

Interculturality Framework and Guiding Principles: An Invitation to Conversation and Dialogue

The Forum for Intercultural Leadership and Learning (FILL)
A Reference Group of The Canadian Council of Churches (April 2021)

The FILL Theology and Research Working Group

This group offers this living document as a framework and guiding principles as it attempts to be open to and live out interculturality in our various church communities. This group recognizes that interculturality is a complex and painstaking process of mutual learning and of undoing inherited structures that privilege a small segment of society over others. As a living document, this will change over time as we become more sensitive to hearing God's calling to become a prophetic community. This group offers this document as an invitation to conversation and dialogue.

The FILL Theology and Research Working Group has adopted a framework and guiding principles:

- 1) the celebration and welcoming of the diverse voices of faith communities to be part of the conversation, with the recognition that each of us speak from **different ethnocultural vantage points**;

Diverse here denotes inclusion of all varying expressions of the human experience, including but not limited to: ethno-racial, cultural, religious traditions, age, gender, sexual orientation and identity, class, ableness, citizenship, education, geographic location...

- 2) and to acknowledge that each of us encounters each other with our own unique experiences, ways of knowing, and **diverse spiritual and theological traditions**.

- 3) We intend to **interrogate the available language** and to **develop and create new language** to speak about intercultural exchanges.

Intercultural exchanges are the multilevel dynamics by which members of different ethnocultural communities interact with each other and draw from their own sources of knowledge and wisdom to make sense of life, interact with each other, the environment, and make sense of the divine. Cultural traditions are not understood here as finished products and uniform. They are conceived as porous and dynamic and in a constant process of fluctuation or change.

As part of our objective, we are committed to reflect on the meaning of **interculturality**. We do this by:

- i) naming and challenging the **duality between theory and practice in Western Euro-centric contexts**, and **validating and affirming the holistic nature of life**;

We do not understand interculturality monolithically, as if there is a single meaning to interculturality. Different communities understand the term differently.

Duality: In Western Euro-Centric contexts the tendency is to separate all experiences of life into disconnected pieces without necessarily bringing all the pieces together at the end, for example: we think; we feel; we do; we intuit, are all separate. Another example is we separate the private and the public. Life is reduced to all of its parts, but the linkages are not made explicit.

Holistic nature of life: Being in touch with all our relationships, with each other, with our own bodies, with all of nature. All of it is not reducible to concepts or categories but is encompassed in everyday life. This is the Indigenous concept of “All my relations”

- ii) reclaiming and learning from the lived-experiences of ethnocultural communities on the ground as sources of theological material;

Intercultural engagement imposes an ethical imperative so that no one group can claim to have any kind of privileges over other communities. It entails an action of mutual welcoming of all parties recognizing that all stand on equal ground.

- iii) **challenging Western Eurocentric and Euro-Canadian-centred forms of knowledge and ways of encountering the Divine** which discount other forms of learning, along with other forms of knowledge, of doing theology, and other forms of living life;

In light with the holistic nature of life, intercultural engagement requires that dominant communities abandon denial, distraction, or deflection of historical grievances. Instead, engage in an intentional unlearning of the colonising mentality and learning decolonising ways of right relationships.

- iv) **celebrating and valuing of Indigenous cultural traditions** and knowledges, as well as the **celebrating and valuing of the many other ethnocultural, epistemological and faith traditions** that call Canada home.

Interculturality requires that cultural diversity becomes a characteristic of the social context. It also requires that different communities become mutually receptive of each other, and the different ways they view life, understand God, and interact with each other in ways that are dignifying, just, and life-giving.



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