

Present and Participating: A place at the table.

Introduction

In July 2003 Synod debated the report *Called to Act Justly: A Challenge to Include Minority Ethnic People in the Life of the Church of England* (GS1512). That paper followed on from *Called to Lead* (2000: GS Misc 625) an initial response to the 1999 Stephen Lawrence Enquiry Report. *Called to Lead* identified five priority issues on which to focus in the future – education and training; young people; vocations; nurturing new leaders; police and safety. *Called to Act Justly* contained eight recommendations¹ building on those of *Called to Lead*. These were endorsed by General Synod with a request for a progress report within three years.² This report was provided to General Synod in July 2006 as GS Misc 832.

Part One of this paper gives a biblically based reflection on the issues of Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns (MEAC). Part Two provides a number of perspectives on the experiences of minority ethnic people, notes the gifts and challenges they offer to the Church, and identifies priority areas for further action.

Part One - Theological reflection

Presence and Participation

1. The idea of having a place at the table – individuals being afforded equal opportunity to be both present and participatory – holds particular significance in scripture. This concept applies whether one is simply taking part in the business of the day, being involved in a decision-making process, or simply sharing a meal or personal stories or biblical exegesis. Both ‘invitation’ and ‘hospitality’ are key elements within the Gospel message (Matt 11.28-30, 19.14; *par.* Mark 10.14 and Lk 18.16; also Lk 14.12-144; John 7.37-38) – and they also carry associated warnings (Matt 8.2-7; *cf* Mark 9.42; also see Matt 7.12).
2. The idea of being ‘present *and* participating’ extends the invitation and offer of hospitality to include equality – a privilege which can only be extended *from* those who hold power *to* those who are vulnerable and oppressed. This extension of grace – *charis* – is a gift or privilege which cannot be earned as it reflects the character of the Holy Spirit and markedly points to the coming kingdom of God, the importance of the Eucharist in Christian life, and ultimately to the vision of the eternal kingdom.
3. Therefore, the responsibility of making certain that all people in the Church are not only present, but valued as equal participants, is not simply about human justice, political correctness, social ‘balancing’ or even good manners. Fundamentally, it is an expression of

¹ These eight recommendations are included at Appendix 2

² The Resolution passed is at Appendix 1

the Church's core belief in God's reconciling work within his human creation, and the impact our actions hold in matters of ultimate destiny.

Invitation and Hospitality

4. Invitation and hospitality have strong roots in scripture, and ultimately quantify what it means to be Christ-like and human. Christ invites all and his invitation exemplifies that of the welcoming host who is genuinely concerned about the emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being of his guests (Matthew 19.14; Mark 10.14; Luke 18.16). The implication is that those who allow their faith and actions to be sullied by the acts of subterfuge and collusion – that are frequently used to oppress those who are vulnerable – jeopardise their relationship with God and their place in his eternal kingdom.
5. Jesus teaches that an invitation to those who have little or nothing to offer in return is an act of grace (Luke 14.12-14). This understanding of *charis* extends kindness and goodwill to the 'other' – depicted in Luke's gospel as the poor, the crippled, lame and blind – without expectation of anything to be given in return. As a special manifestation of God's divine presence or Holy Spirit at work in his people, *charis* represents those acts which bless and extend favour to the 'other.' Whether it is an invitation to partake in the Eucharistic meal or sample the life-giving water of the Spirit (John 7-37-39), or an offer of an extended hand of fellowship or promotion to a seat of honour, *charis* represents God's grace extended to others by his followers. Thus, by extension, hospitality means looking for, finding and acknowledging the 'other' to be worthy of honour, respect and dignity, irrespective of origin or societal standing.
6. This interpretation of hospitality is not limited to the Gospel message, but has its roots in Old Testament narrative as well. So it is that Abraham (Gen 18.1ff.) offers food, rest and all the comforts of his household to strangers, unaware that the Lord himself has come to join him at the table (*cf.* Heb 13.2). This beautiful story of courtesy, dignity and *charis* – making space and time for those who come unknown and expecting no payment in return – becomes a parable of how God openly and willingly comes to form relationships with his human creation. As Abraham invites the Lord to be present at his table and in his life a relationship is formed, while participating in his family's hospitality leads to an unimagined blessing, (Gen 18.18; also *cf.* 22.16-18) – one that is later extended to comprise all nations of the earth.
7. This analogy teaches us that in the hospitable offering of a place at the table, God forms a co-labouring bond with his human creation. This bond is formed to accomplish the reconciling work that is at the heart both of Christ's life-giving act of redemption on the cross and of his directive for mission to the world (Matt 28.18-20), and presents a foretaste of communion between the divine and humanity which is to last for eternity.
8. Further, at the heart of all genuine invitation and hospitality is generosity – an offer or gift extended without expectation of repayment – which acknowledges and celebrates all humans as beings created in God's image. Such generosity not only sees God's image in his human creation, but in turn acts to eliminate competitive rivalries and diminishes our selfish and exclusive nature. Generosity also makes us more receptive to the gifts and contributions of others, and the value they offer the common good. When relationships are fostered without strings attached any service, gift, or contribution which comes forth unexpectedly is

a welcomed surprise. We find ourselves open to those aspects in others which reflect God's image and creative genius at work in human beings.

9. In fact, an invitation for all to come and be seated at the table signals the coming of God's kingdom and the *charis* of his Spirit at work in the Christian community in which the fundamental equality of all human persons is celebrated. Thereby, we should always strive to extend generosity and seek to find the image of God and the likeness of Christ in all our sisters and brothers. David Ford says:

*"This vision of promised joy has the most radical consequences now. No community can rest in its present level of hospitality towards others. All our actions towards others can be tested by whether they are in harmony with wholehearted feasting together eventually. What changes will have to happen in ourselves, our families and communities in order to be able fully to enjoy the company of other classes, races, religions, communities, personality types and cultures?"*³

Invitation and Equality

10. However, to make a place at table for those who are often overlooked is not as simple as it sounds. To extend an invitation for someone to join us at our table creates powerful obligations and forges relationships which cannot be ignored. There are important responsibilities on both sides. Jesus teaches how God's invitation to people and their response to his call is mirrored in the way people offer others a place at table (John 14.16-24).
11. First, we are challenged to live up to the demands of hospitality, and to actively seek out those who are to receive places and provision at our table. To respond to Jesus' teaching requires obedience and that we allow ourselves to be challenged and changed by the demands such hospitality bears. It is not enough to simply issue invitations and then ignore or patronise those who accept the offer.
12. The very nature of genuine hospitality acknowledges the contribution that the mere presence of the invitee will bring to the relationship. The relationship evolves into one where both become privileged through sharing with and being served by one another. This important lesson is given to us by Jesus in a number of places, where he insists that the guest at table must not be overshadowed by the importance of the host or his special friends (Mark 9. 33-35). He rebukes his disciples and silences their arguments concerning who belongs where in the hierarchy (Matt 18.1-4; 23.1-11), and he demolishes the pecking order by insisting that the kingdom of God demands the loss of such thinking (Matt 20.20-28). He makes this startlingly clear not simply by his words, but also in his deeds. By washing his disciples' feet, much to their initial discomfort and amazement, Jesus demonstrates his own greatness through humility and becoming a servant to others (John 13.1-17).

Accepting Invitation

13. Jesus also warns us about the dangers of expecting the place of privilege and honour at the table (Luke 11.43, 14.8-11). Further, he denounces complacency showing that our treatment

³ Ford, David, *The Shape of Living* (Fount, Harper Collins 1997) p 166.

of others can open the way for those ‘out there’ to respond to the invitation positively, toppling the established and comfortable order (Luke 14.16-24). Jesus teaches that the kingdom of heaven isn’t exclusive to any one particular group of people. In fact, Jesus uses the parable of the wedding banquet to illustrate how invitations to the heavenly banquet will be radically offered to people from everywhere, for ‘then people will come from east and west and north and south and will eat in the kingdom of God’ (Luke 13.29). Thus Jesus makes his point succinctly: ‘the last shall be first and the first last.’⁴

14. Recognition of the ‘other’ is also important. If we fail to recognise others who are different from ourselves as equals, or if we refuse to acknowledge their needs, or if we insist on measuring their contributions by our own prejudices and biased assumptions, then we in turn will not be recognised by God (Matt 22.7-8; 25.11-13; 44-46). How we invite others to be present and participating in our own lives and consequently in the life of the Church directly impacts on who we are in this world and how we will be recognised by God in his eternal kingdom.
15. So Jesus leaves us in no doubt what it means to extend an invitation to others and how we are to respond to that act of generosity. It is not good enough to get an invitation to fellowship and then find more important things to do (Matt 22.1-10). It is not good enough to be unprepared (Matt 22.11-14; 25.1-13) or to forget even to turn up. To be invited to a place at table is to be entrusted with the power of participation which in turn is to be treasured – with humility and wisdom – and never abused or taken lightly (Luke 14.7-11).
16. To abuse a position or place at the table through suspicion, arrogance, poor stewardship or even lack of interest is to exclude oneself from God’s company and diminishes the significance of kingdom values exhibited by Jesus. In several parables, Jesus illustrates how guests abuse their invitation (Matthew 22. 1-14; Luke 14 7-11; Luke 14.16-24)
17. Rather, the *charis* we extend when we offer a place at the table to the ‘other,’ the eager willingness with which we accept and respond to an invitation, as well as the genuine effort that goes into creating an atmosphere of trust and fellowship among those present, are all ways in which we honour God, celebrate his creative genius and marvel at the rich diversity in which his image is portrayed within all his human creatures. Further, it represents a foretaste of the human tapestry that God will gather to himself at the time of the marvellous harvest. Therefore, to allow others to be present at table and to participate fully in the life of the Church not only is a witness to the gospel message, but illustrates the true and lasting fellowship that we share in Christ.

Transformation

18. It is a part of our human nature to seek to define whom we would like to invite or to share our table with. We see this clearly in scripture when Jesus is rebuked for accepting the hospitality of tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2.13-15; Luke 27-29). Yet Jesus argues that these are precisely the people with whom relationships should be forged, because it is through new friendships and fellowship with others that lives are transformed – theirs and ours!

⁴ See Matt 19.30, 20.8, 16; and Mark 10.31.

This is powerfully portrayed in the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19.1-10) whose life is changed dramatically by offering Jesus a place at his table. Jesus challenges the religious leaders of his day (generally the Pharisees or Sadducees) to look closely at whom they offer table room to and to examine their motivations by observing whom they always exclude – the poor, the sick, the outcast and the unclean.

19. Further, Jesus acknowledges that all of these people are welcome at God's table and have a contribution to make. Their presence transforms us! Diversity offers multiple perspectives and many witnesses (2 Tim 2.2). In doing likewise, our efforts illustrate kingdom values to the world which is becoming increasingly self-obsessed and hungry for attention and notoriety.
20. To make it possible for people to be 'present and participating,' and to welcome them at all times, frequently in their outcast state, demonstrates the power of acceptance and the insatiable generosity of God that we see in the parables of the vineyard or the prodigal son. Both teach us powerful lessons about the love and mercy of God, the *charis* he extends to raise up all who have been forgotten, pushed aside or oppressed – all those who according to our own arbitrary reasoning do not deserve to have equal status among us. All forms of exclusion, or the disingenuous efforts made when inviting others to be present only on our own terms, mirror the sinful and God-forgetting world in which we live.
21. Presence and participation lies at the heart of fellowship – *koinonia*. Unfortunately, we sometimes dilute the meaning of this word, interpreting it as a sort of fuzzy network of vaguely like-minded people. However, the term means just the opposite. The form of fellowship expressed by the term *koinonia* conveys relationships based on genuine mutuality and on cooperative partnership that include the welcome exchange of valuable gifts. And as true *koinonia* is practised, the guest is transformed to become the host (Matt 25.40, cf Lk 24.30).

Barriers

22. The early church was challenged by the question of whether Gentiles should only be allowed to be present and participating if they gave up their differences, underwent circumcision and agreed to live by Mosaic law (Acts 15.1-11; also see 10.45, 11.2-3). As the controversy rages, Peter reminds everyone that we should seek to follow God's will for 'he has found no distinction between them and us'. Similarly, Paul's writings also address the need to overcome barriers between people based on differences, not by exterminating or ignoring those differences or relegating them to a status of less importance, but by concentrating instead on the shared life in Christ (Gal 3.28; Col 3.11). This means putting aside factions and cliques – whereby some enjoy status and privilege at the expense of others – for something more fundamental to Christian life, the gracious giving and receiving of God's love released in fellowship. The barriers to accepting invitations can be as deep-seated as the barriers to extending them.
23. Sometimes the barrier (both to giving or accepting hospitality) can take the form of a desire to retain cultural differences or to preserve external loyalties - or to avoid having to move out of comfort zones into controversial areas. Cultural diversity is a gift to be offered into the fellowship, but some who do not want to embrace the responsibility that participation

brings may use diversity, not as a gift but as a barrier. Prime examples occur in Galatians 2, where Paul recalls having to challenge Peter for failing to be consistent in accepting the gentile converts on an equal footing; and in John 4 where the Samaritan woman responds to Jesus' invitation by asking whether she can continue to worship in the Samaritan tradition.

24. Another barrier to accepting hospitality may arise from a feeling of unworthiness. As Jesus makes clear on numerous occasions, recognition of unworthiness is actually an excellent qualification for receiving God's grace, as exemplified by the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 2.25), the Roman centurion (Luke 7.2) and the tax collector in the parable (Luke 18.13).
25. The practice of true fellowship among Christians is both radical and challenging. Paul acknowledges this when he advises Christian communities of the absolute necessity to lay arguments and rivalries aside (1 Cor 10-17). The establishment of *koinonia* can only be based on genuine mutuality amongst diverse peoples and groups of people who give to and receive from one another, and in so doing more accurately exhibit kingdom values to the world.

The Eucharist

26. The ultimate synthesis of *charis* and *koinonia* – as expressions of the abiding presence of God's Spirit, communal fellowship, equality and privilege by adoption – is personified in the Eucharistic meal. At the Passover meal, Jesus emphasises to his disciples the significance of the 'servant master,' the one who willingly becomes a servant to others not only to teach the meaning of *charis* and *koinonia*, but to embody them and therein present a living example for all disciples to follow. He is both host and guest, master and servant.

In his example, we find an expression of courtesy and service based on a familial relationship forged through adoption. Each disciple, even the one who betrays him, is invited to be present and to participate actively in the ritual of eating and drinking as a member of Jesus' extended family. Further, they are encouraged to repeat this act of generous hospitality to others, to cement the shared principles of fellowship and blessing, invitation and favour, mutuality through grace. Our Christian life then has its centre in a Eucharistic presence and participation in which God is active and equality and love are both expressed and experienced. And so to deny people the opportunity to be fully part of this family is to turn away from Jesus' command "you should do as I have done for you" (John 13: 3-15).

The Heavenly Vision

27. Presence and participation are also hallmarks of the eschatology we find in scripture. The prophetic vision promises that in the end times all nations will see God's glory and human enmities will be forgotten when replaced by unity and love (Isaiah 40.5; Zephaniah 3.9).

Similarly, Luke's depiction of the 'Day of Pentecost' reveals how the presence and power of the Holy Spirit blows aside the barriers created by racial and cultural divisions and differences. God's Spirit gathers different people and forms new communities where all can be established and nurtured (Acts 2). Paul's famous metaphor of the parts of God's body,

an organic whole comprised of believers from varied backgrounds, exercising diverse gifts and talents, actively working together harmoniously vividly paints a picture of presence and participation that can effectively reconcile broken people and a broken world (1 Cor 12.1-13.3).

28. To be a church of this kind – one that loves uncompromisingly, that overcomes prejudice with acceptance and exclusion with invitation – is to allow the windows of heaven to be opened here on earth in order for God’s heavenly will to replace our own fragile and imperfect inclinations. It is not surprising to find that John’s vision in the Book of Revelation depicts God’s glory emerging from a broken world through the active presence and participation of people from all nations joined in prayer, praise and thanksgiving (Rev 7.9-12; 21.22-27). To establish Christian believers and worshippers from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, to allow them to openly share their gifts and talents with mutual benefit to all, to have all nations represented among those who are present and participating fully at the table – at every level and throughout all structures of the Church – is therefore a heavenly vision, and is an expression of God’s eternal kingdom that will be a unifying and dynamic witness to a fallen world.

Part Two

In this section of the paper we want to relate these theological principles of invitation, hospitality, inclusion and participation to what has actually been happening in the Church of England. We want to look at what there is to celebrate and see where we fall short of what God wants.

Defining ethnicity

29. In this paper use of the term ethnicity refers to those characteristics used to classify people into distinguishable groups or categories. These could be cultural tradition, national origin, history, ancestry, etc. Using this definition of ethnicity as one of our terms of reference acknowledges that minority ethnic people are not a homogenous group and no one particular set of people is being thought about.

There will be a difference between how an organisation, like the Church of England, and the society we live in, handles majority and minority groups’ issues. We have seen that the nature of the Church means that being one in Christ has a bearing on how we function as community and should also be reflected in the processes. For example society makes laws about the treatment of others such as racial abuse or discrimination. However the Church wants to create a world where such laws would be unnecessary, where ethnicity would always be celebrated and enjoyed. The important question for us is how far have progressed with this vision in the Church of England?

Celebration of diversity and Anglicanism

30. The most exciting thing about the Anglican Communion is its diversity. The people we would call “minority ethnic Anglicans” in this country are, within the context of the Anglican Communion, actually the majority. Therefore, being an Anglican means much

more than belonging to a local parish church: it means joining a vast company of Christians across the whole world. That in itself indicates diversity – of culture, language, tradition, customs, dress, etc. Reaching across one hundred and sixty different countries means that each country, diocese and parish bring to the Anglican Communion its own richness and diversity.

31. Visitors from all over the world who normally worship in an Anglican church in their country of origin should find a welcoming place within any Anglican Church in England – they are part of a very large Church family. There are numerous examples of excellent diocesan links where visiting Anglicans are welcomed. For example, the Southwell and Nottingham diocese is linked with the diocese of Natal. Visitors from Natal are included and participate fully in services held in Southwell Minster and in local parish churches during their visit. Similarly mission agencies such as USPG and CMS have partnerships and exchanges that include receiving and welcoming visitors from various areas within of the wider Anglican Communion.

The gifts that are offered – an opportunity or problem?

32. How does the Church of England regard its diverse constituency? Minority ethnic people have come to Britain from many different countries and cultural backgrounds. The vast majority of them seek to contribute fully to the life of the nation that is now their home – without losing their cultural distinctiveness.
33. Whilst the Church of England has generally been tolerant of other cultures, there has not always been a warm welcome extended to newcomers. Tolerance does not mean acceptance. It is the contention of this paper that the Church of England has been, and to some extent remains, subject to the same criticism as the country as a whole. Its failure to allow and encourage people from minority ethnic backgrounds to participate fully has led to its impoverishment.⁵
34. The Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann describes institutionalised religion as being characterised by '*a management mentality which believes there are no mysteries to honour, only problems to be solved*' and which '*requires the annulment of the neighbour as a life-giver in our history*'.⁶

This “management mentality” is in evidence within the Church of England as an institution. Accordingly minority ethnic Anglicans have sometimes come to be seen as a burden. This produces a reaction within the Church that depicts minority ethnic concerns as a problem rather than an opportunity to grow, revitalise and sustain the Church. To make the same point another way, the issue of what to do about minority ethnic Anglicans is seen as a difficulty that will need to be resolved with time and energy that could otherwise be devoted to the “real work” of the Church. It is our position that the presence of minority ethnic

⁵ Peter Brierley's recent research argues that church attendance by non-Whites increased by 19% over the seven year period of 1998-2005, while church attendance among Whites decreased by 19% over the same period. Further, his research identifies that Blacks represented 63% of the growth among non-White church goers during this time. See *Pulling out of the nosedive* (London: Christian Research, 2006), pp90-92.

⁶ Brueggemann, Walter (1978) *The Prophetic Imagination* Fortress Press (pp.42-43)

members, their diverse abilities and work is a *charis* – a gift from God – and thereby forms an integral part of what it will take to enrich and build the Church for mission now and in the future.

Why is it important to embrace minority ethnic Anglican worshippers?

35. As set out in the theological reflection in Part One there are numerous reasons why minority ethnic Anglican worshippers are an important part of the worshipping community. First, the teaching and example of Jesus shows us that the “stranger in our midst” is to be especially welcomed. (Matthew 25.35 – “...when I was a stranger you invited me in.”) The same point is made in a different way in the Letter of James (2.5-6), where the author upbraids his readers for showing favouritism to the rich at the expense of the poor. Whilst minorities are not strangers to the Church, or indeed the Lord’s Table, within their own dioceses and amongst their own congregations they are often made to feel as though they are aliens residing in a foreign land. Further, whilst the financial status of minority ethnic worshippers varies, many are often perceived and treated as ‘the poor.’ Consequently such cultural assumptions mean that they are frequently pushed aside with their gifts and financial status demeaned in favour of their non-minority counterparts.⁷

36. Second, minority ethnic groups are often those who are marginalised in our society. In his keynote speech at the Association of Black Clergy Conference in 2004 the Archbishop of Canterbury emphasised the need to define what he called the changing face of racism.⁸ The dispossession and disconnectedness of minority ethnic people is recognised by many minority ethnic Anglicans as the changing face of racism. These were the issues at the heart of *Called to Act Justly*.

The findings of the Joynt Hope Youth Ministry Report highlighted the feelings of minority ethnic young people, and their sense of being disconnected. Many feel misunderstood by their youth workers who frequently have difficulty engaging with them. This in turn reinforces their feelings of isolation and the perception that their thoughts and experiences are being ignored by those who simply do not understand or relate to their cultural contexts.

37. Finally, minority ethnic Anglicans need to be valued for the contributions they can make to the life of the Church. The diversity of experience and culture of English, Caribbean, African, Chinese, Indian and many other communities are a microcosm and foretaste of the richness celebrated in the Eucharistic meal and the life that we will all enjoy in the eternal kingdom. Minority ethnic people joyously celebrate being followers of Christ. Their presence as Anglicans provides an excellent opportunity to the Church of England to embrace, acknowledge and utilise their gifts and talents for the enrichment of the whole body of Christ.⁹

⁷ Research suggests that while minority ethnic professionals and managerial classes may come from working class backgrounds, they excel because they have been encouraged by their parents to gain higher qualifications, more so than their White counterparts who come from migrant or working class backgrounds. See *Pulling Out Of The Nose Dive*, pp.92-93.

⁸ Archbishop of Canterbury address (2004) to Association of Black Clergy, Crowther Hall, Birmingham

⁹ Paul writes to the Corinthians about the importance of every part of the body in I Cor 12:12-27

Vitality and energy

“Taking experience seriously requires that we find ways of making sense of what we see, hear and feel.”¹⁰

38. It is important to focus on young people because many of the minority ethnic young people in our congregations have been born and brought up in the Church of England and yet feel disconnected from it. All young people want and expect their experiences to be taken seriously. The manner in which they are responded to, their ideas embraced, and their dreams cultivated tends to shape their futures. Young people are passionate people! They bring vitality to any given project, and often their commitment is presented with total abandonment to all else. Minority ethnic young people also have a strong sense of community and (like their white counterparts) have passion and energy. Like all young people seeking a sense of belonging and identity young minority ethnic people want to be allowed to use their gifts, and for Christians this means using them within the kingdom of God. Their openness, honesty and desire to build real community can be a model for youth practitioners to further develop. However to date the under-representation of minority ethnic youth practitioners and diocesan youth officers has meant they have been unable to make their full contribution to the development of the National Youth Strategy.

39. This reaction to their feelings of disconnectedness and alienation from their churches (not just the Church of England)¹¹ is leading many young church members to vote with their feet. The Church of England needs to understand what it means to be a second, third, fourth or even fifth generation young person of minority ethnic origin in the Anglican Church and ask questions about encouraging and nurturing leadership. Some minority ethnic young people today have great grandparents who were born and educated in England. These young people who remain within the Church of England ask questions about their role in what they believe to be ‘their’ church, but often they seem to have no role nor do they see a reflection of themselves in places where it matters.

It is part of our vision that disaffected young minority ethnic Christians will see the Church of England offering a fresh and appealing perspective which encourages and welcomes their gifts and vitality.

Honed through suffering

40. The resilience of many minority ethnic people, born out of their particular history of suffering – through the legacies of slavery, war, poverty or the more brutal forms of colonialism – is a true gift to the Church of England at this time when religion has become a private matter for a large majority of the population. This understanding of suffering enables a resonance with the torture and crucifixion of Jesus. This makes the cross the ultimate act of solidarity with the oppressed – God’s ‘NO’ to injustice which speaks so powerfully to those who are suffering from it. It is a mark of mission to ‘seek to transform unjust

¹⁰ Beckford, Robert (2004), *God and the gangs* London, Darton Longman and Todd

¹¹ See *Pulling Out Of The Nose Dive*, p.101

structures of society' and minority ethnic Christians have much to offer the Church in terms of understanding what needs to happen to make such transformation possible. Similarly, the Church cannot address this part of its mission effectively unless minority ethnic people are invited to be fully part of the leadership and decision-making process, and their stories and experiences shared and incorporated in the Church's common life.

Understanding of the pain and suffering of Christ paralleled in the many experiences of minority ethnic Anglicans gives urgency to sharing the good news of Jesus enthusiastically with everyone. Minority ethnic people offer gifts which are a strength in areas where interpersonal relationships predominate, making them feel confident in sharing the gospel more easily and openly, including re-evangelising and re-energising some existing congregations.

Church banners - a valuable contribution

At a parish church in one of the *deaneries in the Liverpool diocese* the congregation decided to make a hanging for the church. Each person was asked to make a square for it. One day an asylum seeker turned up saying that he had come to be part of the sewing team. The group were not aware that he was a tailor but when he sewed several squares to contribute to the hanging his tailoring skills came into their own. Although he was a displaced person, he was able to make a valuable contribution to the life of the church and the church provided him with a space in which his skills could be appreciated and known.

The gifts of resolve, strength of mind and determination in the face of adversity have been honed through past experiences of marginalisation. This continues now through the determined decision of minority ethnic people to continue to stand up to be counted, even though they are visibly absent within the Church structures. Despite the rejection experienced by many, they have chosen to remain within the Church of England rather than walk away as many others have done.

Strong sense of community

41. The openness and hospitality of minority ethnic people is something to be treasured by the Church whose mandate it is to "go and make disciples of all nations". This gift of hospitality is a cultural attribute not only at the Eucharistic table but is extended to the whole of life. It is part of their history, culture and tradition to welcome the stranger.

*"Have you had similar experiences in which you have been the stranger in a strange land, or the outsider longing to be included? Ask yourself how you cope with your own feelings and how that can help you understand how others feel when they are excluded."*¹²

42. Their sense of community enables many minority ethnic people to feel comfortable in openly dealing with human experiences. This openness is potentially a huge asset in, for example, the grieving process and coming to terms with death. Some minority ethnic

¹² Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, (2002) *Voices of Experience*, London The Methodist Church (p17)

Christians embrace all the occasional offices with intense emotion. This is a testimony to others, Christians included, of the power and passion that is present in the gospel and which can be lost in complacency and routine religious practice.

Minority Ethnic Anglicans in positions of leadership?

Reflection of diversity in leadership

On an Advisory team visit to Chelmsford diocese in 2005 there was a very good example of a diocese where “how things look” is taken seriously. On a tour of Chelmsford Cathedral the team observed sculptures and bronzes depicting minority ethnic images. In one of the parishes the team was told of what happens at a baptism. When a person is baptised someone of the same language group is asked to pray. People are affirmed for who they are and their gifts are valued. Pictures showed the different art form; respect for each was evident.

moment minority ethnic people see very little reflection of themselves, their culture, their joy or pains or their story.

For example, African members of the Church of England bring to worship a sense of joy and excitement, vitality, energy and spontaneity. However, they are rarely part of the Church leadership or participants in devising Church liturgy. Thus the life of the Church does not often reflect these gifts.

44. In presiding at the Eucharist a person brings not only the message of Christ, but also a sense of identity. It is not a performance or pretence; but the simple fact of having a minority ethnic person presiding, and bringing to the liturgy their history and all that it encompasses, gives an additional focus to God’s message to his people. Anthony Reddie sums it up well when he says: “*Images do matter... how things look matters greatly. I have witnessed the ways in which marginalized people come to life when they have seen themselves represented in the Godhead.*”¹³ Additionally, a minority ethnic person presiding may often bring to the liturgy an emphasis or insight that is unfamiliar to the majority.

45. Work under way in dioceses and parishes to promote training in equality and cultural and ethnic diversity is one way of acknowledging these gifts. We recognise however that there is still much work to be done to make minority ethnic members feel truly affirmed. Any action that assists in making this happen should be regarded as an important and significant contribution.

43. The Church needs to be able to celebrate diversity and variety and to bring all gifts, talents and cultures to be shared in the kingdom of God. People being ministered to need to be able to see a reflection of themselves in the leadership of God’s church. The reflection that many see is white, English and male! At the

13 Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (2002) *Voices of Experience*, London, Methodist Church p.20

How far have we come? Statistical synopsis

46. As we reflect on our church processes: training of clergy, our worship, the distribution of power within the church, the crucified Christ on the cross has implications for transforming and redeeming the whole Church.

The recent survey from Research and Statistics¹⁴ shows that currently 2.2% of clergy are of minority ethnic background, compared to 3.7% of the local parochial electoral roll membership and 8.7% of the population as a whole.

47. It is over 20 years since the Church of England's *Faith in the City* highlighted the disparity between minority ethnic people and the majority white members in the Church. That report recommended that something be done to address this issue. There are many who have said and continue to say that the Church has come a long way. This is true if it simply refers to the acceptance, in an average church, of minority ethnic Anglicans in the pews. But much remains to be done at the leadership and collective level. For example when the General Synod reduced its numbers in 2005 by 18% the proportion of minority ethnic members elected to General Synod fell by a startling 29.4%¹⁵, almost with the implication that the minority ethnic members were the most dispensable. Even Southwark, often seen as a flagship diocese for its inclusiveness, only returned one lay member out of a possible seven minority ethnic members and has no minority ethnic clergy member on General Synod.
48. For those who wish to see evidence that the Church of England welcomes minority ethnic members to participate fully at all levels, this is disheartening. There is still only one minority ethnic archdeacon; there are two minority ethnic bishops (out of 113); there is only one cathedral dean; and there is one minority ethnic diocesan youth officer out of 44. The fact that we now have a minority ethnic archbishop is however a very welcome and encouraging sign.

The anniversary of abolition of the slave trade

49. The Church of England's response to the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act earlier this year included *Bicentenary hearings* in six dioceses and the *Walk of Witness* through London on Saturday 24th March with almost 4,000 people in attendance.

The Walk was the first of its kind organised on a national scale and this was initiated and driven by CMEAC. This was an important event for minority ethnic Anglicans within the Church of England but also for the wider church because of their involvement and the opportunities it offered for remembrance, repentance, restoration and reconciliation. It was an example of minority ethnic Anglicans not just being present, but fully participating and taking the lead.

50. The *Bicentenary hearings* provided another opportunity for black people to have a voice and for many presented a forum for them to tell their story uninterrupted. In this space we heard

¹⁴ Research and Statistics Department: Clergy Diversity Audit 2005

¹⁵ Numbers of those declaring a minority ethnic background fell from 17 out of 568 to 12 out of 466.

experiences of ‘living the legacy’ of the slave trade from black and white perspectives – a place where both were given equal opportunity to be listened to and heard. Furthermore a safe environment was created that fostered mutual learning where the aim was to help begin a process of healing and reconciliation but also to educate and promote understanding and awareness. In these hearings there was true and full participation without any fear of judgement but complete acceptance of each individual for who they are and the voice they offered.

It is hoped that encouragement will be drawn from both these events.

Opportunities to grasp

51. The presence of minority ethnic people provides a number of opportunities for the Church of England to become more inclusive of different cultures in this country and lead by example, having them visibly active and participating in all areas of the life of the Church.
52. Minority ethnic people often struggle to fully engage with the processes within the Church of England. For example the committee culture of the Church means that very capable people with much needed skills will not stand for vacancies that arise within the Parochial Church Council, Deanery or Diocesan synod. This has a knock-on effect in that they will not be present and therefore not participating in key places within their diocesan or church life. These processes need to be challenged and creative ways found to carry out church business that engage with and include all. Closely related to this are opportunities for developing the number of readers, leaders of worship, counsellors, pastoral assistants etc. Dioceses, deaneries and parishes should look at different areas of church life and see where minority ethnic people are not participating and then take steps to do something about it.
53. Minority ethnic people provide opportunities for all to gain insight into new patterns of hospitality and sharing faith. One of the biggest challenges for the Church over the next few years is the question of how to make all issues of minority ethnic Anglican concerns mainstream, and not something seen as the domain of CMEAC or the racial justice officer (if you have one!)
54. Ministry Division provides a good example of how the work of CMEAC can become mainstream within the National Church Institutions. Over the past five years the CMEAC Vocations working group has had one of the officers from Ministry Division as a member. Together CMEAC and Ministry division organise an annual vocations conference at the end of February. CMEAC has carried the financial responsibility until now but with effect from 2008 these conferences will be funded from the Ministry Division budget. Similarly the Education Division has one of its National Youth Officers as a member of the CMEAC

The diocese in Europe has been imaginative in addressing the needs of some of their minority ethnic people. In Finland there is a large number of Sudanese refugees who are Anglicans or who worship with the Anglican congregation. Recently Amos Manga, an ordinand from Sudan, came to England on placement alongside an Anglican priest in Nottingham. He was ordained deacon in December and will be ordained priest in Oulu, Finland in June. The needs of this congregation are being met in a culturally relevant way using his gifts.

Youth Issues working group and included CMEAC's work in a successful bid for a DfES grant for work with young people. This is being used to build up the network of minority ethnic youth workers as well as to provide conferences for white youth workers working in areas with large numbers of minority ethnic young people. Other divisions should seek to develop a similar pattern of making the work of CMEAC an integral part of their work.

55. These are real opportunities for the Church to ensure minority ethnic people are present and active on their decision-making bodies. Genuinely seeking to be inclusive is not just a token gesture but flows from a recognition that the church is poorer for not having the contribution of every part of the body.
56. It is of the utmost importance that theological colleges and courses ensure that they use the opportunities presented for ordinands to understand cultural and ethnic diversity. There is recognition of the need to be aware of the different concerns encountered by clergy working in rural areas; this awareness needs to be extended to the area of cultural diversity. Colleges and courses should also seek to recruit minority ethnic tutors and be creative in addressing this need if they do not have them as members of their staff.
57. The voluntary societies of the Church of England – Children's Society, Church Mission Society, USPG and others – should especially seek to ensure that minority ethnic people are included and involved in all their processes.

Conclusion

58. For years there have been *individuals* within the wider Church who have taken conscious action to ensure that minority ethnic concerns have been and continue to be addressed, and who do not see it as a task which, once completed, the Church can move on from as if ticking a box. For such individuals it is ongoing, something to be consciously working at all the time and addressed at every level, however seemingly insignificant. This individual action has been very good for the Church of England but additional *collective* action is now needed. Conscious, collective action could lead to the transformation of individual and communal attitudes and so to the transformation of the whole church.
59. In part this is a matter of simple justice. The Bishop of Worcester set the issues on a wider canvas in the debate on *Called to Act Justly*:

“If we do not take an interest, for example where I live, in the manifest discrimination against travellers; if we do not take an interest in how we respond to the efforts of the British National Party to recruit in places like Worcester; if we do not do those things because we have few minority ethnic members in our congregations, then we are ensuring that we always will have very few, for evangelism begins with the perception of people that you are on their side, that you take their concerns seriously, and that you are on the lookout for ways in which they are suffering in the wider society.”¹⁶

¹⁶ General Synod debate of *Called to Act Justly* report July 2003

The Church needs to ask whether providing opportunities for gifts and talents to flourish would enrich the whole church. If the benefits of these gifts were truly acknowledged and fully utilised within the Church then all sorts of possibilities open up.

60. But there is another reason (beyond that of justice) why the Church needs to take the issues so seriously – its own need of rediscovery and renewal. The Archbishop of York in his inaugural sermon said: *“The church in England must rediscover her self-confidence and self-esteem that united and energised the English people those many centuries ago when the disparate fighting groups embraced the gospel.”*¹⁷ He continued *“For me, the vital issue facing the Church in England and the nation, is the loss of this country’s long tradition of Christian wisdom which brought to birth the English nation: the loss of wonder and amazement that Jesus Christ has authority over every aspect of our lives and our nation.”*

The purpose or goal of this background paper should not be perceived as an attempt to specifically seek after minority ethnic churches but instead to look for ways of celebrating all of God’s people, their lives, and their stories so that when we look at the church we can say that it is demonstrably the whole body of Christ.

¹⁷ Sermon at his inauguration 30th November 2005

APPENDIX 1

The General Synod Resolution of July 2003

Called to Act Justly: Report to the Archbishops' Council (GS 1512)

‘That this Synod

- (a) affirm its commitment to continue tackling the challenge of institutional racism within the Church of England and providing a prophetic voice in addressing the issues of racial injustice;
- (b) commend the report *Called to Act Justly* and invite bishops and their dioceses to consider its implications for their ministry, witness and work for racial justice;
- (c) endorse the recommendations in section VII of *Called to Act Justly* and ask the Archbishops' Council to report on progress in implementation within the next three years; and
- (d) recommend that bishops, in consultation with the Ministry Division, introduce valuing cultural diversity and racism awareness training as a standard requirement for all clergy, accredited ministers, and diocesan officers and staff.’

12 July 2003

APPENDIX 2

Called To Act Justly Recommendations:

It is recommended that

1. The Church of England should continue to exercise a prophetic role by calling attention to issues of racial injustice in society and promoting Gospel values.
2. Renewed effort be invested in enhancing the participation of minority ethnic people within all aspects of the life of the Church of England, in view of their continued under-representation and unjust treatment in spite of the steps taken since the report *Called To Lead* (GS 625, 2000) and its acknowledgement of the challenge of institutional racism.
3. The Research and Statistics Unit undertake regular and reliable statistical ethnic monitoring of dioceses, deaneries and parishes including information on gender, age and offices held;
4. Bishops, in consultation with the Ministry Division, introduce racial awareness/cultural diversity training as a standard component within CME 1-4 and in training for others in leadership positions in dioceses;
5. CMEAC and the Education Division collect and disseminate examples of the effective participation of minority ethnic young people in the life of the Church of England and lessons from the forthcoming Joynt/Hope project to develop models of youth ministry to assist good practice in such youth work
6. The Ministry Division, in partnership with CMEAC and dioceses, undertake:
 - the carrying out of an audit of the clergy in 2004 to establish the proportion who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the offices they hold to establish a baseline, with special reference to gender and whether such clergy are British born;
 - specific projects in the period 2004 to 2008 to encourage vocations to the ordained ministry among minority ethnic people, particularly those who are British born, and explore with the House of Bishops the possibility of introducing targets
7. The National Church Institutions become an example of best practice in providing racial awareness/ cultural diversity training, mentoring and support of minority ethnic staff and by the end of 2004 set targets for the proportion of NCI staff in London drawn from minority ethnic backgrounds.
8. Dioceses work with their local police service to build on the progress made in recent years both in tackling racist crime, in achieving greater representation of minority ethnic people and working towards a more racially equitable criminal justice system.