 | Mono-Mono |
| Dima | M | Romanian | Romania | 5-10 | 10-15 | Mono-Multi |
| Dragomir | M | Romanian | Romania | 1-5 | 10-15 | Mono-Mono |
| Efrain | M | Spanish | Spain | 10-15 | 15-20 | Multi-Multi |
| Elsa | F | Portuguese | Austria | 1-5 | 8-11 | Multi-Mono |
| Enrique | M | Spanish | Spain | 10-15 | 40-50 | Multi-Multi |
| Iosif | M | Bulgarian | Bulgaria | 30-35 | 13-16 | Mono-Mono |
| John | M | American | Italy | 1-5 | 10-12 | Multi-Mono |
| Joos | M | American | Belgium | 1-5 | 10-15 | Multi-Multi |
| Justýna | F | Czech | Czech Republic | 5-10 | 4-5 | Mono-Mono |
| Kim | F | American | Bosnia-Herzegovina | 20-25 | 10-15 | Multi-Multi |
| Mary | F | Austrian | Austria | 5-10 | 10-20 | Multi-Mono |
| Michał | M | Polish | Poland | 10-15 | 5-6 | Mono-Mono |
| Pascal | M | French | France | 10-15 | 20-30 | Multi-Multi |
| Petr | M | Czech | Czech Republic | 5-10 | 4-5 | Multi-Mono |
| Timotheus | M | \* | Germany | 5-10 | 50-60 | Multi-Multi |
| Trey | M | Finnish | Finland | 1-5 | 50-60 | Multi-Mono |
| Tristan | M | Czech | Czech Republic | 15-20 | 5-10 | Mono-Mono |
| Wilda | F | American | Austria | 15-20 | 5-10 | Multi-Multi |
| Wilma | F | American | Croatia | 15-20 | 15-20 | Mono-Multi |

*Note*: \* One participant declined to give a national identity and instead identified as “a citizen of heaven.” M= Male; F= Female.

# Methodology

Data were collected from 24 participants in 14 European countries using semi-structured interviews. Each interview was approximately one hour in length, recorded, and transcribed. The transcriptions were imported into NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis tool, and coded using initial and focused coding. The interviews were conducted in English, but translators assisted in two instances. Two participants, feeling their English was rudimentary, asked if their spouses could be in the room and translate as needed. Being fluent in their indigenous language, I verified what they said in English and their indigenous languages. All the interviews were transcribed into English before coding.

Due to COVID-19 and stringent travel restrictions levied by most national governments in Europe, travel to conduct personal interviews was practically impossible. All interviews were conducted via Zoom using what Dzubinski termed technology-assisted qualitative data collection (TAQDAC).[[7]](#endnote-7)

# Findings

A surprising finding from the study was four church models that arose from the participants’ depictions of their churches. I developed a framework to demonstrate the models of churches that exist in my data (See Figure 1). The churches in each model had shared commonalities that impacted the cultural diversity of the church. Some of the commonalities included perceptions of the diversity in their city and perceptions of mission.

Figure 1. Church and Youth Group Diversity Model

A white squares with black text

Description automatically generated

The most commonly described model was the multicultural church with a multicultural youth group (Multi-Multi). Eleven participants described their church as Multi-Multi. The second most common church structure that emerged was the monocultural church with a monocultural youth group (Mono-Mono). Seven youth leaders described their churches as Mono-Mono. Five participants described their churches as multicultural with a monocultural youth group (Multi-Mono). The monocultural church with a multicultural youth group (Mono-Multi) was the least common church framework. Only one participant described their church as Mono-Multi. In the following pages, I will briefly describe the youth leaders’ perceptions of their church structures and the commonalities found among the churches in each framework.

## Multi-Multi: Multicultural Churches with Multicultural Youth Groups.

Eleven youth leaders described their church structures as Multi-Multi (see Table 1). Further, the churches that shared the Multi-Multi model were distributed across Western and Eastern Europe. There were significant shared commonalities among the participants who identified their church structures as Multi-Multi. These commonalities include perceptions of the city in which they served, perceptions of their church, and perceptions of their mission.

Perceptions of the City

All participants who described their church as Multi-Multi also described their cities as culturally and ethnically diverse. In Portugal, Andreia noted that much of the recent immigration seemed to be coming from former Portuguese territories in Africa and Latin America. According to Andreia,

Most of the people from Africa and Brazil speak Portuguese. Brazilian is different with the accent and some words, but we understand each other. Although African immigrants have different local languages, Portuguese is a common language they all speak. In my city, we have Brazilian families, African families, and Portuguese-born families—it’s diverse. It is not monochromatic at all. When my son comes home from school, he uses Brazilian expressions, and I explain to him in Portuguese, “We don’t say that. We say it differently.” In the school, they are changing up some of the curriculum, and they are using Brazilian poems and African stories so that kids can relate to those cultures, which helps them be more open.

Joos described the diversity where he lived in Brussels, Belgium, which is northeast of Portugal. Where Andreia noted international diversity in the city, Joos noted both international and intra-European immigrants. Joos commented,

Brussels is the seat of the European Union, and it’s really, really diverse. The city of Brussels has quite a few, obviously, ethnic Belgians, but we also have a lot of every other kind of European. Additionally, there are huge populations of Moroccans, various Arabic populations, and a very, very large African population. There are Asians as well. Basically, there’s people from everywhere in a smaller city, if that makes any sense.

In Romania, Ciprian described the diversity found in the city of Bucharest. In his view, the shortage of workers, the government’s response, and the presence of Roma drove the city’s diversity. Ciprian stated,

We have about two and a half to three million people in our city. And most of them, of course, are Romanian citizens. Statistics say that we now have around 100,000 foreigners in the city. So, the city is growing. Every week we have planeloads of people from Nepal, Philippines, and Sri Lanka arriving in the country. The Romanian government last year, and for the last two years, kept doubling the number of work permits that they allow foreign workers because Romania has such a shortage of workers.

In the city and our church, about 10% to 20% of the people are from the Gypsy Roma minority. There are also many Hungarians in the city. About half of the approximately 100,000 foreign workers who live in and around the city are from the West, like from the European Union and North America. But I’ve been seeing more and more from Asia, the Philippines, Nepal, and students from Africa. I’m also seeing more people from the Middle East. We have a lot of Syrians in the city; some of them are Romanian citizens now because they were students in Romania in the 80s. They arrived during communist times. For example, the Romanian version of Dr. Fauci is Dr. Arafa, who is a Romanian-Palestinian-Syrian.

Ciprian noted that the government allowed more foreign workers into the country to alleviate the shortage of workers due to massive emigration. Nevertheless, all participants who identified their churches as Multi-Multi also identified their cities as diverse. Interestingly participants in the Multi-Multi category also depicted shared commonalities about their churches.

Perceptions of the Church

The two most common descriptors participants in Multi-Multi churches used to depict their churches were diverse membership and diverse teams.

Diverse Membership**.** Timotheus had the most nationals represented in his church compared to the other churches in the Multi-Multi category. He reported that “60%” of the church attendees were German, and “40%” were from other countries. Timotheus described it this way,

We have 25 nations represented in our church. We have Russian-speaking people, English-speaking people, French-speaking and Korean-speaking. We have a little bit more African languages, but I don’t know all the names of the African languages. I don’t have that information in front of me, but I’m guessing our church is 60/40—about 60% German and 40% multicultural.

Six participants in the Multi-Multi category, Andreia, Ciprian, Enrique, Joos, Kim, and Pascal, noted that about half of their church participants were nationals and half from diverse cultures. Ciprian described how his church became more multicultural during the 2 years of the pandemic. Ciprian explained,

Through the years, the church’s demographics have varied; now, with the pandemic, it changed. For example, a few years ago, at the start of the pandemic, we were three-quarters Romanian. Some Romanians left for different reasons, and we have started a new congregation for Nepalese, and we are seeing an increase [in diversity]. At the start of the pandemic, we only had one Nepalese. Now we started a separate meeting for them, and they have like 50 to 60 people, at least, participating. So now I would say the church is 50% Romanian and 50% other nationalities. We have Americans and Canadians. The other groups would be Western Europeans—we have British and Dutch people. We have lesser numbers of people from Africa, and occasionally, some people from South America. Two ladies joined our gatherings last month, one is from Venezuela, and the other is from Brazil.

While explaining the diversity in his church, Joos alluded that it was challenging to know who classified as Belgian—because the European phenotype is no longer exclusively White. Joos described it this way,

Our church has a sizable African population. So quite a few Congolese people are members of the Church. It also has a healthy Belgian group, especially in the French service, which happens at night. Also, there’s a sizable Filipino population and a large smattering of people from all over the place. Probably the largest groups would be Europeans and people of African descent. Those would probably be the two biggest groups. It gets complicated because the African people I’m thinking of are of African descent but are fully Belgian if that makes any sense. So as far as people who are Belgian, I would easily put that at least 50% to 60% of the church are people who are not expats. Perhaps that number is even higher of people who are not expats, they feel that Belgium is their home, but they come from a more international background.

Where Timotheus had the most nationals in his church, Carmen, Efrain, and Wilda observed that nationals were the cultural minority in their church. Wilda had the least number of nationals in her church. Interestingly, while the church was culturally diverse, it was ethnically homogenous. Wilda described the diversity this way,

Our church demographic is very similar to the city. We have lots of Europeans from lots of different European nations. But we are also predominantly White and have a smattering of different ethnicities. But Western European and American are the predominant ethnicities. I would put that a 10% to 90%. So, 10% Austrian, and 90% everything else.

Participants from Multi-Multi churches described both their city and church as diverse. Moreover, their churches were diverse in their diversity. Some Multi-Multi churches had more people of color than other Multi-Multi churches, while other churches had more European immigrants. Nevertheless, this group of churches seemed to embrace their diversity, which extended to their leadership teams.

Diverse Leaders. The Multi-Multi group of churches also shared the commonality of diverse leadership in the church. Sometimes, diversity manifested itself in the church’s pastoral leadership, sometimes in the diversity of the youth leaders, and often in both areas. For example, Carmen, Joos, Kim, and Wilda were not from the country they served, and all described their youth leadership teams as diverse. Joos was from the United States (US), and his lead pastor was from a different European country other than where the church is located. Joos noted that his team consisted of mainly cultural hybrids,

So our typical team is a little new, and it’s about five people besides us. Of those five, one is Congolese but is Belgian Congolese fully. Her parents are both Congolese, but she was born in Belgium and grew up in Belgium. Two others are Parisian French. He’s from Portuguese background, and she is from some African background, but both are Parisian French. The other couple, he is half Flemish, half American, and grew up in the United States. She’s from New Jersey and is fully American.

Likewise, Carmen was Scottish and was serving in Spain. Additionally, the lead pastors of her church were from the US. She described the diversity of her youth leaders this way,

We have more Spanish speaking than English speaking, which has been a challenge for me at times. We have a Nigerian and two Bolivians, some from Catalonia, a few girls from the States, and one from Panama. It’s quite a mixture. Most are *extranjeros* (foreigners).

However, churches pastored by nationals in the Multi-Multi category also reported having diverse teams. Pascal was French and served in a French church; however, the church elders and youth leadership team included French Africans. Pascal explained,

We’ve got leaders from 25 to, let’s say, 50 years old. Three of them are of African origin. And three of them are French of French origin. This gives us a different perspective on how the team deals with the different discussion topics.

Without exception, the youth leaders represented in the Multi-Multi category described their church’s membership and leadership teams as diverse. The European churches in the Multi-Multi category followed a similar pattern of diverse leadership.

Perceptions of Mission

A third commonality described by the participants was that of mission. Participants often described mission as supporting foreign missions, engaging in evangelism, or both. The only exception was Enrique, who admitted that the church did not participate in foreign missions but was missional because they participated in local evangelism. Enrique clarified,

I think that our church is intentionally missional. It is really focused on pastoring and mentoring. I think that’s our strongest area for the church. We could also talk about missions and evangelism. The church does not participate in missions, but we do participate in evangelism.

Enrique described how his church was intentionally missional as he shared a story of a Latin American gang member reached by the church evangelism team. Enrique described the encounter,

Just recently, one of the younger people came from El Salvador. He came from a gang there. They were going to kill him, so he had to leave the country. He came without anything. We spoke to him about Jesus, he came to the church, and he had an encounter with Jesus. He told us his story, and we prayed for him. Now he’s really involved and is one of the people that always come to youth. He is always the first person at church.

The other participants in the Multi-Multi category also emphasized the importance of mission in their church. They shared stories of supporting foreign missions, participating in missions trips, and engaging in evangelism locally. Ciprian’s observations concisely captured the views of the other participants about mission, specifically his comments about being a glocal church, that is, a local church with a global impact. Ciprian stated,

We try to be at what is called a glocal church. It’s not just a catchphrase but a physical manifestation of a church community that comes together locally but has a global impact—an impact in the city, in Romania, and in other countries. We support missionaries in Africa, the Middle East, China, and Japan. We’re trying to be not just doing missions, like foreign missions, but we are also missional. Not just focused on the Sunday morning emphasis, but a 24/7 emphasis on reaching the lost. Being missional is one of our priorities. We do that through small groups, or missional community, to encourage people to see their life as missionaries when they go to their job in their business and so forth.

In summary, youth leaders in the Multi-Multi category shared perceptions regarding the diversity of their city. They also stated that their church membership and youth leadership teams were diverse. The church’s pastoral leadership was often diverse, and five of the twelve youth leaders were expatriates. All the youth leaders, except Efrain, noted that their church and youth ministry supported and participated in foreign missions. However, without exception, all labeled their churches as missional—engaging in evangelism across the wide range of cultures in their city.

Mono-Mono: Monocultural Churches With Monocultural Youth Groups

Seven participants described their churches as monocultural with a monocultural youth group (Mono-Mono). As shown in Table 1, all seven churches were in Eastern Europe. The youth leaders in the Mono-Mono category shared common perceptions about leadership teams and mission. Five of the youth leaders held similar perceptions about the diversity of their city, except for Dalibor and Iosif.

Perceptions of Leadership

All of the participants noted that their youth leadership teams were homogenous. With one minor exception from Tristian, all the participants noted the ethnic racial identity (ERI) of their youth leadership teams matched the national identity. Tristian’s exception came to light as he described the youth leadership teams in his church network.

Tristan: In every town that we have a youth group, there is a team. One youth leader who is usually older, like 25-30. The team consists of teenagers who help with the youth group.

Tony: Are they mostly Czech?

Tristan: Yes, yes. Oh, and we have one Vietnamese youth leader.

Tony: You have some Vietnamese youth leaders?

Tristan: Yeah, one.

Occasionally, some would prefix the nationality or region with the descriptor “White” when describing their demographics. For example, Dalibor described his youth leaders,

The leaders are all White Europeans, Czechs who grew up and live a good city life. They are all at different levels socioeconomically, but it doesn’t really matter much because they all have much in common. They are all the same age, they went to the same schools, and have the same cultural background. I don’t know how to describe this to you. Our culture is not much different around the Czech Republic because there are so many White people and even the Roma, even the Ukrainians; their culture doesn’t differ too much. The Vietnamese are different, but the rest of us are very similar.

Interestingly, the descriptor White also occurred when some participants described the demographics of their city.

Perceptions of City

Five youth leaders described their cities as homogenous, while Dalibor and Iosif were outliers who described their cities as diverse. Alios used the descriptor, White,

I think my city is 95% Czech White people. The other 5% are Polish people, and some are from Ukraine. In the city lives many Polish people. That’s normal for our region, but not in others. Our city is young—it is only 60 years old.

Michał in Poland also described his city as homogenous and White. Additionally, he felt that a homogenous city has some social benefits. Michał explained,

So yeah, I would say that we are about 98%, 99% Polish city *(laughter)*. Poland is a very homogeneous country. Maybe now it’s starting to change, but 10 years, 20 years ago, 95% of people would say they are Roman Catholics, and they are White, and they speak Polish. That’s a good thing from one point of view because we didn’t have any racial tension inside the country. However, we are very homogeneous, and that also makes us very curious about people of other colors. When somebody Black is walking down the street, everybody’s looking. Not because they are angry at you, but because they are very curious because they don’t often see somebody of color on the street.

Finally, Dragomir, possibly the least verbose participant in the Mono-Mono church category, described his city’s demographics and disinterest in demographics in two brief sentences. Dragomir stated,

You asked about the ethnicity of the city. I am not interested in this, but I think it is mostly White Romanians.

Curiously, Dragomir and Ciprian from the Multi-Multi category lived in the same city but had different perspectives on the diversity of their city. Dalibor and Iosif were the outliers in the Mono-Mono group regarding their perceptions of the diversity in their cities. Both felt their cities were diverse, yet their churches and youth groups were homogenous. Iosif explained,

Oh, the city is mixed. Some of the ethnical groups we have are Bulgarians, Roma or Gypsy people, and Turkish-speaking people, but they’re, of course, Bulgarians. We have a lot of Jewish people also in Sofia. Now we have a lot of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Also, a lot of Russians, or Russian-speaking people from Ukraine and Moldova. They are different. I mean, we have a lot of ethnic groups. I cannot count all of them (*laughter*). Also Chinese. For Sofia, it is a big number. We have about 40,000 Chinese people in Sofia, and they have worked here and lived here for many years. They have a Chinese church in Sofia, which is great.

In Dalibor’s description of his city, the descriptor White appeared. There also seemed to be some confusion about referring to people of color. Dalibor elaborated,

I would say my city is like 80% European White people. And the rest of the 20% are [ethnic and cultural] minorities. There’s a lot of Vietnamese people, maybe like 7%, and there’s a lot of, we call them Gypsies, I guess their origin is from Italy, maybe Spain. I’m not really sure about that because it’s an old, old culture in the Czech Republic. They’ve been here for a long time. Then there are students, for example, in Prague. You can find a lot of African American people. You can find a lot of ethnicities in there, but those are just pretty much students and young people who have recently moved to the Czech Republic.

After thinking about the city’s diversity, Dalibor revised his thoughts after a few moments. Dalibor said,

You know what, I would actually like to maybe edit these numbers. Because I think there’s less of us, the White European people maybe like 70%, or 60%, there will be more of the Gypsy ethnicity, which I would say there’s maybe 15% to 30% of them.

Curious about the African Americans in Prague, I asked Dalibor to elaborate. His response indicated confusion about referring to people of African descent without marginalizing people of color. Dalibor clarified,

I don’t want to make this racist, but I don’t know how to describe them in any other way. So I would just say Black people; that is the culture I see. Their origin might be from anywhere.

Generally, the participants in the Mono-Mono model, with two exceptions, described their cities as homogenous, with five of the seven participants using “White” to describe the demographics of their city. While Dalibor and Iosif described their cities as diverse, their church structures, nevertheless, were homogenous.

Perception of Mission

Where participants in the Multi-Multi model supported foreign missions and engaged in local evangelism, youth leaders in Mono-Mono churches rarely spoke about these topics. While participants in the Multi-Multi category emphasized mission, mission in Mono-Mono churches had less significance. It seemed Mono-Mono churches prioritized monocultural mission. Iosif was the only participant in a Mono-Mono church to describe how his church participated in foreign missions. Iosif explained,

I can’t say our church is missional. I’d say it’s more focused on a local level, taking care of the people in our neighborhoods. We try to present the gospel in the best way so the people in our neighborhood or the closest neighborhoods can come to the truth. Yeah, but not so missionally involved. Let’s say we support missions. I mean, often, we have people who have missions in India or somewhere in Africa, and our church collects money for them. But we only do this a few times a year, maybe not more than three or four times a year. We also supported a missionary team, so let’s say five, not any more than this.

Tristian also mentioned missions, but it was related to foreign missionaries coming to his city. These missionaries started ethnic churches and drew significant numbers of people away from his church. Tristian explained,

A large group of Roma started to come to our Sunday services. They became a part of the church, some became part of the worship team, and they were with us for three to four years, maybe longer. Some Roma missionaries from France or Britain came and influenced them to start a church. A few weeks later, about 100 Roma started to go to this new Roma church. However, a few months later, it crashed. Then another Roma missionary from France came, and 200 Roma left and started to go to this new church, and again it crashed. There are a lot of outside influencers that make it challenging to minister to Roma.

None of the other participants in the Mono-Mono model mentioned missions. Four participants, Alois, Dalibor, Dragomir, and Michał, commented that they did not engage in evangelism or outreach. Alois described his church as having two separate worship services, one service for Roma and one for Czechs. The groups used the same facilities with little interaction between the two groups. Alois explained,

In our local church, we don’t really do much in missions with our community or in our city. In our church, we have another service in the evening for Roma. This is the church service only for them. It’s different. They have Roma worship songs, specific preaching from the minister, and manifestations of the Holy Spirit. It is different. But these people are very good, and they are so, so nice. I like them, but they are different. Together we are family, but in our church, we don’t have a vision for a multiethnic church.

Similarly, Dalibor indicated evangelism and outreach were not something they had focused on in the past, but rather, the youth group tended to focus on ministering to the teens already in the church. However, youth evangelism was something he was currently working to establish. Dalibor elaborated,

As a youth group, we haven’t really done much outreach outside the church. It is something that we are starting right now. We have to do a lot of work with our youth group to be able to do what God has for us. We have not done any outreach events for any culture. We have only been encouraging the teens to invite people to youth.

While Dalibor wanted to create processes to evangelize youth, Dragomir did not see the urgency or necessity of reaching multicultural youth. He felt that it would happen organically as the youth ministry grew. Dalibor explained,

We haven’t tried to reach multicultural people in the city. I think the first problem is that we don’t see the urgency of reaching multicultural teens. We don’t see the reason why we should do it. I think it will happen when the ministry grows and we have a solid foundation of people who know what we are doing. Then maybe we will start to think about how to reach multicultural teens and look for resources that will help us reach them in the city.

Multicultural churches, by their nature, are inclusive. In other words, multicultural churches create space for people from different cultures and ethnicities to worship together without focusing on one cultural or ethnic group. Michał indicated that his church emphasized reaching Poles and not the large population of Ukrainians in the area. Michał commented,

We are a very monocultural country, nation, and city. We haven’t even thought about reaching multicultural youth. We haven’t even thought about reaching Ukrainians here in our town. We are mainly focused on Polish people because this is the biggest need. I think we don’t have so many multicultural youth. The ones we do have, for example, Ukrainians, speak Polish, and they don’t have any problems assimilating with Polish culture. I don’t think we would have any problem reaching out to them. The only problem would be finding them (*laughter*).

The commonalities shared by the Mono-Mono churches were generally opposite those shared by the Multi-Multi churches. Where the Mono-Mono churches saw their cities and leadership teams as homogenous, the Multi-Multi churches saw them as diverse. Further, churches and youth ministries in the Multi-Multi category emphasized mission and supported foreign missions and local evangelism. On the other hand, Mono-Mono churches and youth ministries minimized mission or, at least, focused on monocultural mission.

The final two categories of church models that developed from the perceptions of the youth leaders were hybrid models. In some ways, they shared commonalities in the Multi-Multi and Mono-Mono models.

Multi-Mono: Multicultural Churches With Monocultural Youth Groups

Five participants described their church as multicultural with a monocultural youth group (see Table 1). The churches in the Multi-Mono model were all located in Western Europe. Two participants in this category, Elsa and John, were expats serving in a country different from their national identity. All youth leaders in Multi-Mono churches had less than 10 years of youth ministry experience, with a combined average of 4 years.

The participants had common perceptions of their city’s diversity, teen ERI, and language.

Perception of City

Like the Multi-Multi model participants, the Multi-Mono group’s youth leaders all described their cities as diverse. Mary attributed the diversity in her city to the industry and international corporations that drew workers from across the globe. Additionally, she felt the byproduct of international economic migration was the church becoming more multicultural. Mary explained,

In our city, we have a lot of industries. So, there are big companies. They also draw international people into our church. We have a big group of Brazilians at the moment, and we have a group of Indian people in our church. So, we have English translation and English life groups. We are becoming more multicultural and open to other cultures and people not speaking Austrian. There are people from different cultures in every ministry department.

Like Mary, business also attracted people to Elsa’s city. Furthermore, Elsa noted that the significant number of international students in Vienna added to the diversity. Elsa described her city,

Why is the city diverse? Simple, we are the capital of the country, where a lot of students come, and a lot of people come for work—way more than in smaller towns or cities like Graz or Salzburg. I think a lot of students first come and study and then a lot of them stay because they love it here. There are also Austrians who come from other parts of Austria and people that come from other countries to work.

Similarly, Trey attributed his city’s diversity to international students. Approximately one-third of his city’s population were university students, many of them from other countries. Trey also expressed that the migrants in his city tended to be mobile and that the fluidity of movement impacted the church. Trey said,

There are a lot of students here. There are about 120,000 people overall in the city, and I think almost every third person is a student. Out of those, there are several thousands international students and people from other countries— immigrants. I don’t have an exact number, but it is something that you can see when you go into the city, you can see that it’s multiethnic city and church for sure. I think there is a lot of movement, especially when it comes to different people with different cultural backgrounds, because they might be in the city for two years, and then they might move to another city. So, when it comes to our international ministry, the church is very fluid, with a lot of people coming and going pretty much all the time. That’s why the situation is changing a lot. However, I would say that there are people from different ethnicities for sure participating in our church.

Participants in Multi-Mono and Multi-Multi churches agreed that their cities and churches were diverse. However, some differences may explain why one group of churches had diverse youth groups while the other had homogenous groups. The most noticeable differences were in the youth leader’s perceptions of the teenager’s ERI and the use of language.

Perception of Ethnic Racial Identity

Elsa, Mary, Petr, and Trey used national identities, Austrian, Czech, and Finnish, to describe the ERI of their teens with a qualifier. The four participants noted that they had teens in the youth group who were, to quote Elsa, “half something else.” During the interview, the participants’ tone seemed to emphasize the teens’ national identity and minimize the teens’ immigrant identity. Elsa described the teenagers in her group by saying,

Right now, all of them are Austrian—but some are half something else. For example, there’s one; she’s Austrian and Brazilian. There is another one, he is Austrian, and from the [United Kingdom]. There’s another one; he is ... well, he’s complicated (*laughter*) because he’s half Austrian, and then one-fourth this and one-fourth something else (*laughter*).

Mary used similar terminology to describe the teenagers in her youth ministry. She explained,

We have some kids who are not 100% Austrian but grew up in Austria. This is all we have for a multicultural youth group. The one guy I’m talking about he’s half Russian, half Austrian. No, we had one more! He is half African and half Austrian.

Elsa and Mary considered cultural hybrids and 2.5-generation immigrants as Austrians. While the church adjusted its functional structures to attract and retain immigrant adults, some participants minimized the immigrant identity of teens and did not adjust the structures in the youth ministry to accommodate immigrant youth.

Perception of Language

In Multi-Mono churches, the church at large adjusted its praxis to attract and retain culturally diverse groups. However, the changes in praxis were not necessarily diffused to the youth group because the youth leaders saw the youth group as homogenous. One example of this is in the use of language.

Four participants, Elsa, Mary, Petr, and Trey, noted that their churches translated their Sunday worship services into English to connect with their international attendees. Yet, three youth leaders, Elsa, Mary, and Trey, generally used the indigenous language for youth services, occasionally translating or switching the entire youth service to English as needed. Elsa explained,

In our church service, we use German, translating to English and sometimes to French. In the youth group, we use German, but we’ve had times when we would do it in English if we had people that didn’t understand German … Then, as soon as we switched to English, I noticed that it was hard for a few teenagers. They were like, “I’m not getting it in English! Oh my gosh, can we not just talk in German?”

In addition to translating the Sunday morning service, Mary’s church adjusted its methodology by offering life groups in English for those who did not speak German. However, the youth group used German exclusively. Likewise, Trey’s church used English and Finnish in the Sunday service but only Finnish in the youth service. Trey did note, “There’s translation in English available” for students who asked for it.

Interestingly, while Petr’s church used Czech and English, his youth service was only in English. Petr explained, “In the Sunday services, we have English and Czech. However, we use only English in young adults because we don’t have anyone who doesn’t speak English. So we keep it in one language, English.”

John’s church was a bit of an outlier. It was an American church located in Italy. They primarily served U.S. military members and their families and used English in Sunday and youth services without translation.

By offering translation only as needed or requested, Multi-Mono youth groups lost teens not fluent in the indigenous language. Mary mentioned that an immigrant family left her church due to the lack of translation in the youth group. Mary explained,

We had one family coming to youth, and their teen struggled with the lack of English, so they decided to go to another church where they have youth ministry in English … Looking back at what happened to those English-speaking kids and me, I feel like if I had more time to connect with them myself, it would have been easier to connect them to the group because I would know them a bit better.

Similarly, by only operating in English, youth services excluded indigenous youth who were not fluent in English. Granted, mitigating circumstances may have prevented the Multi-Mono youth groups from adopting the church’s praxis. For example, many participants mentioned the lack of youth workers. It is plausible that there may not have been enough youth workers to help with translation. Nevertheless, immigrant and indigenous teens were excluded from the youth ministry when the church used translation, and the youth ministry did not.

Mono-Multi: Monocultural Churches With Multicultural Youth Groups.

The monocultural church with a multicultural youth group (Mono-Multi) was the least common church model. Only one participant, Dima, described his church as Mono-Multi (See Table 1). The Mono-Multi church may have been an anomaly since many of Dima’s perceptions aligned with those in the Multi-Multi category. Dima described his city and church leadership team as diverse but the church as monocultural. Before COVID, the youth ministry took ministry trips to other countries and was active in hosting ministry training events.

Dima’s pastor was an evangelist whose initial evangelism efforts focused on substance abusers. Dima explained,

So the way the church I attend came about was through Teen Challenge. Which you may or may not know is a program for drug addicts, a Christian program for drug addicts. My pastor started this ministry before he started the church. He didn’t really have a plan for starting a church, just for saving drug addicts and bringing them to Christ. Along the years, as numbers grew and the families of those who had completed the Teen Challenge program were interested in the Christian faith and in coming to Christ, the need for a church became obvious. Maybe 50% of people attending still to this day are people who either did the Teen Challenge program or are family or friends of the people who have done it.

Dima continued to depict the church, noting that it was primarily Romanian, with some diversity. Dima said,

The church would be mostly Romanian. I say maybe 85% to 90% Romanian, but there’s a large number of American missionaries who are doing ministry in Bucharest right now. They are attending our church and have teens in the youth group. We have some international students, and the largest group is American. Also, one of our pastors is a missionary from Brazil.

Dima’s church model was a bit puzzling as it was the only church with a Mono-Multi model. To better understand what was happening at his church, I asked Dima what helped him reach multicultural youth. He attributed his success to his former youth pastor, who trained him as a youth leader. Dima explained,

While we haven’t done this as a youth group since COVID, we traveled with our former youth pastor all over Europe. We took part in international youth ministry, and I think that’s an advantage. So, I can personally say I have been, quote-unquote, “trained for this.” So I think that’s an advantage. Especially compared to someone who has never done ministry outside of Romania.

Eli (pseudonym), the youth pastor who trained Dima, was a missionary who served in Europe for over 20 years. Eli was instrumental in establishing a Europe-wide youth ministry network and youth leadership training and development programs. Focusing on mission tended to be emphasized in the youth leader training. Curious to understand what was happening in this Mono-Multi church, I reached out to Eli and asked him to describe the church. Eli responded,

The church is like 97% Romanian. They don’t have “members,” and it’s not the culture in our church to count people, so you’ll never get a fully accurate number on almost anything. But it is a Romanian church with just a small percentage of non-Romanians.

While it was an anomaly, it appeared that Dima’s church was a Mono-Multi church.

## Findings Conclusion

The Multi-Multi category was the most common church model in the framework, with eleven participants from across Europe identifying their churches as multicultural with a multicultural youth group. A key finding in Multi-Multi churches was that the church’s values of multicultural missions and evangelism were diffused to the youth ministry. Structures and changes of praxes that the church deployed to attract and retain immigrants, such as language translation, were also found in the youth ministry.

Mono-Mono churches were the second most common model in the framework, with seven participants describing their church and youth group as monocultural. The churches in the Mono-Mono model were all from Eastern Europe and tended to deemphasize mission. Over half of the participants commented that the youth ministry did not participate in evangelism. In Mono-Mono churches, the energy expended on mission or evangelism mainly focused on groups whose ethnicity or culture matched the churches.

Five participants described their churches as multicultural with monocultural youth groups. In the Multi-Mono churches, the church’s value of multicultural mission was not being diffused to the youth ministry. Additionally, the adjustments in praxis that the churches were making to attract and retain immigrants were not being incorporated into the youth ministry. Youth leaders reported that immigrant families left Multi-Mono churches in favor of Multi-Multi churches because the Multi-Mono youth groups did not offer translation into English. Interestingly, the Multi-Mono category youth leaders had a combined average of 4 years of youth ministry experience.

Finally, one participant described his church as Mono-Multi. The data suggested the influence of foreign missionaries had helped train an indigenous youth leader to see beyond the monocultural structures of the church and reach youth from various backgrounds.

# Implications of the Church Models

Of the 24 participants, 16 described their Sunday morning congregations as culturally diverse. In comparison, only 8 participants described their Sunday morning congregations as culturally and racially homogenous. This finding was surprising since congregational diversity literature from the United States (US) indicated that, while increasing, only 16% of the congregations surveyed are racially diverse.[[8]](#endnote-8) This discrepancy is likely due to what the literature measures. The church diversity literature emerging from the US, such as the National Congregations Study (NCS), examined racial diversity in the church, not cultural diversity[[9]](#endnote-9). For example, if a church in the study had 100 people—50 Italians and 50 Poles or 50 Nigerians and 50 Ghanaians—they were considered racially homogenous. While the churches in the study had cultural diversity, they were racially homogenous.

The findings from my study indicate that culturally diverse churches were often, but not always, racially diverse. Several churches, particularly in Eastern Europe, were culturally diverse but not racially diverse.

Of the 16 participants who described their Sunday morning services as culturally diverse, 5 described their youth group as monocultural. As indicated by DeYmaz, Woo, and Yancey, a homogenous church must make changes in functional structures to transition to a diverse church.[[10]](#endnote-10) It seemed that, within the Multi-Mono model, youth leaders failed to adopt the changes in praxis used by the church to attract and keep diverse youth. For example, all participants in the Multi-Mono model noted that their Sunday worship services used translation to engage immigrants and refugees. However, leaders in Multi-Mono youth groups seldom used translation.

On the other hand, churches in the Multi-Multi model evidenced several of Yancey’s seven principles and DeYmaz’s seven core commitments in the Sunday service and youth group.[[11]](#endnote-11) Some of these principles and commitments were inclusive worship, diverse leadership, and adaptability[[12]](#endnote-12), as well as developing cross-cultural relationships, pursuing cross-cultural competence, and mobilizing for impact.[[13]](#endnote-13) For example, the participants’ descriptions of diverse leaders aligned with Yancey’s findings on diverse leadership in multiracial churches.[[14]](#endnote-14) Similarly, the participants’ description of their engagement in foreign missions and local evangelism aligned with DeYmaz’s mobilization for impact.[[15]](#endnote-15)

Interestingly, there is precedent in the literature for the one Mono-Multi church. When Woo’s church transitioned from a homogenous, Anglo church to a diverse one, he noted that the change started in the youth group.[[16]](#endnote-16) In other words, the youth group was diverse before the Sunday morning worship service was.

However, in Woo’s example, the church was in a transitional stage.[[17]](#endnote-17) The leadership was intentionally driving change. Intentionality by leadership, according to DeYmaz, Yancey, and Woo, is essential in driving change toward a diverse church.[[18]](#endnote-18) It is unclear if the Mono-Multi church in this study will influence the youth group to become monocultural or if the youth group will influence the church to increase cultural diversity in the Sunday morning worship service.

Essential Strategies for Engaging Multicultural Teenagers

Participants engaging diverse teens described how they embraced mission as part of their overall strategy. Some participants likened mission as part of the “DNA” of the church, core to their identity. Embracing a missional identity led to the churches being heavily involved in foreign missions and local evangelism. Various sub-strategies of missions and evangelism participants described included personal invitations, special evangelistic events, social programs, and short-term missions (STM).

Embracing the Mission of the Church

Participants embraced the Biblical mandate to make disciples of all ethnos (*NIV*, 1984, Matthew 28:19) by engaging in foreign missions and local evangelism. Multi-Multi churches intentionally adjusted their strategy to participate in foreign missions and local evangelism, much like Latino churches in the US adjusted their strategy to include a bilingual model to retain their youth and engage their non-Spanish-speaking neighbors.[[19]](#endnote-19)

The most commonly used evangelism strategy was a personal invitation. Participants and their teens invited people from their social networks—friends, family, and peers—to attend the youth service or special event. Yancey called multiracial churches in the US that grew via this method a “Network Multiracial Church.”[[20]](#endnote-20) According to Yancey, churches using social networks to engage people have a “strong propensity to grow,”[[21]](#endnote-21) and he encouraged leaders to use network evangelism to develop multiracial churches.

A less common strategy used exclusively by participants in Multi-Multi churches was street evangelism, using drama, music, and street preaching to connect with diverse people in the city. While DeYmaz would consider both personal invitation and street evangelism part of his core commitment of “mobilizing for impact,”[[22]](#endnote-22) Yancey called multiracial churches that grew through this strategy “Evangelism Multiracial Churches.”[[23]](#endnote-23) According to Yancey, churches using this strategy are fishing with a net: “If the fisherman is not discriminating about which fish are worth keeping, then there will be a great variety of fish in the net.”[[24]](#endnote-24) Thus, the churches can engage diverse individuals and the majority population. Interestingly, Yancey noted “that Evangelism multiracial churches tend to be noncharismatic conservative congregations. Some of these churches may be fundamentalist.”[[25]](#endnote-25) However, the churches in my study that used street evangelism all identified as Pentecostal.

In addition to personal invitation and evangelism, some participants embraced mission by using social programs such as food and clothing distribution and tutoring. Using social programs in evangelism aligns with DeYmaz’s core commitment of “mobilizing for impact.”[[26]](#endnote-26) DeYmaz gave examples of how a multicultural church plant in Arkansas mobilized for impact by providing food, clothing, and pony rides to economically disadvantaged minorities on Thanksgiving as part of their overall strategy to engage diverse groups.

Diffusing the Mission of the Church

Participants embraced mission by identifying as missional and using substrategies of personal invitations, special evangelistic events, social programs, and STM. Participants also described a second strategy—diffusing mission. Diffusion occurred by empowering teens to evangelize and encouraging teens to participate in STM and cultural exchanges.

A study conducted by Nagy et al. found that teens who engaged in activities such as evangelism were more involved in the church. Further, Nagy et al. indicated that, for teens in the church, “Service involvement not only promotes their holistic development, but it also reinforces their faith in God as well as their commitment to the spiritual and religious values they have embraced.”[[27]](#endnote-27)

Participants engaging diverse teens described how they loved “across cultures”[[28]](#endnote-28) using various methods to reach lost youth. Indeed, youth leaders fulfilled several of Parrett’s ten commitments to multicultural youth ministry by encouraging the teens to engage in international missions and local cross-cultural evangelism.[[29]](#endnote-29) Parrett’s first commitment encourages leaders to “Focus on the greatest commandment to love God, yourself, and others; including a willingness to love across cultures.”[[30]](#endnote-30) Similarly, Parrett’s second commitment calls for leaders and youth to “Focus on the great commission, which emphasizes a commitment to be concerned for all people in the whole world.”[[31]](#endnote-31) Participants in the Multi-Multi model seemed to embody these two commitments.

# Conclusion

The more diverse churches were those churches that seemed to embody the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 4:19 and were eager to “fish for people.” Churches in the Mono-Mono model tended to fish with a pole, trying to catch “fish” that looked and acted like the majority group in the church— if they went fishing at all. Churches in the Multi-Multi and Multi-Mono categories seemed to fish often and, to borrow Yancey’s illustration, with nets— eager to catch whatever type of fish that happened to be nearby, “not discriminating about which fish are worth keeping.”[[32]](#endnote-32) Multi-Multi churches included the youth ministry in the fishing and ensured that the changes made in Sunday morning service to attract and retain diverse groups of people were also evident in the youth ministry. By cultivating a passion to “fish for people” in our churches and youth ministries, and by encouraging them to fish with nets, more churches and youth groups could be ethnically and culturally diverse.

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