

Better Church Hosting

Intentionally exploring life together on an intercultural journey

Newer Churches/Christian Communities and the United Reformed Church, including a bible study on I Corinthians 12:12-27

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'multicultural church, intercultural habit'
RjiM-Mission, United Reformed Church
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Introduction

'Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.'
[1 Peter 5:2-4]

The United Reformed Church wishes to become proactive about being a multicultural church that welcomes all people, treating them with loving care and respect. One of the ways the United Reformed Church (URC) is reaching out in its ministry and mission is by welcoming newer migrant churches¹ and other Christian communities to share the use of its church buildings.

What in some may start out as a rental relationship often evolves and develops into good intercultural relations within United Reformed Churches themselves. We need to keep in mind how diverse the Christian landscape is in the UK, with the presence of different confessions, denominations and historical sensitivities. All these will play a part in conversations that take place between congregations of the URC and churches that will share and inhabit URC-owned buildings

Among all this diversity, we need to focus on the relevance to people's lives, of how church life intertwines with people's daily life, in community influenced by cultural practices that cannot be separated from other aspects of life.

Intercultural ministry is an ongoing journey that demands thorough consultation across many areas. When a new Christian community seeks to relate to the United Reformed Church and enter into a partnership with a local URC congregation, the following inclusive framework – intended to help both parties to achieve good relations – could help their transition.

¹ We use the term 'migrant churches' primarily to identify newer Christian communities in the UK that have resulted because of migration, movement of peoples and through the rising number of Diaspora communities. We are mindful of the limited, restrictive and sometimes prejudicial use of the term.

Foreword

The small booklet, *better church hosting – exploring life together on an intercultural journey*, is an attempt to offer, in a user-friendly and accessible format, some guidelines for welcoming, receiving and sharing our church spaces with newer ‘migrant’, churches and Christian communities.

At various General Assemblies from 2005 to 2014, we have received and endorsed not only well-written papers, but also new congregations from some of the newer Christian communities among us. There are also an increasing number of United Reformed Church congregations that share their worship space and/or buildings with migrant Christian communities. Such sharing may take a variety of shapes, from developing intentional partnerships, to merely a ‘rental’ relationship.

Since our 2005 ‘multicultural church’ declaration, much has changed. Hence, we have been giving thought to how we can together move beyond our nicely formulated intentions and grow deeper and wider in our life together. To this end, we have reframed our aspirations that invite us all to deepen *intercultural habits* where the reality of diversity will mean ‘mutual inconveniencing’ of all towards the larger story of members of the one body of Christ.

The booklet firstly reworks, builds on and adds to the ‘guidelines for receiving migrant churches’ that was adopted at General Assembly, 2007. We have also included a bible study (by Revd Dr John Campbell) that will provide biblical support when it comes to exploring the themes and challenges. It is our hope that congregations (Elders meetings, study days, joint meetings and House Groups, and so on) will find this a helpful study tool and conversation starter.

While we have consulted with a wide cross-section of voices, (including those of colleagues from migrant churches and Christian communities), this booklet has been prepared from the perspective of a ‘host’ or established church tradition. It is important to note this. Also, we wish to note the limitations and dangers of using a term such as ‘migrant churches’ and ‘newer migrant churches’. We have used ‘newer migrant’ and ‘migrant’ Christian churches and communities, mindful of all the challenges associated with naming – especially pejorative connotations, as well as the danger of seeing a long established church or cultural group in our midst as always being ‘migrant’. We hope that there is enough in this booklet to help us move beyond these perceptions.

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Newer migrant churches and the United Reformed Church Building good relationships

VISIONING

The multicultural church, in all its forms, needs to be 'intercultural': inviting all of us to journey beyond our comfort zones and boundaries to learn and understand more clearly what it means to be followers of Jesus in our specific contexts. And in order to do this successfully, vision is required.

listen - learn - openness - re-evaluate - respect - self-assess – patience - understand - accept - humility - compassion - just

Consider your starting point

1. Discover the reason for this intercultural quest, there is great value in asking questions, as both parties need to assess what their aims are. **AND WHAT THEIR LIMITATIONS ARE.**
2. It's a journey to travel: there is a road that is worth traversing, worth doing.
3. There is an alternative, theological vision to have, one that could enhance relationships – so start by doing a self-assessment of giving. Then, reassess and respond!

*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you,
in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:7)*

Patient people demonstrate their love by accepting that others are different from them.

*'Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness
the sash around his waist.'*(Isaiah 11 1:10)

The child in the passage represents an openness, innocence and fairness that had been lost among the people. The child evokes a vision of peace and gentleness, of unconditional trust. Could we interpret these characteristics today as being those representing sound ethical conduct?

- Q** So, what is relevant as a starting point?
A An understanding and respect for people's position.

STARTING OUT

For our journey together to be effective and fruitful, from the outset we need to identify the ministry and mission needs of our congregations and communities and embrace a shared diversity (a multicultural church, an intercultural habit).

**shared context(s) of faith - fairness - trust - co-operation - expectations
consult - communicate - consolidate - reassess**

Consider what insights are necessary to embark on this intercultural journey together

1. How do you engage in ongoing communication?
2. What is the best way of doing this and between whom?
3. How will you develop skills in cross-cultural communication?
4. How do you together manage the expectations of both congregations?

The word 'humility' literally means having your 'feet on the ground' (from the Latin *humus*, 'earth'). How should the United Reformed Church, being the host church, show that it is not guilty of the scribal practices mentioned in Mark 12.38-40?

- Q** How do you present yourselves in welcoming the other church?
A Refute patronising language, open up, and provide an inclusive framework.

Invite a mutual exchange of 'back story' with each other, this creates an 'ice breaker' which also helps establish the first lines of reciprocation in an informal, yet informative, way.

ASKING QUESTIONS

From this exchange, questions might be sensitively posed to the representative(s) of the new migrant church community during the early consultation sessions:

Are you a settled permanent group?

Do you have a relationship with any home church or mission partner outside of the UK?

Is your worship inclusive and welcoming to all, and open to people of different ethnicities?

Why do you wish to be in the fellowship with your neighbouring congregations and local ecumenical partners?

What in your faith and practice find common ground with the United Reformed Church's *Basis of Union*?

And in fostering a mutuality in open questioning the United Reformed congregation might anticipate answering the following questions:

How will you begin the process of receiving this new congregation in an openly warm and welcoming way?

How will you implement an educational and orientation programme that will benefit both congregations, including developing a better understanding of the United Reformed Church in a British context and understanding better the background of the new migrant congregation?

Consolidation through communication

For your church to reflect the diversity of the community, what kind of diversity should be reflected in the leadership? Understanding and recognising the leadership of a new congregation is crucial for the transition period and also for long-term survival of the new congregations. Hence, the suggested questions:

How do we formally recognise the leadership of a new congregation (lay or ordained)?

Who can we seek advice from within the United Reformed Church?

- Synod Moderators (and other Synod Officers)
- The Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries
- The Secretary for Ministries
- The Secretary for Education and Learning
- The Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
- The General Secretariat
- The Mission Department

It is clearly important that people feel their perspective is represented in leadership decisions.

How would a migrant congregation find constructive ways of developing, nurturing and sustaining leadership, including volunteer leadership?

Are there expectations that the host church may be invited to be involved in the life of the new congregation and vice versa?

Members of the host church could reflect on 'leadership'. This can start as general conversations and move to the specific case of the new congregation.

Consultations and conversations may lead/enable a working system of formal recognition of minority ethnic leadership, as part of the guidelines of better church hosting

- The Synod and the Area Committee/Forum should be involved in this process.

How do we ensure accountability and to whom? Are there other questions that evolve out of the conversations?

Recognition of the church 'back home

What is the distinction between cultural traditions (whether host or newer migrant church community) and maintaining home traditions?

- Migrants often seek out churches that appear the same or similar to their church back home.
- However, in reality, the seemingly alike churches turn out to have different practices and sometimes ethos.
- This can cause confusion for both the migrant church and the members of the United Reformed Church.
- It is very important for the United Reformed Church to understand something of the churches that the members of the migrant church congregation have come from.
 - *How can this understanding be achieved and developed?*
- We need to recognise that church life and theology are heavily influenced by cultural practices. This is the case for all churches as we are all culturally embodied!

Equally, it is important for the migrant church community to be encouraged to understand the United Reformed Church, its ethos and the way its church works.

- *How can this understanding be achieved and developed?*

Generational challenges

How can we enable all generations to engage in worship, church life and Christian education in a way that is appealing and meaningful to them?

- Experience shows that differences between the needs of people from, and raised in their country of origin, and those born in Britain.
- First and second generations in migrant congregations may feel more at home worshipping in their own ethnicity, culture and language.
- On the other hand, third and fourth generations could be very comfortable worshipping with their peers of different ethnic/cultural groups in English.

Recognition of different models of multicultural church

Church alongside church (*solidarity model*)

Two congregations worshipping at different times in two different languages but could have a single Church Elders or Council meeting (e.g. when a United Reformed Church congregation exists side by side with another language ministry – multi-worship service).

Culturally-mixed church (*an ecumenical model and an intercultural model*)

A culturally diverse/mixed congregation: where two or more ethnic groups merge into forming one congregation. The hope is that such a congregation would proactively work to be intercultural in its worship, hospitality and church programmes. Hopefully, dialogue of cultures will result in creative possibilities and interacting in reshaping the church.

Mission project (*partnership model*)

A specific migrant church that becomes a mission project, that has grown out of a partnership with a local church (e.g. currently in Korean, Pakistani and the Metropolitan Christian/Church communities).

- Such a project could serve as a transition opportunity in a rapidly changing context.
- This model is geared towards revitalizing mission and ministry, where an existing culture has diminished to maintenance mode. Such a mission project would need to embrace ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic changes.

Living diversity (*pragmatic realism model*)

- Sometimes there can be different models happening at the same time in the one church.
- Such diversity can thrive and be affirmed within the framework of the United Reformed Church as the home to all these groups – as the manifest body of Christ who unites us all.
- The implied emphasis here is an assertion of our identity as the United Reformed Church, which is a certainty of belonging and ownership that new migrant groups particularly need as they establish roots in a new context. (Noting that some of our churches are part of Local Ecumenical Partnerships [LEPSs].)

“How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity” Psalm 133 v.1

- Building good relationships between churches sharing premises is beautiful and enriching for all. It’s just something we have to keep working at.

Is it anything like this, in your experience?

A working list of how things sometimes are in landlord/tenant church relationships, generated by Revd Dr John Campbell.

- **It’s often a relationship neither church really wants**
The landlords wish they were so busy and active that they couldn’t fit another church in. The tenants wish they could have a whole place of their own.
- **It can be hard for either church to justify the relationship theologically**
There are other churches down the road is just about acceptable, but sharing the same building with another church sort of stretches ‘the body of Christ’ idea.
- **It can be a balancing act of similarity and difference**
*Both churches may be pleased that the other church is broadly Christian, and so sort of ‘us’
yet both may be pleased that the other is sort of different in some clear way (e.g. language),
to help explain why they are not worshipping as ONE fellowship.*
- **It can all too easily be a minefield of misunderstandings and annoyances**
Both churches can find some of the things the other does deeply annoying and hard to explain. How can they be Christian if they do this? Frustrations can build and build in both directions.
- **A particular issue can become a marker in a tussle for the moral high ground**
A particular (small?) issue can grow into something huge where both churches see themselves as being wronged and treated un-Christianly and it can become very fraught.
- **Sometimes the relationship may sort of mimic family tensions**
The landlord church may find itself playing the ‘parent’ role, insisting on rules; the tenant church may find itself feeling like a resentful teenager.

TRANSITIONING

It is now time to consider the practical matters to help enable, nurture and support newer migrant congregations in mission and ministry, alongside the local and the wider church.

Building an ethos of trust between the two congregations is crucial, for an effective relationship to develop and sustain.

friction - compassion – reciprocal - review - resourceful - cohabit

'Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.'
I Corinthians 12.4-13

Paul mentions the gifts of the Spirit in I Corinthians 12 and includes a spirit of wisdom, knowledge, service and so on. The point is that these gifts are intended for the many different members of the church and if no one attends church they cannot use their gifts or the gifts of other Christian's minister to them.

Consider the following:

Resource sharing

It is important to evaluate the use and distribution of resource people and building sharing, especially where the host church may have been without a minister for a long time.

How can the property sharing aspect of the journey be managed amicably and efficiently between both parties?

- For the host congregation and the new congregation, the sharing of buildings should be seen as an important aspect of mission.
- It needs to be clear who holds the keys and it is essential that there is a written agreement of this relationship.

Membership in the new congregation

Who are the members and what categories of membership exist?
How does this compare with the United Reformed Church's understanding of membership?
How do we share different understanding of membership and re-think membership in the light of the new partnership?

Governance/meetings

- This will include minutes of church meetings, working with a constitution, locating of structures and understanding of how these work in each ecclesial organisation, the place and role of elders and the ministry of the whole people of God.
- This can also include legal requirements and regulations as stipulated by the law of the land.

Finances and resourcing for Ministry

How is mission and ministry of both local congregations funded and how are resources to be shared and deployed?

Conflicts and discipline

How are conflicts managed and resolved in the United Reformed Church?
How are inappropriate behaviours of ministers/CRCWs/lay workers dealt with?

Roles

How can the Synod become more proactive in this new partnership (with a watching brief)?
Will there be a designated Synod/Area person to accompany/enable/ the process?

Timescale

What timescale should be in place for review and giving content and shape to a helpful process?

Support

What sort of pastoral support will be provided for both minister and congregation?

Formal ceremony of welcome and receiving

When a United Reformed Church and new migrant congregation or Christian community have decided to enter a partnership together and are satisfied that all the different aspects of the relationship have been discussed, and agreements reached, a *public ceremony/service* should take place to welcome and receive the new congregation/community into the United Reformed Church.

This should involve the Synod, area committee/forum and the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries.

Such a service similar to an induction/commissioning service may include the handing over of the new congregation's roll to the Synod/area; a symbolic acceptance or affirmation by the parties involved (i.e. the new congregation, the host congregation etc.) of their property sharing agreement; the adoption of and commitment to the '*Model Constitution for a Local Congregation of the URC*' by the parties involved.

It is important that, in such a Service, the new congregation is properly enabled to have its say in what happens, and that the 'host' congregation is also included. Often the new congregation would want someone from their own ethnic leadership to play a key role (e.g. preaching) on the day.

MOVING ON TOGETHER

Allow enough time for people to consider - Everyone needs to be allowed to get it in their own time -Dynamic changes, people move on, new minister decides this is not their agenda - not an easy road but there are great advantages to it.

So, you want to get along well together...

Good intentions, difficult moments and practical advice in Ancient Corinth

Bible Study for Intercultural Explorations based on 1 Corinthians 12.12-27

Consider

WHAT IS IT?

- A flexible tool for use by two or more churches engaging in intercultural explorations alongside each other

WHOM IS IT AIMED AT?

- It is designed to enable a shared Bible study between such fellowships, but it could also be used within a single congregation as a means to reflect on its developing relationship with one or more other fellowships.

HOW?

- Exactly what is done and how it is done must be a local decision.

WHERE CAN IT BE USED?

- Typically in our shared premises.

'I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.' John 15:1-8

Bible Study

Things to think about before you start

1. **enablers** – it is often much more creative and helpful if two or three people prepare for and enable the study between them. Where more than one congregation is involved it would be good to have each of them represented within the team of enablers who meet and prepare for it beforehand, then deliver it together. They could also reflect together afterwards on how the study went and what they themselves learned from being enablers.
2. **setting** – how? where? and when? Questions are important. What timings and place will best engage all the affected people? What sort of catering (anything from a drink to a full meal) will best suit those attending, and how will the catering be done? Would it be right to share in some form of prayer and worship before and/or after the study? What might that be and who will prepare for it? The wishes and expectations of all who may be involved are important.

3. **participants** – who you might wish to have present is a local decision. It could involve a mixed group from the fellowships who is seeking to journey together or people from one fellowship as they prepare for intercultural exploration with another fellowship. Other options to consider are whether you might want to do this study at a joint leadership meeting (with ministers, pastors, elders, deacons, leadership teams, etc) or offer it as an open invitation study for anyone from the affected churches or simply offer it as a special session at existing study groups.
4. **How much paper?** – some groups appreciate having lots of paperwork, others are happy just to refer to the set passage in their Bibles and leave the rest to the enablers. It is intended that this study can be done in one of three ways: (1) by sharing the passage, a background information sheet and a small-group question sheet with every participant; (2) by sharing only the passage and the small-group question sheet with every participant; (3) by offering no paper support, only asking people to follow the passage in their own Bibles or in Church Bibles or listen to others reading it. Which approach is best suited to your group(s) has to be a local decision.
5. **seeking involvement** – depending on the format and membership you intend, you may need to give careful thought as to how the study is ‘sold’ to those whom you would wish to involve. How do you generate attendance? How do you ensure a reasonable balance of attendance if more than one church is involved?
6. **follow-up** – the study itself invites those involved to consider what they and their church(es) will do afterwards. As a result, there may need to be some structured follow-up or reporting back to wider groups within affected fellowships. It would be wise to plan for this before you start.

Part one

Our aspirations today

Allow about five minutes in the small groups and five to ten for feedback (depending on group size)

Before we travel back to the ancient Greek city of Corinth (the core of our study) you are invited to stop a moment to think about your own churches’ intercultural explorations and journey today. Working in twos and threes (*you could try mixed pairings from different churches, if your study group involves people from more than one fellowship*) take a few moments to share what each person thinks their church should be aspiring to achieve in its relationship(s) with the other church(es) sharing the same premises. Be honest. There’s no ‘right’ answer to this one. Everyone needs to give their personal opinion.

What do you hope will emerge or develop from our intercultural explorations? (*you could usefully adapt this question to refer explicitly to your local situation*)

Once these ‘buzz’ groups in 2s and 3s have had about five minutes to talk and everyone has shared their own ideas, one of the enablers should invite people to name their ideas to the whole group, whilst another enabler captures the ideas on a flipchart pad or other large piece of paper so that they can be displayed and reviewed by everyone later in the session.

Part two

The way the world works – the city as a body

Allow about ten to fifteen minutes for all of this section, including thinking about arrival in UK cities today

Now we're ready to travel back in time to the ancient city of Corinth, somewhere around 48CE, but we're not going straight to the church that has recently been formed there. We're going to take a quick look at the city and at a commonly-used model of how cities work.

Practical notes

There are two blocks of background information here that need to be shared with everyone in as accessible a format as possible. The information is given below in a readable format that could simply be read out to the participants, but equally, someone could present or retell the information in a more enlivening style, perhaps using a PowerPoint display. Googling 'Ancient Corinth' in Google Images (or equivalent) should help you find some relevant maps and pictures. Alternatively, use the maps showing Paul's missionary journeys found at the back of Bibles.

Use two different voices for the two blocks

Corinth in the time of Paul – background information, block one

Corinth was a strategically-placed Roman colony in Greece. It had been founded by Julius Caesar in 44 BCE on the site of an older Greek city of the same name that previously had been largely destroyed. The city sat next to a narrow neck of land that joined a vast peninsula (the furthest south blob of Greece) to the rest of Greece. This meant that it held a key position on the main trade route between Italy and Asia Minor. Corinth had two ports, one to the west, the other to the east and all goods in transit had to be carried over the isthmus from the one port to the other. So, by the time of Paul, Corinth was a self-confident, competitive and very prosperous trading centre with a multi-racial population but with a markedly Roman character to its civic life.

People came to Corinth from all across the Empire to try to make money. But, so far as we can tell, the city was divided not only into distinct ethnic groups (e.g. the Jewish community) but also by social status (notably, the division between slaves and free people, but there were many more layers besides). There were also significant divisions into distinct trades and callings. Each trade probably had its own guild or affiliation that took regular subscriptions and would lay on an appropriately dignified funeral when one of its members died. Social mobility wasn't easy to achieve.

New arrivals, particularly if they had grown up in a village community, must have wondered how this complex bustling community held together. One common explanation, which was used regularly at the time, was to compare a city to a human body.

The city is like a body – background information, block two

The complexity of a city like Corinth, with its many, many distinct roles and tasks, was likened to the diverse members of a human body. Various very different members all contributed to the life and health of the one body. The picture also helped to explain why some city dwellers were doing much better than others. Not everyone can be the stomach

(where all the food goes), the picture said. Some have to be the hands that prepare the food (without getting to keep any) and others have to be feet and legs that do all the legwork.

The body picture honours the rich diversity of the city's people and their roles in city life, but it also affirms the vast differences in wealth, status and freedom between people within the city. It urges everyone to accept inequality. The city needs slaves as well as merchants and councilmen if it is going to work. Don't try to be what you're not. Don't envy the wealthy. Just get on with your bit of being body together. If the city-body turned on itself everyone would suffer. The body picture says, "Know your place! Don't get uppity!"

Can we recognise this?

This diversity and inequality is the way our world works, too. Here are two questions for the whole group to consider together. Firstly, everyone should try to imagine they are a recent arrival in a UK city, either from a rural area or from another continent (or, if this has ever been part of your own experience, try to recall how it all looked to you when you first arrived).

**As a new arrival, what might you make of the city's diversity and inequality?
What aspects of life in UK cities today teach the 'have nots' to know their place?**

The enablers can share these questions with the whole group and invite responses, recording and displaying them as seems best. Particularly if people are tapping into real experiences of new arrival, there is a risk of the story-sharing taking a lot of time. The enablers need to judge how much time to give to this so as to balance respect for the shared stories with keeping the whole study moving forward (easier to manage when there's more than one enabler).

Part three

Paul's Christian ideal – the body of Christ

Allow about ten to fifteen minutes for all of this section

Now we're ready to visit with the recently-formed church in Corinth. This will involve one more block of background information that needs to be shared with everyone in as accessible a format as possible, either simply be read out to the participants, or presented in a different way.

The New Church in Ancient Corinth – background information, block three

There is an account of the beginnings of the Church in Corinth in Acts 18.1-17. From this and comments in Paul's letters it would seem that Paul, in distinction to his grand public address in Athens (Acts 17.16-34), quietly joined the endless stream of new arrivals in the city. Like many, he seeks out friends from his own ethnic background and trade, paying his way in the low-status, menial trade of tent-making. Still, sewing leather and canvas in an open-fronted shop, he must have made contact with a wide variety of customers. As a result, he attracted people of a wide variety of social backgrounds to the church. Although most of them were of low standing – slaves, artisans and such like – some were of higher social standing within the Jewish, Roman and Greek communities of the city. Paul, in the first chapter of I Corinthians, puts it like this: '*...not many of you were wise by human standards, not*

many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.’ Thus the Christian fellowships of Corinth must have been highly unusual in the sorts of broad social mixing they afforded in what was otherwise a highly stratified city of distinct groups who each knew their place. Being a convention-defying Christian in Corinth must have been exciting!

Paul’s body picture is different

Only some three or four years after the church began in Corinth, Paul has travelled on and is now writing back with advice because he has heard disturbing things about new developments in the church. As part of his therapeutic comments he likens the church to a body – not just any body, ‘the body of Christ’.

Read I Corinthians 12.12-13 and 18-20

Invite the whole group to consider the ways this picture is like the Greek idea of the city as body:

In what ways is Paul’s body picture of church like the city-as-body picture?

Hopefully, the group will be able to identify that this is also about affirming diversity:

- there’s **ethnic** diversity (Jew & Greek in v.13)
- there’s **status** diversity (slave & free in v.13)
- there’s also (if anyone spots it) diversity of **gifts** in the previous verses (vv.9-11)

So far, Paul’s picture of the church is very similar to the Greek picture of the city as a body.

Read I Corinthians 12.21-26

Invite the whole group to consider:

So, now, what’s different about Paul’s body picture?

Hopefully, the group will be able to identify that this is not about affirming inequality:

v.25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

v.26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

- v.22 – *the members... that seem to be weaker are indispensable*
- v.23 – *those we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour*
- v.24 – *God has so arranged the body – giving the greater honour to the inferior member*
- v.25 – *the members... have the same care for one another*
- *This is active re-evaluating – affirming every member!*

Invite the group to sum up Paul’s attitude to the diversity in the body of Christ:

How, according to Paul, are we to respond to differences of ethnicity, status or gifting in church?

Try to agree a statement about this that you can record and display before the group moves on.

It might be helpful to take some sort of short break at this point, even if it's just standing up and turning round; any means of deliberately disengaging in order to re-engage you could sing together the 'One Body!' song given at the end of these notes

Part four

Keeping it real – echoes from the text

Allow about thirty to forty minutes for this section, including about twenty to thirty minutes in groups

Now start up with another quick question to the whole group:

But why does Paul need to say all this in his letter to the church in Corinth?

The Corinthian Christians are not delivering!

Invite someone to read the bit of the passage we've previously skipped over:

I Corinthians 12.14-21

Invite the whole group to see if they can detect traces of the way the Corinthian Christians have been treating each other in this section of the text.

Can you uncover any traces of how the Corinthian Christians might have been treating each other from what Paul says?

Possible traces in the text that, hopefully, the group will identify:

- v.15 – *'Because I'm not a hand I do not belong to the body!'*
- v.16 – *'Because I'm not an eye I do not belong to the body!'*
- v.21 – *eye to hand – 'I have no need of you!'*
- v.21 – *head to feet – 'I have no need of you!'*

Is it possible these are really quotations from Corinthian church people?

Do we recognise these attitudes from church life today? Let's explore this further.

Group exercise (in groups of 4 to 6 people)

If there are eight or more people present, you need to divide those present into groups of 4 to 6 people (*with less than eight people, just look at one of the two quotations with the whole group*).

Some of your groups of 4 to 6 need to look at the **'Because I'm not a..., I'm not a part of the body!'** quotation, and the others need to look at the **'I have no need of you!'** quotation.

Each group then divides into two sub-groups – **'Comment makers'** and **'Comment receivers'**.

These two sub-groups have separate short discussions:

'Comment makers' consider together what might have brought church members to make this sort of comment.

‘Comment receivers’ consider together how they might have felt if this sort of comment was made to/about them.

Give the sub-groups ten minutes during which time everyone in turn shares their ideas with the rest of their group. Hopefully a picture of some of the tensions in Corinth will be emerging.

Now each of the **‘Because I’m not...’** groups reports back on the tensions, feelings and divisions they have unearthed or recreated. Then each of the **‘I have no need of you!’** groups reports back on the tensions, feelings and divisions they have recreated.

The whole group, reflecting on what has been shared, tries to answer three questions (and an enabler writes their contributions down, to display):

- **What is going wrong in the church in Corinth?**
- **How might Paul’s idea of the Body of Christ help?**
- **How does this relate to us in our intercultural situation today?**

Part five

What about us? – what will we do now?

Allow ten to fifteen minutes for this section, including the brief time in small groups

Now it would be best for everyone, if possible, to return to the group of two or three that they formed in Part one and for each of those groups to consider two things:

Have we learned anything from the study that might affect how our aspirations would best be achieved?

What do our church(es) need to do to make realistic progress with ‘getting along well together’?

Try to remember what you said to each other in Part one of the study, but also refer to the recording sheet produced during the feedback from the groups in Part one as a prompt both to your own ideas and to the ideas that others shared. Has this study contributed anything to your ideas as to how the shared aspirations might realistically be achieved?

Once the groups have had about 5-10 minutes to talk and everyone has shared their ideas, one of the enablers should invite people to feedback their thoughts to the whole group, while another enabler writes the ideas down on a flip chart or other large piece of paper, to be displayed and then considered by the group as a whole. From all of this, can we agree **‘Our recommendations’**? If so, they can be used as the basis of reporting back to other groups and formal church meetings, if you have planned to do this.

Closing

At the conclusion of your study you may wish to share a prayer or some form of closing worship, possibly including the reading of the whole study passage: **I Corinthians 12.12-27**. If you feel like singing, the following short song might be appropriate.

One body!

Sung to the well-known tune 'Give me oil in my lamp'/'Sing Hosanna' (Rejoice and Sing 523, Mission Praise 167) this song should be quite easy to sing unaccompanied, if necessary.

Called by Jesus to live as one body
with a unity all can share,
but to glory in ev'ryone's diff'rence;
treat each other with respect and care!
Each one giving, each receiving,
build one body with the love of God;
each one list'ning, each one learning,
body-building for our God!
(all shout): **One body!**

Words by John M. Campbell – full permission given to reproduce for singing

Scroll on down to find the following possible handouts:

All the Background materials on one sheet

All the group questions on one sheet

Bible study for Intercultural Explorations

So, you want to get along well together...

Good intentions, difficult moments and practical advice in Ancient Corinth

I Corinthians 12.12-27

All the background materials for the study

Corinth in the time of Paul – background information, block one

Corinth was a strategically-placed Roman colony in Greece. It had been founded by Julius Caesar in 44 BCE on the site of an older Greek city of the same name that previously had been largely destroyed. The city sat next to a narrow neck of land that joined a vast peninsula (the furthest south blob of Greece) to the rest of Greece. This meant that it held a key position on the main trade route between Italy and Asia Minor. Corinth had two ports, one to the west, the other to the east and all goods in transit had to be carried over the isthmus from the one port to the other. So, by the time of Paul, Corinth was a self-confident, competitive and very prosperous trading centre with a multi-racial population but with a markedly Roman character to its civic life.

People came to Corinth from all across the Empire to try to make money. But, so far as we can tell, the city was divided not only into distinct ethnic groups (e.g. the Jewish community) but also by social status (notably, the division between slaves and free people, but there were many more layers besides). There were also significant divisions into distinct trades and callings. Each trade probably had its own guild or affiliation that took regular subscriptions and would lay on an appropriately dignified funeral when one of its members died. Social mobility wasn't easy to achieve.

New arrivals, particularly if they had grown up in a village community, must have wondered how this complex bustling community held together. One common explanation, which was used regularly at the time, was to compare a city to a human body.

The city is like a body – background information, block two

The complexity of a city such as Corinth, with its many, many distinct roles and tasks, was likened to the diverse members of a human body. Various very different members all contributed to the life and health of the one body. The picture also helped to explain why some city dwellers were doing much better than others. Not everyone can be the stomach (where all the food goes), the picture said. Some have to be the hands that prepare the food (without getting to keep any) and others have to be feet and legs that do all the legwork.

The body picture honours the rich **diversity** of the city's people and their roles in city life, but it also affirms the vast differences in wealth, status and freedom between people within the city. It urges everyone to accept **inequality**. The city needs slaves as well as merchants and councilmen if it is going to work. Don't try to be what you're not. Don't envy the wealthy. Just get on with your bit of being body together. If the city-body turned on itself everyone would suffer. The body picture says, "*Know your place! Don't get uppity!*"

The New Church in ancient Corinth – *background information, block three*

There is an account of the beginnings of the Church in Corinth in Acts 18.1-17. From this and comments in Paul's letters it would seem that Paul, in distinction to his grand public address in Athens (Acts 17.16-34), quietly joined the endless stream of new arrivals in the city. Like many, he seeks out friends from his own ethnic background and trade, paying his way in the low-status, menial trade of tent-making. Still, sewing leather and canvas in an open-fronted shop, he must have made contact with a wide variety of customers. As a result, he attracted people of a wide variety of social backgrounds to the church. Although most of them were of low standing – slaves, artisans and such like – some were of higher social standing within the Jewish, Roman and Greek communities of the city. Paul, in the first chapter of I Corinthians puts it like this: *'...not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.'* Thus the Christian fellowships of Corinth must have been highly unusual in the sorts of broad social mixing they afforded in what was otherwise a highly stratified city of distinct groups who each knew their place. Being a convention-defying Christian in Corinth must have been exciting!

Bible study for Intercultural Explorations

So, you want to get along well together...

Good intentions, difficult moments and practical advice in Ancient Corinth

I Corinthians 12.12-27

Part one

Our aspirations today

A question to be considered in groups of two or three...

- What do you hope will emerge or develop from our intercultural explorations?
-

Part two

The way the world works – the city as a body

Two questions for all the participants working together...

- As a new arrival, what might you make of the city's diversity and inequality?
 - What aspects of life in UK cities today teach the 'have nots' to know their place?
-

Part three

Paul's Christian ideal – the body of Christ

Three questions for all the participants working together...

After hearing I Corinthians 12.12-13 and 18-20, ask:

- In what ways is Paul's body picture of church like the city-as-body picture?

After hearing I Corinthians 12.21-26, ask:

- So, now, what's different about Paul's body picture?
 - How, according to Paul, are we to respond to differences of ethnicity, status or gifting in church?
-

Part four

Keeping it real – echoes from the text

several questions for all the participants working together... and a group exercise

- But why does Paul need to say all this in his letter to the church in Corinth?

After hearing I Corinthians 12.14-21, ask:

- Can you uncover any traces of how the Corinthian Christians might have been treating each other from what Paul says?

Group Exercise

- “Comment makers” consider together what might have brought church members to make this sort of comment
- “Comment receivers” consider together how they might have felt if this sort of comment was made to/about them

- What is going wrong in the church in Corinth?
 - How might Paul’s idea of the Body of Christ help?
 - How does this relate to us in our intercultural situation today?
-

Part five

What about us? What will we do now?

Two questions to be considered in our original groups of two or three...

- Have we learned anything from the study that might affect how our aspirations would best be achieved?
 - What do our church(es) need to do to make realistic progress with ‘getting along well together’?
-

One body!

Sung to the tune: Give me oil in my lamp... (Rejoice and Sing 523, Mission Praise 167)

Called by Jesus to live as one body
 with a unity all can share,
 but to glory in ev’ryone’s diff’rence;
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