

HOW TO DO MULTICULTURAL WORSHIP MUSIC AT YOUR CHURCH

Introduction: When it comes to church, especially multicultural ministry, I do not support most notions of extrabiblical instruction booklets. Local contextualization, discernment, and relationships are more important and more biblical than any constructed and/or observation-based formula for growth. Nonetheless, it was suggested that I (James) put together something resembling an instruction booklet on how to do multicultural worship in your church. After serving at a few multicultural churches, I've thought of three guidelines, in probably-necessary chronological order below.

Steps:

1) **Know your “why.”** Why would a church whose congregation and music set list may be strongly homogenous pursue multicultural worship? The answers to that question are for the leader and his team to know. And know them well, because multicultural ministry is easily the slowest way to build a church. When things don't seem right to you, or you're frustrated or impatient by all the nuance and complexity in a multicultural community, your “why” is important to remember. You are building a strong, diverse, God-honoring, community-changing church whose worship is a glimpse of Heaven. And don't forget that the “your” in this paragraph is plural. The “why” must be understood because multicultural worship is a risk that many do not take, even though it can reap Godly rewards.

2) **Know your “what.”** Now we get to talk about numbers. How many non-white songs, for example, should we do per service? Per month? Should we shift the programming quickly or slowly? Should we announce it or not? That's something that church leaders should prayerfully answer, because the pros and cons of the various levels of involvement of multicultural worship will differ between each church. But it also should involve educational and gracious conversations with trusted or trustworthy brothers and sisters in Christ who are not of the majority culture in the church's leadership. No matter the degree of diversity in the music selection, humility, teachability and collaboration needs to be visible in the leadership, especially if the leadership is more culturally homogenous than the congregation. (Having more diverse teams and leadership is more effective, but we must avoid tokenism). *Sidenote: Keep in mind that the ideal multicultural church features more than just diverse music and even teams. It also has events, outreach ministries, sermon-quoted authors, Sunday school curricula, visual and dramatic arts, etc. that are, for example, non-white).*

(Step 3 on next page)

3) **Keep learning your “how.”** This step is the most fun. You need to always be saturating yourself with worship music and art from all across the world and its history.

a) *Learn from friends:* As we mentioned earlier, collaboration is key. Share your vision-in-progress with trusted brothers and sisters in Christ of another culture. They may know and suggest some songs, and perhaps even help the church to sing them.

b) *Learn from resources:* Our website, diversechurchmusic.com, has links to books, blogs, conferences, and artists of multicultural worship. We also offer transcription services, so you can, for example, find a song on YouTube from our blog or globalworship.tumblr.com and request a transcription through us.

Other resources include black Gospel radio (e.g. Moody’s Urban Praise) or albums such as Heartsounds International’s *Sounds of Global Worship* series or Proskuneo Ministries’s *One*. There are also Gospel music festivals and other cultural celebrations you can attend, often for free.

Again, in my experience, this step is the most fun. The important about this step is to never stop learning.

Troubleshooting: Do not be surprised at the slowness, obstacles, and seeming smallness of success in multicultural ministry. You may never have recording-label music, an awesome Instagram account, or church attendance bursting at the seams. For some megachurches may chase after these things, but your Heavenly Father knows you don’t need them to do His work. Your work in sharing the Gospel through humility, reconciliation, and curiosity, embracing the hard truths of Scripture and the complexities of culture and relationships, may go unnoticed in the noisy world. But God sees such work and faithfulness and is pleased.



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Musical arrangements (hymns, contemporary, black Gospel, multilingual, etc.) on demand, and resources and connections for multicultural worship ministry from all around the world!

