



RACIAL JUSTICE AND
ETHNIC EQUITY
TASK FORCE

(RJEE) REPORT

APRIL 2024

IMAGINE

PREPARED FOR THE 2024 FREE METHODIST CHURCH IN CANADA
GENERAL CONFERENCE | APRIL 25-28 - TORONTO, ON

BOARD OF ADMINISTRATION

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BOA Report: Racial Justice and Ethnic Equity Task Force

The Racial Justice and Ethnic Equity Task Force (RJEE) has completed its work and has submitted their final report to BOA. This task force was commissioned by the BOA to help us gain a better understanding of the experiences of black, indigenous, and other people of colour in our denomination, and to investigate and evaluate the perceptions, practices, and potential barriers in our churches with regard to achieving and appreciating diversity of race and ethnicity. If the RJEE work identified shortcomings in this regard, the task force was invited to develop and submit remedial recommendations to the BOA.

BOA Summary and Perspective

The RJEE has faced a momentous task of data collection, analysis and synthesis. We appreciate the vigour and thoroughness that the task force has brought to this assignment. The RJEE brought 10 well-reasoned recommendations to the BOA, and each was carefully considered. We found that we agreed at least in principle to all of the recommendations, but that some of our responses were limited by information requirements, resources, or capacity. We further recognize that there is much still to be learned on this issue, but more importantly, much to be done. The recommendations provide guidance for the BOA, working with the NLT and our Intercultural Engagement Team (IET), to begin implementing policies and practices that will move us toward achieving racial justice and ethnic equity within our denomination.

RJEE Task Force Perspective

The following is an account of this work from the perspective of the Task Force. Their full report with data appendices can be viewed at <https://fmcic.ca/task-forces/racial-justice-and-ethnic-equity/>.

Executive Summary

This report is a response to the Free Methodist Church in Canada (FMCIC) and the mandate given to the Racial Justice and Ethnic Equity Task Force (RJEE) to offer recommendations to address racism in all its forms. The intent is to empower our leaders by suggesting a justice and equity strategy—to the end that our movement would embody ethnic diversity, conciliation, and deep intercultural relationships as necessary markers of Biblical shalom. We believe that this report is part of our responsibility and our beliefs in the “Frees” that make us uniquely Free Methodist. We offer this report in that spirit.

The report was completed over the course of three and a half years, gathering research comprised of different methodologies: theological, historical, phenomenological, and statistical, among others. As

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such, this report is sectioned as following: history—tracing the story of FMCIC engagement with indigenous peoples in Canada as well as the story of a local congregation; congregational experience—illuminating the on-the-ground stories of encounters of racism, interculturalism, and biblical shalom; the story of FMCIC leadership—revealing the difficulties of putting theological values into praxis; highlighting Québec and the Québécois story.

From the research, we propose the following recommendations, summarized here:

Gather and record demographic data that includes race and ethnicity.

Create and provide educational resources that offer an understanding of diversity as God-designed.

Diversify environments for interactions, training, internships, and/or placements.

Commit to identifying and minimizing barriers to accessing scholarships and financial aid in order to intentionally develop leaders from all people groups.

Develop an arm's length Human Resources (HR) system where racial and ethnic discrimination and other issues can be addressed by an unbiased party.

Establish a recruiting system for the Nominating Committee that is policy driven and equity based.

Conduct further research into the immigrant experience as it pertains to faith, church leadership, the passing on of faith through generations, and the role of immigrants in the future of the Canadian church.

Curate a list of resources that examines the concept of the *imago Dei* from an RJEE lens (SCOD specific).

Institute equitable and sustainable practice for English and French translation.

Our prayer is that this report and these recommendations will continue the conversation within the FMCIC, so that we might be more “free” to follow Jesus together—from Jerusalem, to Samaria, and beyond.

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Introduction

In 2020, as the world found itself confronted with COVID-19 and the looming uncertainty that came with the news of the pandemic, the world also found itself face to face with the disturbing reality of racially motivated violence. On May 25, 2020, Mr. George Floyd was murdered at the hands of the police. His killing was recorded and his plea for his mother and cries, “I can’t breathe” shook individuals, nations, and organizations around the world.

In response, protests emerged, articles were written, and statements of outrage were proclaimed as communities of black and brown persons mourned. They mourned for the loss that the Floyd family suffered, but also grieved the losses that racial discrimination had cost them, their families, friends, and neighbours. This moment was coupled with announcements and media broadcasts regarding the death of other black men and women, the rise of hate and discrimination towards individuals of Asian heritage, stories of unmarked graves on the grounds of former Indian Residential Schools and continued discrimination of Indigenous people in Canada and beyond.

While people of colour (POC) were mourning, for some it felt as though the church was silent and even unwilling to take a clear and direct stand for anti-racist learning, postures, and policies. Rather than standing with those who were mourning, those from the majority culture seemed quick to ask those who longed for a more equitable world to wait just a little bit longer, seek individual heart change and not get caught up in “identity politics”. This, however, was not an acceptable response for those whose experience both within and outside of the church had been marred deeply by racism. The “wait and pray”, the “wait and see”, and the “wait for justice to trickle down” approaches were allowing harm to continue to those scarred by racism, bias and microaggressions. Waiting was no longer a reasonable option, and an outcry from Black, Indigenous, and other People of Colour (BIPOC) Christ followers started a ripple effect as they demanded that local and national churches respond.

The FMCIC, to be responsive to the questions and concerns arising from the broader Christian world, the larger Canadian society, and members of the Free Methodist Church in Canada, sought to form a task force. The task force was intended to help the Board of Administration (BoA) and National Leadership Team (NLT) consider the denomination’s history, its congregations and its leadership regarding racial and ethnic equity and justice.

The RJEETF was formed with nine original members: Rev. Keitha Ogbogu and Rev. Darrin Lindsay (co-chairs), Xenia Chan, Rev. Sabrina Hinds, Raquel John-Matuzewiski, Lindsay Noël, Kalesha Peters, David Wright, and Debbie Yeboah. The team was also supported by Andrea Chan and the late Dr. Tim Tang from the Tyndale Intercultural Ministry Center. We consulted members of the FMCUSA including Dr. Michael Traylor, Rev. Dr. Fraser Venter, Joshua Canada, and Rev.

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Katherine Howell. We were also supported by our critical friends, Rev. Dan Sheffield (Adjunct Lecturer, Tyndale University and FMCIC Pastor) and Dr. Heather Bensler (University of Calgary).

The team was given the opportunity to create a mandate for their work which is noted here:

The RJEE Task Force will offer recommendations to the Free Methodist Church in Canada (FMCIC) Intercultural Engagement Team (IET) and the Board of Administration (BoA) to empower our leaders and congregations to address the reality of racism in all its forms and the need to intentionally implement a justice and equity strategy that rejects systemic racism.

Our goal is that our movement would embody ethnic diversity, conciliation, and deep intercultural relationships as necessary markers of Biblical shalom.

This mandate was executed by considering our history, the stories of our congregations and our past and present leadership. Our work began with engaging the FMCUSA and the Tyndale Intercultural Ministries Center. The FMCUSA shared their own journey as they examined the ways their beliefs merged with their practices as an anti-racist organization. Part of their shift in practice were direct changes to their manual (the Book of Discipline) with an anti-racist statement, and the decision to hire a justice focused national leadership position and engage their leadership team with an Intercultural Specialist. The TIM Center, led by the late Dr. Tim Tang, helped us to launch our research by guiding us towards a unified set of terms, helping us structure our research questions, and assisting in the preparation of a grant proposal. Their feedback and guidance were invaluable in launching our work. For further expert support, we consulted Rev. Dan Sheffield as a critical friend and engaged Dr. Heather Bensler as a reviewer of our final draft report.

The history team engaged texts, personal interviews, and historical statistics to help them understand the FMCIC's historical engagement with Indigenous people in Canada. The results of their research demonstrated both a desire and a resistance to engage Indigenous communities. The historical Indigenous ministry was stifled by a lack of focused funding, the pursuit of assimilation, and a resistance to engaging Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices into Free Methodism. We also conducted a case study of a local congregation and the experience of racialized members. We found it noteworthy that while discrimination was experienced, there was great hesitancy to describe such encounters as "racist". One of our friendly critics found this anomaly throughout our report and encouraged us to take note of the ways that individuals may describe discriminatory encounters, and then rename it with less inflammatory language. This presents interesting questions for the FMCIC to consider:

Do individuals understand what racism and racial microaggressions are?

Submitted by:
David Kreutzweiser, Chair, BOA

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Why are victims of racism reluctant to note discriminatory activities that occur within the church as racist behaviours?

Do we have systems for pastors and leaders to understand how to address issues of racial injustice within their congregations or the denomination as a whole?

We began research on the black experience but were not able to complete this section and do hope the FMCIC will continue this aspect of research should there be a future Study Team.

The Congregational Research Team wanted to understand the outlook and experience of congregations regarding racial justice and ethnic equity. They sought to interview pastors and congregants from a range of church demographics, including congregations that were majority white, ethnic, urban etc. The largest response was from rural white churches followed by urban diverse churches. It was evident that pastoral leadership was a key factor in influencing how congregations thought about and engaged in intercultural relationships. A leader's interest, experience, and awareness of interculturalism were essential in the cultivation of a "safe" and anti-racist environment within congregations. Stories emerged of church members who left worship settings due to an increase in racial and ethnic diversity in attendance and leadership, a focus on refugee sponsorship or the implementation of ministries that engaged immigrants and newcomers. While these stories were shared with our interviewers, interviewees often requested that the painful accounts not be shared. It was evident that congregations and more specifically local leaders who were willing to acknowledge differences, embrace diversity and who took on a learning posture were more successful in creating healthy intercultural relationships and congregation. To that end we encourage an intentional increase in BIPOC leadership who are equipped with intercultural tools, the implementation of IDI as a part of ministerial tracking and specific intercultural training and education for pastors and leaders.

The Leadership Research Team surveyed leadership across the FMCIC including the NLT, Nominating Committee members, MEGaP members and past and present BoA members. These conversations were held via Zoom with the intent of understanding the perspective of leaders regarding racial justice and ethnic equity. Nine themes emerged from this research. Justice emerged as a key value, yet respondents did not necessarily think the FMCIC lived this value as a priority. Another theme that arose was that pathways to leadership were largely dependent on relationship or "who you know". As we conducted interviews it was repeated that individuals within Conference did not know or did not know enough about leaders who represent the BIPOC community within the FMCIC to "shoulder tap" them for national positions. Finally, it was noted that intercultural

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competence remains a practice that must be cultivated at all levels of the movement to help leaders develop beyond token responses to racial justice and ethnic equity.

The leadership survey was a second tool used to understand Conference's perspectives on leadership. Unfortunately, we had low engagement from members of conference who identify as a person of colour (7%). However, the responses we did receive from BIPOC suggested distinctive differences in their perceptions of leadership in the FMCIC when compared with non BIPOC members on issues of Diversity and Inclusion. For instance, the question was asked, "Do you feel that the FMCIC demonstrates and communicates the value of Diversity and Inclusion?" Overall, 31% of the leaders agreed, while only 17% of BIPOC leaders were in agreement. For the same question, 9% of those interviewed disagreed with the premise while 33% of BIPOC persons disagreed. Likewise, when we asked if members of Conference demonstrate a commitment to creating racial and ethnic diversity and inclusion in our national leadership groups such as NLT, BoA, SCOD etc. 48% of those interviewed agreed while 50% of BIPOC disagreed. The difference in responses is hard to quantify due to the low response from those who were willing to identify as a part of the BIPOC community but does present interesting considerations for future leaders to consider.

Both interviewees and survey respondents communicated both positive and negative stories related to race and ethnicity. Stories emerged from the research that communicated individual and congregational experiences with racial bias. This was evidenced in the types of jokes that were made, comments offered to BIPOC congregants and the vocalized resistance to considering an intentional and targeted increase in the appointment and recruitment of BIPOC leaders. We learned about individuals feeling dismissed or overlooked due to race, accents or place of birth. We also heard stories about the ways individuals found safe haven in their church communities, where others were willing to listen and the ways a designated intercultural practitioner as a part of the NLT over the past several decades was meaningful for increased intercultural engagement and understanding.

Finally, we engaged our Québec pastors both past and present. These pastors come from diverse countries that include Burundi, Congo, and Haiti. They were formed in Free Methodist churches within their home countries and chose to partner with the work and mission of the FMCIC when they came to Canada. They offer the Canadian church a global perspective of Methodism and bring experienced and mature theological understanding, and an energetic and active faith into the FMCIC. We learned about the ways missionary work helped to form them. They communicated their historic connection to the Free Methodist church and to Wesleyan thought. Naturally, language can be a barrier to greater inclusion, but the pastors and leaders are grateful for the persistence of those who make up the FMCIC leadership to communicate with them in French. The efforts to increase the usage of both French and English have become more apparent over time and are greatly appreciated, however consistency in translation is desired and necessary.

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Our findings were not surprising: they are the lived or observed realities of each member of the team, both in and outside of the church. The stories of racist encounters that left individuals with an odd shame response were not simply the stories of those we interviewed, but also our stories as interviewers. Dismissive or belittling experiences that noted us as “exotic” and most likely in need of financial or other support were ours as we sat in white majority congregations. Individuals wondering if our education was sufficient, or our experience worthy of positive consideration—regardless of schools attended or roles held—are also our story. The sense that one is welcome, but only on the terms of those from the majority culture—those who do not share our experiences, history or skin colour, permeates the stories of those who put this report together. Yet, we have also been welcomed by leaders and encouraged to pursue ministry, whether in the local church or the national church. We have also been the ones who have had white congregants stand with us and for us despite the ways that the evil of racism and injustice linger. We have also been the ones who have found the FMCIC to be home.

Our home.

This document is written by those who not only see the FMCIC as she is, but also how she desires to be—a living picture of “on earth as it is in heaven.” A church whose future, whose congregations and leadership represent the beauty found in Revelation 7:9 where every tongue, tribe and nation gather to worship before the throne of God.

This work of racial reconciliation and the acknowledgment of the beauty and power found in diversity may at a superficial glance seem to be a distraction from kingdom work. However, if we believe that our calling as Christ followers is to participate in Shalom, all things being made new, all things becoming a vision of what God envisioned in the beginning, then racial justice and ethnic equity are deeply embedded in our belief and our mission. This is difficult and at times uncomfortable work as we are invited to engage in ideas, stories and theories that might counteract the narrative of “truth” or bias that we have built around us. The gospels provide us a picture of what it looks like to face our narratives, biases, and previously held beliefs through the lens of Jesus. His lens reminds us that all the law can be summarized as “love God and love your neighbour as you love yourself”. As we go about the work of establishing healthy churches in the reach of all Canadians, your RJEE TF joyfully anticipates that you will see this work, the report, the recommendations, and inspired actions as a means to love God and to love our neighbours.

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Mandate

The RJEE Task Force will offer recommendations to the Free Methodist Church in Canada (FMCIC), the Intercultural Engagement Team (IET) and the Board of Administration (BoA) with the purpose of empowering our leaders and congregations to address the reality of racism in all its forms and the need to intentionally implement a justice and equity strategy that rejects systemic racism. Our expectation is that our movement will seek to embody ethnic diversity, conciliation, and deep intercultural relationships as necessary markers of biblical shalom.

Our objectives will be to:

1. Evaluate the FMCIC's theological and policy statements regarding racial and ethnic diversity, equality, and equity.
2. Recommend specific changes or insertions to theological and policy statements that lead to the intentional implementation of racial justice and ethnic equity.
3. Explore opportunities for adjustments to FMCIC denominational systems, with the goal of providing equitable pathways for racialized persons to participate in denominational and local church leadership.
4. Create defining terminology and resource lists that support the content related to diversity, access, equity, and social inclusion.
5. Provide pathways and advocate for individuals affected by racism in the church and the community to move towards healing, wholeness, and justice.
6. Suggest specific opportunities for local FMCIC congregations to explore, learn about, and invest in the establishment of a truly anti-racist, intercultural environment across generations.

Recommendations and Further Research

RJEE's recommendations emerged from three years of research, interviews, data collection, observations, and conversations. Implementation of several of these recommendations could be launched initially by short-term working committees supporting our national teams as necessary to alleviate time pressure. Where possible we have supported our recommendations with available research.

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Our recommendations fall under the following categories:

Demographic Data

Recommendation #1

Gather and record demographic data that includes race and ethnicity as a means to better understand the makeup of local congregations and the cities we serve, and better equip local pastors and national leaders. **Review the 2005 FIND Study Team Report.**

Support/Summary: During our conversations with various leaders within the denomination, we were asked if we had collected relevant and updated data regarding the racial and ethnic demographic of the FMCIC organization. We discovered that data which records the placement, tenure, progress, etc. of individuals who identify as BIPOC or who are ethnically diverse is not retained, thereby making it difficult or impossible to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of our diversity pursuits.

- **Supporting Articles/Books:**
<https://ifdhe.aha.org/hretdisparities/why-collect-race-ethnicity-language>

“The data may also help evaluate population trends and help ensure nondiscrimination on the basis of race and national origin, such as providing meaningful access for persons with limited English proficiency.”

- **FMCIC Research:**
 Double-click on the pushpin icons to open the documents



FIND Study Team Report



Charting Our Reach



Intentional IC Development



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Recommendation #2

Conduct further research into how the Free Methodist Church in Canada has interacted with Black People historically, to review and analyze the FMCIC's engagement with ethnic equity and racial justice over time.

Support/Summary: This research will allow the FMCIC to consider the areas where it has been successful with respect to its engagement of and care of BIPOC peoples, and the areas where it has fallen short. Furthermore, an exploration of the past will help reveal where the current struggles of BIPOC peoples can be attributed to imperialist dominations, structures, and desires of the past. This will allow the FMCIC to intentionally resist these structures and systems that existed in the past and continue to exist now, to forge a more inclusive future.

Training (internal and external)

Recommendation #3

To help combat racism and encourage integration of diverse ethnicities within our congregations and among our leadership, **create and/or provide educational resources** that offer an understanding of diversity as God-designed. For this to be comprehensive, we recommend including the historical, sociological, and theological roots of racial and ethnic bias. The curation of these resources could include the following:

1. In collaboration with an Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) consultant, post secondary institution, or seminary, **design a FMCIC foundational course** which covers a theological understanding of diversity and the resultant blessings (such as creativity and innovation) and challenges (such as racial bias and the hurt it causes).
2. In conjunction with an IDI consultant, **develop a training module** covering intercultural awareness and include within the standard training for FMCIC National leaders and Ministry Centre staff, then repeat this training regularly.
3. **Make the IDI training mandatory** for ministerial candidates and current appointed pastors along with the national staff.
 - o Note: Two IDI consultants are members of our denomination, and the TIM centre has at least one qualified consultant available. We also have historical IDI data which may be useful for comparison.

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Support/Summary: The congregational and leadership research revealed that healthy intercultural experiences require strong intercultural awareness. Some pastors expressed a desire to engage their congregations in a more multi-ethnic and multicultural way ongoing but lacked helpful tools. In our research we encountered stories of performative diversity initiatives that left the systemic roots of racial and ethnic bias untouched, fear that unfair bias could emerge as a result of focusing on racial justice and ethnic equity. Through our survey, we saw that the experiences of racialized members of the FMCIC in comparison to non-racialized members were understood differently. We noted that these stories and experiences demonstrate the need for greater formal intercultural education. Intentional, foundational education will help cultivate a new culture of pastors and congregants who understand how important it is to acknowledge, learn about and learn from the varied experiences of Canada's ethnic minorities.

- **Supporting Articles/Books:**
<https://www.idiinventory.com/>

“The IDI provides quantitative and qualitative data to support and guide developmentally appropriate actions for individuals and groups. IDI Group Profile results can be used to inform and shape the focus of developmental opportunities for teams, departments, and organizations. For individuals, a customized self-directed Intercultural Development Plan (IDP) guides them through a series of developmentally appropriate activities and self-reflections to increase their intercultural capability.”

Recommendation #4

To better prepare leaders and congregations for the changing landscape of demographics and cultures in Canada and Canadian churches, we recommend that ministerial candidates be given the opportunity to engage and serve in a variety of Canadian ministry settings. **Diversifying environments** for interactions, training, internships, and/or placements, assists in the introduction of different cultural groups, diverse and multi-ethnic congregations, and congregations of varying size and community makeup.

Support/Summary: In our research we noted that within local churches, as the influx of minority ethnic groups increased, the presence of majority culture congregants decreased. Also, the majority of our congregations have not experienced pastoral leadership from a member of a minority ethnic group. It became clear that the experiences and perspectives of racialized and ethnic minorities were different from those of Canada's majority culture. It was evident that individuals from ethnocentric congregations struggled to understand or value what diverse community or congregant members could contribute. We also noted that local pastors were often the ones to lead the way in cultivating

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an inclusive environment. By engaging our leaders with various cultural and ethnic groups during their formation, we can help cultivate a more understanding and inclusive culture as a denomination.

Education

Recommendation #5

Commit to identifying and minimizing barriers to accessing scholarships and financial aid to intentionally develop leaders from all people groups. In this pursuit, specifically be mindful of those groups which are most underrepresented as pastoral leaders, lay leaders, etc. Possible actions include the following:

1. Track who is accessing scholarships and financial aid. Follow up with underrepresented pastors and lay leaders about these resources.
2. Send regular updates on educational resources for pastors and lay leaders.
3. Create a FAQ for incoming leaders and pastors on the website.
4. Given that research indicates that an increasing percentage of churches will be led by new immigrant pastors, MEGaP should highlight specific opportunities, supports, and processes for the credentialing and education journeys (can also be embedded into the MEGaP process, core courses, and/or as separate seminars) for pastors new to the FMCIC.
5. Consider providing scholarships for English as a Second Language or French as a Second Language education.
6. Provide an easily accessible FAQ page on the FMCIC website to clarify the process of transferring credentials from other denominations to the FMCIC.

Support/Summary: The leadership interviews and surveys revealed a sense that the low diversity in leadership within congregations and within national teams correlates to insufficient intentionality in the formation of diverse leaders. There is a perceived fear of tokenism and that establishing diversity minimums could lower the quality of leaders. However, as the demographics of Canada and the Canadian church shift, our systems must ensure equity in the ordination and ordination transfer processes. The urgent need for pastors should encourage us to help minority leaders to meet the educational requirements to be pastors and leaders here in Canada and to obtain their credentials, particularly those who have been pastors or church leaders in their countries of origin. Supporting potential immigrant leaders by reducing some of the information gaps and other stresses present in

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the pursuit of educational requirements in a new country can aid in establishing a culturally and theologically prepared, yet diverse leadership pipeline.

Advocacy

Recommendation #6

Develop an arm's length Human Resources (HR) system where racial and ethnic discrimination and other issues can be addressed by an unbiased party. This should extend beyond Ministry Centre staff to pastors and other local church leaders.

Support/Summary: The creation of HR systems and HR training can help ameliorate the negative experiences that ethnic minorities face within church cultures. We realized through the research that minorities who face negative racial encounters do not always feel safe enough to address these issues. This was noted in both national and local church encounters. A clear process to resolve grievances related to race, ethnicity or other sensitive issues from an arms length perspective may increase confidence in the denomination's willingness to walk with individuals towards a fair, unbiased resolution.

Addressing Connectionalism

Recommendation #7

Create a recruiting system for the Nominating Committee that is policy driven and equity based to encourage ethnic minorities to consider positions of leadership and participate in the leadership selection and evaluation processes. (i.e., personnel team, hiring team, etc.).

Support/Summary: The denomination has a specific focus on leadership development and selection that relies on the method of "shoulder tapping". Shoulder tapping relates to us as a connection-based organisation where "who knows you" is one of the strongest determinants of upward career or leadership mobility. While there are positives to having an organisation that focuses on relationships as a means for leadership, there is the possibility that lesser-known leaders will not be "shoulder tapped" for national teams, committees and positions. We believe that one benefit of connectionalism in the FMCIC is the increased familiarity with the gifts given to all for the work of the Kingdom and the Spirit-led, unbiased selection from a wider range of possible known options. Evaluating means and methods of centering BIPOC voices so that they can be fairly and properly considered for local and national teams is a matter of equity and importance. It was noted by some participants in the leadership research that they didn't have relevant data on or knowledge of BIPOC

Submitted by:
David Kreutzweiser, Chair, BOA

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leaders. Cultivating opportunities for BIPOC leaders to engage in more visible teams and leadership roles helps to establish a culture shift in both the highlighting and recognition of effective leaders from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Elevating BIPOC voices benefits rather than takes away from the denomination. Intentionally including qualified candidates from minority ethnic or racial backgrounds does not equate to choosing an unqualified person for a role but offers another qualified option for consideration. This is an opportunity to demonstrate that a slate of qualified candidates can include qualified BIPOC leaders.

- Note: a high percentage of immigrants involved in ministry are well educated, though they may not have Canadian experience.

- Supporting Articles/Books:

<https://fortune.com/2021/02/27/diversity-inclusion-talent-pipeline-business/>

“So the next time someone says that finding diverse talent for all levels of their organization is a pipeline problem, remember: What they really should explore are their underlying systems and processes. They must also be courageous to challenge the embedded perceptions that exist across their culture. Because that’s what’s really holding them back.”

Recommendation #8

Consider using regular English to French translation for all outgoing documents and conversations. This allows for information to be communicated clearly in both official languages. As the demographics of the FMCIC shift and change further translation may be required to meet the needs of a changing Canada.

Support/Summary: This aids in connectionalism across the country and empowers our French speaking pastors and leaders to fully participate at all levels. This consistency facilitates easier and more immediate engagement from French speaking pastors and leaders.

The Immigrant Experience

Recommendation #9

Conduct further research into the immigrant experience as it pertains to faith, church leadership, the passing on of faith through generations, and the role of immigrants in the future of the Canadian

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church. Given the increasing need to integrate new pastors, be mindful that immigrants tend to be multi-vocational when entering ministry. Our leadership programs, such as ministers' conferences, are not always easily accommodated. Consider virtual, weekend or evening options for our connection times to help immigrant pastors build relationships within the denomination. Many immigrants are also unfamiliar with our traditional FMCIC camping and cottaging culture. Find ways to include these varied ethnic groups into our camps' programing, in planning and/or participation, thereby helping to build connectionalism and provide an atmosphere of belonging.

Support/Summary: We observed that many congregations are aware of shifts in their communities—the ethnic and cultural makeup is changing. It is also noted that the FMCIC tends to help newcomers to Canada plant new churches, however those churches are not consistently producing FMCIC leaders. Better understanding of the immigrant experience, the dynamics their children face as they integrate into Canada, and consideration of the role of first- and second-generation Canadians in the establishment of thriving and growing churches will better position the denomination for leadership development, church growth and church planting.

- **Supporting Articles/Books:**

<https://www.cardus.ca/research/faith-communities/research-brief/religion-and-belief-among-immigrants-to-canada/>

“Survey data from 2022 suggest that immigrants’ beliefs and practices make them more likely than people born in Canada to fall on the more committed end of the Spectrum and to see a larger role for religious expression in public life than those born in Canada. Those born in another country are twice as likely as those born in Canada to be Religiously Committed. Nearly seven in ten people born in Canada can be categorized as Spiritually Uncertain or Non-religious, compared to just half of immigrants to Canada.”

Theology

Recommendation #10

Have SCOD curate a list of resources that examines the concept of the *imago Dei* from an *RJEE lens*. This includes conversations around how the church should value unity and diversity. Provide ways for the FMCIC to present a unified understanding of the theological responsibilities the Church must shoulder in order to engage in issues of racial justice and ethnic equity. Develop Free Methodist language regarding what it means to be made in the image of God, given diversity, ethnicity, and varied physical characteristics. This could include:

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David Kreutzweiser, Chair, BOA

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1. Specific anti-racism statements and policies within our Manual (reviewing the theological work and statements from the FMCUSA in parallel)
2. Curating (Canadian) academic resources in the Wesleyan tradition that speak to the theological importance of racial and ethnic justice and equity and encouraging new scholarship along this vein (in journals, academic and pastoral conferences, etc.)

- **Supporting Articles/Books:**

Consider the input of Rev. Dan Sheffield from FMCIC and Rev. Dr. Fraser Ventner from FMCUSA.

Congregational Survey

In this new life one's nationality or race or education or social position is unimportant; such things mean nothing. Whether a person has Christ is what matters, and He is equally available to all. ~ Colossians 3:11 TLB

The Congregational Research sub-committee was tasked with the mandate to compile data regarding the outlook and experience of congregations regarding racial justice and ethnic equity. They elected to conduct a phenomenological study. This report will discuss: the research statement and questions asked; the strategies that were employed for the fieldwork conducted; the methods for data analysis that helped uncover emerging concerns and themes from the interviews; the findings and the themes that emerged from the data; and lastly, implications from our findings as well as limitations of the research.

Fieldwork Strategies

Our research question for this study was: How is racial justice and ethnic equity understood and experienced by FMCIC congregation lay people, leaders, and pastors? Stemming from this, we compiled the following questions.

1. How do you understand race and ethnicity? When you hear the two terms, is there a difference?
2. What is the makeup of this congregation with respect to racial/ethnic diversity and what is the makeup of the community surrounding the church?
3. Talk about ethnic diversity in your experience of church, what has your experience of ethnic diversity in the church been like?

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4. What is the ethnic make-up of your church leadership currently? What has been the ethnic make-up of church leadership in your experience? In the last ten years who has been a part of your congregational leadership?
5. How have leaders been received if they have been members of ethnic minorities? How has the leadership served the congregation / how has leadership been received generally?
6. (if applicable) Would you consider yourself an ethnic minority or a racialized person? What positive or negative experiences have you had within your community and your congregation as a racialized person?
7. What if any examples of racial injustice have you seen/experienced in the church?
8. How has your congregation addressed racial injustice? Why or why not?

We left these interview questions as open as possible to keep an open mind and allow the interviewees to use their own language to describe their experiences. Unless asked by the interviewee, we opted not to give any examples when clarifying our questions in order to avoid guiding the interviewee in his or her answer.

We conducted these interviews over Zoom. All of the interviewees consented to having us record the interviews, which allowed us to re-listen to the interviews at a later time and increase clarity. We conducted a total of 11 interviews. For ethical safeguarding, given the possibility of causing participants discomfort, they were told they could withdraw from the study at any point. All of our interviewees are adults who consented to being interviewed and recorded, on the condition of keeping confidentiality.

Data Analysis

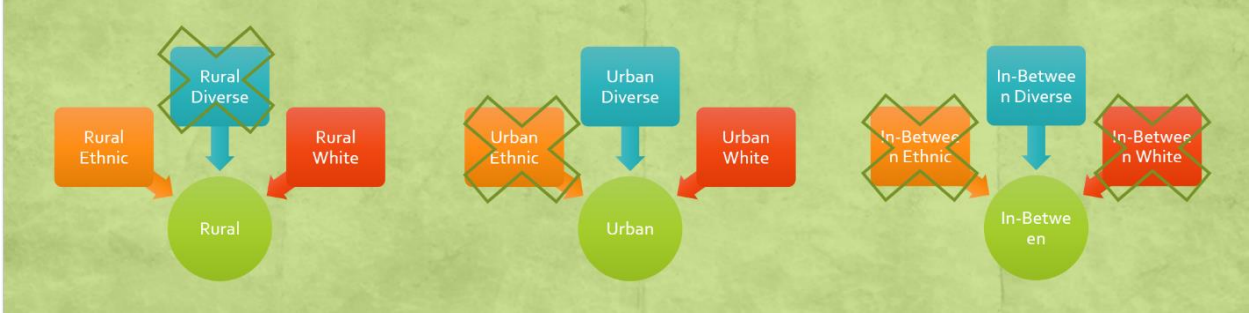
Data triangulation is a critical component of the research because it provides an opportunity to verify the information given by the interviewees, with the intention to provide a more comprehensive view of the research questions. As such, we categorized churches in the following ways:

- Geographical Distribution: Rural, Urban, In-Between
- Ethnicity: Ethnic, Diverse, and White

No rural diverse churches, urban ethnic churches, in-between ethnic churches, and in-between white churches responded to our invitation to participate in the research (Image 1).

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(Image 1: Categorization of Churches)

We received the most responses from rural white churches (4 interviews), followed by urban diverse (3 interviews), while each of the remaining categories were 1 or 2 interviews. Once all the data was collected, we went through our interview notes and began highlighting according to our research question. We assigned a specific colour for each research question and looked for responses from the data that matched each respective question, highlighting that section with the corresponding research question. After highlighting the data, we copy and pasted the quotes and notes directly under each research question in an Excel spreadsheet and separated these by source. We then reviewed all the data for each question, looked for repeating words and ideas from a single source, and then compared them to see if other sources also mentioned similar words or ideas.

Findings and Themes Emerging from the Data

Given the small sample size, we are unable to make generalized conclusions from the data. However, there are some commonalities and impactful messages that appear in the narratives. The following section will discuss key observations and some themes which have emerged from said observations. These observations primarily centre around: leadership influence, proximity and tensions, education, outreach practices, and minority concerns.

Leadership Influence

In many of the interviews, it was clear that the pastors and local church leaders were a key influence in how congregations thought about and engaged in intercultural relationships. Pastoral passion for diversity and the willingness to be uncomfortable, for example, in stepping out front to facilitate and participate in difficult conversations and interactions, was seen to be a signal of the depth of a church’s engagement in intercultural relationships within the context of the local church. One church which has a recent history of engaging with the challenges of deliberately embracing diversity has seen its leadership tackle racist rhetoric head-on. A couple apparently felt comfortable disparaging a refugee family that the church was sponsoring to a leader. This comfort level was misplaced as the pastor pointedly reminded them that the church supported ethnic and cultural diversity and that they should examine whether the church would be a good fit for them.

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Moreover, the passion and effort to foster diversity within a congregation was noted to be related in part to the influence of the leader's background, exposure and/or experience especially in peer groups, or in their curiosity and interest in other cultures. A passionate lay leader described her own family's heritage of reaching out to others of diverse backgrounds. She noted that a cornerstone of her grandfather's ministry was local visitation and outreach that extended to ministry in Haiti. Her grandmother's family worked in a war-torn African nation. Another pastor who was a major influence in the early development of her church worked fervently on missions. "Their focus was so much on mission, global as well as local, and it has just kind of carried [on through the church.]"

Further, several interviewees' comments implied that healthy intercultural experiences require strong intercultural awareness and exemplary cross-cultural relations from the leader. This was dependent on how pastors are thinking about the reality of others' experiences, their own self-awareness in their own worldviews, being teachable, fostering curiosity within themselves, and having a strong value for being interdependent with others. Some of the pastors interviewed made a point of going beyond programs and church meals, to be personally curious about the differences in cultures, including body language, ways of speaking, ways of worshiping and appreciating (sometimes personally embracing) those differences. One pastor currently serving a diverse congregation described personal efforts to connect families from different backgrounds over Sunday lunch hosted by the pastor and observed that the fruit of deeper connection was slow to come by but insisted, "We've got to keep leading the way and showing how it can be done."

Proximity and Tensions

A consistent theme emerging from this study was that as the presence of ethnic groups increased within the local context, the presence of white congregants decreased. The factors that forge lasting, strong relationships between Christians of different ethnicities and cultures require examination. One congregant told a pastor, "I'm going to another church because I just feel I can't make friends." This congregant had been attending the church for decades. The pastor reflected that the congregant had seen Anglo friends leave, was no longer comfortable, and could not envisage becoming close friends with fellow believers in the congregation from other ethnicities. Another family was heard observing aloud that "nobody looks like us anymore" and eventually left the church. Similarly, another pastor spoke of a family from an ethnic minority who appeared to be happily embedded in the church family but left after eight years to join an ethnic church because of the attraction of the familiar homogenous cultural experience. In a couple of interviews the narrative suggested a widespread lack of effort to reach across racial, ethnic boundaries (by almost all involved) to build relationships. These and other examples also suggest a desire by some attendees to interact with a certain "critical mass" of congregants that are like them in a meaningful way. An important question is what characteristics are most important for congregants to feel a sense of connection or interest in

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making friends. Some congregants with very fixed views on what is “proper” and “how things should be done,” both of which may be connected to middle-class values and perceptions of dignity, experience difficulty re-examining those values and relating to others from other cultures who have competing values. One pastor’s approach to this with respect to valuing time commented,

“We try to start things close to on time and recognize that we take the time to do what needs to be done. And that’s the time we’ll take, and we’ll do our best to be mindful of people’s other things, but to a certain degree, if you’ve come to church you’re there to be church and that might happen in a timely fashion or not.”

In other words, even “small” things like how one values time is dependent on cultural context, and this reality is not often recognised, or acknowledged.

As one interviewee noted in that person’s own context, there was a repeated identification of the “Other”, e.g. tensions over refugees and immigration. A question that was voiced in another church was, “Do we help people from ‘outside’ or do we focus on ‘Canadians?’” One couple that left the church over other stated reasons wondered why the church focused on mission in other countries when there was so much need in Canada. On the other side of the tension in a different place, an adherent left the congregation to find another church that would be more receptive to their justice work among immigrants. In another instance, one pastor admitted to supporting immigrants in what some might deem as questionable actions, commenting “We supported a few people as they’ve had to fight with immigration to stay in Canada ... nobody’s like well, is this really something we should support? No, we understand the immigration system. It sucks.”

Education

On the terms of race, racialization, whiteness, etc., it is clear that the disagreement on terminology and ideas around race abounds. We asked in several instances what these terms meant, and in many instances, discovered that some of these terms were used interchangeably. For example, definitions of race ran the gamut: “a created construct”, “the physical genetic makeup of who a person is”, “[related to] your/your family’s country of origin”, “a physical thing. It’s skin color. It’s phenotype. It’s hair texture.” Etc. Interviewees also expressed that in order to care for congregations, churches must be clear on the history and the construction of race to help all under their care to navigate and understand the consequences of the idea on the lives of racialized persons, in a world where an interviewee could be asked by a child in the community, “What kind of half-breed are you?”. (The child’s background was not provided.) A significant gap noted by some interviewees was the absence of acknowledgement or understanding of the reality of racialized peoples as quite different from those who are not racialized. Often, the desire to recognize this absence is associated with being politically or socially progressive/politically “liberal”.

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Outreach Practices

Another concern that emerged from the data was the ways in which missionary work has been and continues to be portrayed or marketed within the local congregation. Interviewees noted that missionaries' depictions of regions and people groups are largely negative and not fully accurate, causing offense to those within our congregations who are from those countries. One leader recounted a congregant approaching on behalf of her community:

"[The specific ethnic] community took offense to the missionaries' presentation ... It was only the poverty; they never showed any of the prosperity of the country or anything. They only showed all the bad, and they're like [the country] is an amazing country with universities and developed cities. And like they visited the poor areas. So that's what they were showing. ... That's not all of [the country]. And she was upset and in tears about it and through the conversation, she also talked to me about racist comments that she had received even in her workplace and so it dug up some of that pain."

Note: these were not FMCIC missionaries, but they were missionaries given a platform by an FMCIC church.

Internal Racialized Minority Concerns

Finally, some disturbing stories of prejudiced behaviour within local congregations were told. We have been asked not to share the details of some of the most heart-wrenching and incriminating stories. This creates a conundrum for us in that it prevents us from providing concrete examples of the authentic deep hurts that still occur in our church communities and helping the reader to understand the realities. However, we hope insight will be gained from the examples shared.

Communication differences, in particular difficulty with accents and limited shared Western/Canadian experiences, can be a hindrance to relationships. Rather than admiration of bilingual or multi-lingual immigrants for their linguistic ability, immigrants' thick accents sometimes elicit condescending behaviours from some congregants. One leader who commented on this said, "I've seen in the past some disrespect for certain people, especially if someone still has quite a thick accent. And you can see where they're doing translation work in their head ... There have been tendencies to treat [someone who kind of struggles with that process a bit] as not as intelligent."

This church, that was primarily attended by immigrants, felt that there was a disconnect with their largely anglo-heritage Canadian neighbours. Their pastor reflected:

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“When they hired a new pastor they wanted somebody who was connected with the denomination and understood Canadian culture better. I was the diverse hire. I think it’s hilarious but also thoughtful that someone looked around and [said,] ‘there’s very few ... white people in our church and maybe we need a leader who can help us bridge this gap’”.

In other conversations some questioned whether there is any real or perceived education (or Canadian experience) gap that is contributing to the limited presence of racialized peoples in leadership. In some multicultural or even primarily homogenous immigrant settings, interviewees noted a deference to leaders from an Anglo heritage and correspondingly very few leaders from racialized people groups.

Racial slurs are sometimes excused, even by those racialized, as caused by ignorance – maybe to temper the likelihood of harsh responses.

“People ... mean well but [are] not aware of potentially what they are doing or saying or how they are viewing things ... and it is hurtful. We have an indigenous community somewhat near to us and [there are] just certain ideas or thoughts about that without understanding the history...”

We were told of a typical response to racialized overtones, where the congregant quietly left to find a church of their cultural background. A pastor recounted a situation where the mother in a “mixed” marriage disclosed quietly that her husband and child had a negative experience in the church but “she didn’t want to give me details and talk about it. ... and then she [and the family] just kind of faded away too.” It was interesting that in these scenarios remaining members seemed to persist, both comfortable and unaware of their biases and the resultant impact. As the pastor shared, the mother’s position was, “I don’t want to cause an issue. I don’t want people to be confronted, but I just want you to know that that was our experience.”

Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this study. Primarily, the data pool was much smaller than we would have liked, and we did not have the opportunity for re-examination with our interviewees due to time limitations and major difficulties in our own life circumstances. We also did not take into consideration demographic factors that may have influenced their responses, such as age, gender, and socio-economic status, and how they may have been impacted by these factors in gauging their experience within the local congregation. As we only conducted 11 interviews, this is by no means an exhaustive or conclusive study, though several notable issues have been raised.

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Implications

Even in this small sample, it was clear that some churches and leaders were thinking and caring deeply about how to love their neighbours and paying attention to those who do not look like the predominant demographic. It is encouraging that, despite the tug of comfort, some are deliberately stepping into discomfort to embrace diverse cultures, resisting the tendency to make undeserved generalizations about entire people groups.

There are several implications for this study. The first is that creating healthy intercultural congregations begins with the leadership and their willingness and eventual commitment to engage in intercultural awareness. Second, likewise, congregations must question their own biases in their values and be willing to follow leaders in becoming more interculturally aware as they welcome people who are not like them. Third, there is a role for SCOD in examining the *imago Dei* along with the concept of race and helping to create resources on racial justice and ethnic equity so as to stem the problem of people speaking past each other. Fourth, missionaries and churches supporting overseas missions work must change their language regarding the countries to which they have been sent. We must also question our modes as we examine the future of missionary work and how it can be shared in presentations most helpfully. How would the language of partnership—full partnership with indigenous movements—change the conversation? And finally, we are called to take seriously the wounds of racialized peoples and be particularly responsible to care for those who have been wounded within the local FMCIC congregation.

Looking towards this goal, we also recognize that there is a significant lack of BIPOC leadership at both the lay and pastoral leadership, and there must be greater effort in raising these leaders up so that entire congregations might flourish. This includes providing support for BIPOC leaders financially, spiritually, and mentoring them through the leadership pathways within FMCIC. Some initiatives that can be implemented to provide exposure and mentoring would include facilitating short-term ministerial internships in congregations that are diverse, homogeneous ethnic and homogenous white; include the IDI process as part of ministerial tracking; provide a structured forum for pastors who have implemented effective methods to share them; provide a training in mindfulness, curiosity, and intercultural relationships generally.

Surveying Leadership Across FMCIC

This sub-committee surveyed leadership across FMCIC in order to understand the varying views on diversity and inclusion and the variable impacts on Black and Indigenous peoples as well as people of colour in leadership. This task was two-pronged: the first, a set of interviews with national leaders and the second, a survey of a similar set of questions sent out to General Conference members. This report is thus organized: a discussion on fieldwork strategies; data analysis; findings and themes that

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emerge; then limitations. The National Leadership Interviews and Diversity and Inclusion Surveys will be discussed separately.

National Leadership Interviews

Fieldwork Strategy

The data pool for national leaders was significantly smaller than General Conference members; as such, we prioritized their interviews. Likewise, we were unsatisfied with only interviews with national leadership; we wanted input from leadership from FMCIC as a whole, and so elected to conduct a quantitative study. This was also to triangulate and to cross-reference whether the patterns as noticed by denominational leadership were also consistent with congregational leadership. Given the mandate, we set these as our research questions:

1. What is your ministry story?
2. Why did you choose to stay or leave FMCIC?
3. Was/Is Diversity and Inclusion considered a priority within denominational leadership/local congregations and denominational structures?
4. Have you faced barriers to leadership within the FMCIC that you would attribute to racism or racial discrimination?
5. How could the FMCIC better address issues around diversity and inclusion? How is the denomination addressing these issues positively?
6. If you could communicate one thing to the FMCIC leadership regarding racial justice and ethnic equity as it relates to our denomination and the broader church, what would it be?

Like the congregational study, we left these questions as open as possible for interviewees' responses to be in their voice. We conducted these interviews over Zoom. All the interviewees consented to having us record the interviews, which allowed for us to pick up on non-verbal cues during the interview, as we could re-listen to the interviews at a later time. We conducted a total of 15 interviews. In terms of ethical safeguarding, given the possibility of causing participants discomfort, they were told they could withdraw from the study at any point. All our interviewees are adults who consented to being interviewed and recorded, on the condition of keeping confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The individuals surveyed were members of the National Leadership Team, the Nominating Committee, Board of Administration, Ministerial Education Guidance and Placement Committee,

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as well as staff at the Ministry Centre. In total, 15 were interviewed. The interviewees have been anonymized here.

Findings and Themes

There are nine themes emerging from the interviews. They have been categorized as justice, theology, pathways to leadership, the importance of diversity and inclusion (DEI), homogenous leadership, intercultural competency, connectionalism, racism, prejudice and bias, and issues denominational leaders should address. There are also significant outliers emerging from the interviews but which we also thought were worth mentioning.

For multiple respondents, justice was a key value, with one person noted that it ought to be the vision for the church to “nurture the right things.” In two instances, Kingsview Free Methodist Church in Etobicoke, ON, was named as inspiration that FMCIC could become more inclusive—in response to Kingsview’s response to the death of George Floyd. One person said that the affirmation of women in ministry led them to the FMCIC, and in particular, “I heard the Bishop speak about women in ministry as a priority.” Two interviewees noted that because of a lack of diversity and voice, they chose to “engage to be a voice for women and POC” and to “say yes to help provide that diversity.” In one instance, one interviewee noted that “the system seems bent towards injustice.”

In terms of understanding theology and praxis, one interviewee wryly noted that FMCIC has interesting ideas about being a neighbour, with others noting that FMCIC pulls from various traditions and ideas. Another person noted that broader perspectives would give the denomination a better picture of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Finally, one interviewee noted that diversity and inclusion work is fundamental to being a Jesus-follower; as such theological vision and reflection is necessary towards that work.

Most interviewees noted that their pathways to leadership was largely embedded in relationship. The more one was known, the more opportunities they had, whether they were cradle FMCIC members or had served in many FM churches and thus “were given specific opportunities.” One interviewee noted, “People noticed my gifts and I found identity and belonging in the church. I wonder if I had presented my full ethnicity if this would have been so.”

On the topic of diversity and inclusion and its importance in the denomination, answers ranged from “it has not been important to the denomination,” to acknowledgement that diversity and inclusion efforts have largely been aspirational with room to grow and the need for greater intentionality. Others wondered if this effort was merely promotional, or to “look good,” and noted “it feels like ticking boxes.” One interviewee noted that it was “something we thought was nice to have, but didn’t account for the challenges along the way,” with another saying, “we fall behind in implementation.” Others mentioned the ways in which diversity and inclusion have been attempted:

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Representation was always discussed regionally rather than focusing on race/ethnicity and gender.

Hitting gender diversity is our starting point because it is easier to reach than ethnic diversity.

At a national level, ethnic diversity has become a recent priority. We initially focused on the East-West divide and Male-Female.

However, everyone agreed that diversity and inclusion was an important issue for the denomination. One person noted: “diversity should be more than a ‘nice’ thing. It is essential to our survival and the future of the church in Canada,” while another noted that diversity should be understood as “something that... benefits the organization,” rather than an “obligation.”

Several interviewees noted that the leadership was largely homogenous. While some have said the denomination is welcoming, it was observed that leadership was largely white, male, and middle-aged. This created a problem, said one interviewee, in that the few people of colour known to the denomination were often oversaturated with requests, and are largely “not represented in denominational leadership.” Moreover, one interviewee noted that BIPOC often sense a “lack of equality... when they sit on national teams.” One person said, “we value diverse teams, although our national leadership is homogenous,” while another added, “The composition of our NLT gives a picture of who makes it through our system. While the denominational leadership has increased in diversity since the interviews were first completed, it is notable that BIPOC had to be recruited from outside of the denomination as suitable candidates were either not evident or not “shoulder tapped” from within the denomination. A lack of an intentionally cultivated pool of diverse pastors is evidenced in this selection process. A question that arises from this observation is, are the talents and skills of pastors of diverse ethnic backgrounds unknown, unwanted or not present within this population. Regardless of how this question is answered, intentional investment in the development of and recruitment of ethnically diverse male and female leadership is something worth further investigation. This is also evidenced by a lack of women and BIPOC who make it through to national leadership.” Another asserted, “National teams, specifically BoA and NLT, demonstrate racial and ethnic diversity are not a priority.” Yet another person said, “We say we value diverse teams, [but] our national leadership is homogenous.” In addition to this, one interviewee remarked that MEGaP has had very few persons of colour. Finally, one questioned, “How much of the vote [at General Conference] is retired and white?” They then added, “The proof will be in future slates and nominations to see if change is truly being embedded.”

Regarding intercultural competency, interviewees were generally interested and noted that it should be a priority within FMCIC. Diversity occurred, it was observed, under two conditions: if the pastor was interested in interculturalism and if the congregation was willing to say yes to diversity. One interviewee said that there was very little local church engagement on the issue, while another

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remarked that there was no diversity and inclusion training, and very little intercultural training available. Other interviewees noted that there was unconscious bias present within denomination, and moreover, the problem was not personal, but systemic. Another interviewee remarked that he wished people of diverse backgrounds could be encouraged to complete terms on teams.

There were several questions posed by the interviewees: How do we let people know they are welcome and chosen not just because of their gender and ethnicity, but also because of their gifts and skills? In the same spirit, how do we make space without tokenism? How do we set people up for success regardless of background? And lastly, how do we move from conversations to tools?

Finally, it was noted by two separate interviewees that Dan Sheffield (former Director of Global and Intercultural Ministries, current Lead Pastor, Grapeview Church) had been invaluable to intercultural competency, but that “it hasn’t always had willing participants,” and that “in his absence, some of this has aged poorly.”

Connectionalism was noted as an avenue for engaging in diversity and inclusion; it was also the reason noted for why diversity and inclusion have been issues within the denomination. On one hand, this strength has been a great facilitator of relationship: “I engaged with other pastors and have gotten to know them... [through] virtual engagement,” and “FMCIC feels like home.” Others simply listed “relationships” as being key to the denomination, and one interviewee noted specific individuals who were crucial to them feeling welcome in the denomination. Others however, had concerns:

We don’t know how diverse the denomination is. Having a picture of the denomination’s diversity across the country could help us know if our teams are representing the diversity.

It can be difficult to engage the Québec pastors. We often don’t hear back.

Connecting with second generation immigrants and moving them to leadership is challenging as we often want to connect with those who are “staying.”

“I encountered a lack of awareness and familiarity with POC [People of Colour]. Perceptions of POC seemed to be based on television stereotypes rather than lived experience.”

Others talked about how it is hard to include diverse voices in national leadership, ranging from “we don’t know people,” “it’s easy to default to the list of people you are familiar with,” to “we don’t have pathways to diversity and [we] assume everyone [can] follow a single path.” One interviewee remarked that the denomination is being asked to look beyond the regular names, and another expressed that the denomination ought to “seek to understand why people don’t say yes to denominational leadership. The reasons are not new.” Other interviewees suggested avenues of change: more intentional communication and getting to know one another, listen to diverse

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churches and leaders, and find ways to ensure ethnic churches feel like they belong, specify what the denomination is looking for. One interviewee urged the denomination to create safer spaces so that pastors can “feel comfortable to share where things can be improved.” Finally, one interviewee warned, “If we do not change, people will not stay.” Another echoed the sentiment: “Do not overestimate that people of colour will be around in the long run if nothing changes.”

Stories of racism, prejudice, and bias emerged from the interviews. One interviewee noted that it is difficult for people of colour to stay within the BoA. Others noted:

I've had to use code-switching to engage well with some local churches that used biased or stereotypical language with me.

Sometimes leaders feel a freedom to say stereotypical or offensive comments based on race and ethnicity. There are very few ways to confront those issues. Thankfully, we now have a personnel committee.

I've witnessed inappropriate things but didn't have the position to change them.

Stories of bias have emerged and at times I have had to help people address this.

Yes, I experienced a volatile and negative reaction when discussing issues of race at a denominational leadership level. This led me to recognize my presence was nothing more than a “tick in a box.”

Yes, in a local setting, a POC [Person of Colour] was told they were not as smart as other members due to colour.

Tasks in the large church were assigned by race... tasks that white people were unwilling to do were handed to POC.

I've experienced dismissal and a lack of value [for] my perspectives.

In a local context, accents can and have unfairly limited people's perception of someone's capacity.

Our response to Black Lives Matter was shameful as people seemed to see issues of racism as an “American” issue.

I've seen people be dismissed because English is not their first language and “Canada” was not their first culture.

One interviewee commented, “we also need quality people and not just choosing based on ethnicity,” while another reflected that “when diversity happens, it is difficult for the person to ‘fit in.’” However, not all stories were negative: “I’ve seen interviews where the person of colour on MEGaP was able to stand up for and advocate for candidates from ethnically diverse backgrounds.”

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There were a number of issues interviewees thought that leaders ought to address. First, there is acknowledgement that the National Leadership Team is “encouraging mindfulness around diversity” and that there are “pathways for newcomers and immigrants to plant [churches].” It was also encouraging for some that “the denomination is willing to have the conversations and so far there seems to be a positive response to the task force” and that “diversity is not an afterthought.” Further, it was positive that “we included specific requests for increased diversity on national teams at general Conference 2020” and that the IET has “started conversations to address the mistrust between people of colour and the denominational leadership.” However, there were several concerns: one interviewee noted they left because they felt they “did not have a ‘voice’ to contribute” while another was concerned that the recommendations put forth by the task force “may not lead us forward to actual change.”

The interviewees had a variety of suggestions on how the denomination might move forward in the process of integrating diversity and inclusion. They are as follows.

- Cast diversity as a hopeful vision
- Mandate quotas
- Diversity helps us to erase “echo chambers”
- Full audit of structures ought to be required
- Create policies that have human beings in mind
- Implementing change and acknowledging what needs to be changed are priorities
- See the Québec story through to success and appreciate its cross-cultural opportunities
- Be willing to change structures to create belonging
- Do not thwart the opportunity to learn by suggesting there is nothing to learn
- Address and acknowledge the hurt that has been inflicted by the inaction and lack of genuine intention to engage and include people of colour
- Support people of colour when crisis hits their communities (i.e., after George Floyd’s death)
- Create greater awareness for local churches and pastors
- Explore and understand the immigrant experience as the denomination seeks their involvement in the local congregation and in the denomination.

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- Understand the challenges of moving to a new country, re-training, caring for family in country of origin, etc.
- Further research and accommodation for multivocational ministry is needed

It was noted several times that the RJEETF was doing good work, and that their recommendations should be noted and acted upon, as they are “helpful in bringing these issues to light.” Finally, one interviewee remarked simply, “We need to be leaders in this work.”

To conclude on a bright note, interviewees observed the following:

Multiethnic was my context, my church heritage where I had the opportunity to watch people engage with God in their culture and context.

People are still willing to listen.

I love the work that I do.

Despite [the] imperfections, [FMCIC] is a good fit.

Limitations

One significant limitation was our limited pool of interviewees. However, given that we were able to interview a significant number of national leaders, former and current, we are relatively confident that this is a good cross-section and representation of national leadership.

Conclusion

The Free Methodist Church in Canada has intentionally engaged in the pursuit of racial and ethnic justice over its lifetime. This work came to life because of those who took notice of their neighbours and chose the path of Jesus centered love, despite social pressures, racially biased perspectives, and at times, a lack of support. We heard the stories of congregants, congregations and leaders who chose to engage with individuals from different countries, ethnic backgrounds, cultural histories and racialized perspectives with deep kindness and a desire to cultivate a culture of belonging within the FMCIC’s local and national contexts. We also encountered individuals who were deeply grateful for the learning they received from the former Director of Intercultural Ministries and the current Intercultural Engagement Team. These national initiatives were instrumental in broadening our understanding of the shifting demographic landscape of Canada and the ways our churches must respond. We are grateful for the work of those who have gone before us.

We have also heard stories of hurt, rejection and disappointment as leaders and congregation members shared the ways they have encountered racism, bias and exclusion that they tie back to race, heritage, language or country of origin. Their stories, although not openly shared within the report,

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reminded us that the FMCIC, (which means all of us) still have work to do. Work that looks like listening and believing the stories of those whose experiences and outlooks are different than our own. Work that looks like platforming and highlighting the ministry and talent of racialized pastors and leaders. Work that looks like intentional training of current and future pastors to see the world through an intercultural lens. Work that looks like all of us participating in manifesting God's Kingdom here on earth. While statistics may help to bolster a position or idea, we hope that you can see this as less of a sociological document and more so as one that is of spiritual and theological significance. The work of racial and ethnic equity and justice is not a task that we should leave solely for government and academia to resolve, rather the church, including our own small, but mighty FMCIC can participate in leading the way. We believe that as our pastors and congregations are equipped with both a greater awareness of the realities of racism, bias, and the prevalence of white supremacy in the society that we will be equipped and inspired to offer a voice of hope, belonging and justice and racial reconciliation within the communities that we minister.

As such we have a final recommendation for the FMCIC: that we build on the work of those who have gone before our team, the work the IET is currently engaged in, and the words written within this document. We strongly recommend that a team be created to continue this work of research, listening, and implementing the recommendations we have presented to the BOA. As the work continues, we pray that new stories will be told, old hurts will be repaired, advocacy will flourish, and our congregations will take on the work of racial and ethnic equity and justice as a part of their responsibility to love and care for their neighbours.

Thank you for entrusting us with this work. We are grateful.

BOA Response and Steps Forward

As a result of the RJEE report, and to build on the recommendations they put forward, the BOA has begun transitioning the RJEE Task Force into a RJEE Team that will continue the work beyond General Conference 2024. The Team will be charged with taking the excellent work and recommendations of the Task Force and begin crafting implementation strategies. We are confident that several of the recommendations can be brought into actionable policies and practices in the near future. But we are also aware that some of the recommendations require further information or fleshing out, and that this Team would work closely with the NLT, the IET, and the BOA in developing plans and policies around these recommendations. We continue to recognize the value in this work, and the BOA commits to helping our FMCIC and local churches “embody ethnic diversity, conciliation, and deep intercultural relationships as necessary markers of biblical shalom”.