

# Cultural perceptions: A barrier to the role of cross-cultural friendships in mission? (A Church of Pentecost-UK case study)

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper, based on original qualitative and quantitative research undertaken as part of my MA studies in African Christianity at Liverpool Hope University, explores the challenges faced by the Ghanaian Church of Pentecost-UK (CoP-UK) in sharing the love and good news of Jesus Christ with White British people, in the specific context of the UK's postmodern culture. Arguing that, in this context, intentional investment by CoP-UK in cross-cultural friendships with White British people is likely to form the essential basis of trust for the discussion of issues of Christian faith, the paper discusses the barriers to engagement

in such friendships posed by a generally negative perception of White British culture. My approach to the original research and to subsequent follow up has been consciously relational and the potential contribution of this approach to future collaboration with CoP-UK, in addressing cross-cultural barriers, is also explored. The findings have potential relevance for other Black Majority Churches (BMCs), for other minority ethnic churches, and for everyone who is concerned to enable the God-given contributions of all ethnic groups to be “brought to the table” in God’s wider evangelistic mission.

**Keywords:** Black majority church; Cross-cultural friendship; Postmodern culture; Mission; Multicultural church; Evangelism

## INTRODUCTION

It is important to clarify at the outset that I am White British and, until my first encounter with the Ghanaian Church of Pentecost-UK (CoP-UK), was unfamiliar with it. While the challenges of cross-cultural communication must be acknowledged in undertaking the research (if not in language itself, then certainly in associated meaning), it is also possible that my ethnicity added value to the research process in that, as an indigenous member of UK culture, I could reasonably be expected to understand key elements of that culture, and that this has generally been perceived as an advantage in exploring cultural engagement by members of CoP-UK in this particular environment.

The genesis of the research underpinning this paper was a 2020 case study interview, conducted as part of my MA in African Christianity studies at Liverpool Hope University (Neate, 2021). In this interview, a District Pastor from CoP-UK poignantly, powerfully and very honestly reflected on the difficulties faced by members of his church in attempting to evangelize in the UK, in pursuit of the global vision of the international, Ghanaian Church of Pentecost (CoP) to be “a church where members go to *possess their nations* [my emphasis] by transforming every worldview, thought and behaviour with values, principles and lifestyles of the Kingdom of God and thereby turning many people to Christ” (Church of Pentecost, 2019: 18). The District Pastor commented:

We recognize that we need to break out of our comfort zones. Our theme is “possessing the nations,” so we need to go out. The first-generation African Christians who come to this country – whether to study or to work – recognize the [poor spiritual]

state of Western Christianity. You say, “This wasn’t as I expected. What can I do?” You have the intention to do it [evangelize cross-culturally], but then the barriers come down; barriers of language, colour and resistance; “Who are you to come and speak to me about God?” Then you begin to withdraw and revert to what you do well. (District Pastor A, 2020)

CoP’s global vision of “possessing the nations” is based on a number of biblical references – in the Old Testament referring more particularly to the physical driving out of the enemies of God’s people (e.g. Dt. 11:23 (NIV)) and in the New Testament, to the driving out of spiritual forces of evil, such that nations and their peoples today are recaptured as part of God’s spiritual realm (e.g. Eph. 6.12 (NIV)).

CoP’s evangelistic vision is truly ambitious but, as illustrated by the comments of the District Pastor, there is a significant gap, at least in the UK context, between the visionary goal and the practical reality on the ground – a challenge shared with many other BMCs in this country. Hence this paper can be set within the context of the significant secularization of UK society, the rapidly increasing number of Black Majority Churches (BMCs) and their challenges in engaging with British, postmodern culture. Attempts to bridge this gap require an understanding of the current postmodern culture in the UK and the adoption by CoP-UK and other BMCs of evangelistic methods likely to be successful in this context.

Research literature highlights changes over recent decades in the landscape of faith in the postmodern UK context, in which Christian certainties (including the notion of absolute truth) are challenged, and where there is now greater emphasis on the *relational* and *process* natures of the faith journey. Tentative conclusions that can be reached from the literature include: (a) that friendship is likely to prove to be an important route to connection with White British people in a postmodern society; (b) that this approach runs counter to some of the currently prevalent methods of evangelism used by CoP-UK (particularly, street evangelism); (c) that it is not a “quick fix” route to making Christian converts; (d) that it must be genuine, unconditional and sustained; (e) that it should not be treated as a project nor should individuals be targeted for friendship in a manipulative way; and (f) it will require hard work, an intentional approach and a willingness to break out of circles of ethnic familiarity.

CoP’s five-year development and evangelism strategy, *Vision 2023* (Church of Pentecost, 2019), highlights the importance, in attempting to transform communities for Jesus Christ, of learning to engage with those communities

and seeking their good (Church of Pentecost, 2019: 62). This suggests the importance of intentional engagement and relationship building and indeed, the possibility of friendship. Interestingly however, a word search of two key reference documents, *Vision 2023* and the 2020 CoP-UK Trustees Report (CoP-UK 2021), contains no reference to the notions of “friendship” or “relationship”. Intentional cross-cultural working is also not significantly developed as a theme. My central research focus was therefore to explore the potential role of cross-cultural friendships between members of CoP-UK and White British people in overcoming the cultural barriers to sharing Jesus’ love and good news. However, while cross-cultural friendships may be very significant in addressing cultural barriers, it is important to recognise that their impact will be conditioned by the *attitudes* of CoP-UK leaders and members towards White British culture, affecting the likelihood of, and enthusiasm for, their active engagement. This paper explores the perceptions of White British culture held by CoP-UK leaders and members and how these may be shaping current attitudes both to UK cultural engagement and to investment in cross-cultural friendships. Finally, this paper briefly discusses the relational approach which I took to the research and the impact of this both on the research process itself, and also on the way in which CoP-UK is currently engaging in conversation about potential responses to the research outcomes.

## THE CHURCH OF PENTECOST

Since its origins in 1937, CoP has extended its reach to become an international church (Onyiah, 2020: 184). By 2021, CoP was operating in 136 nations with a worldwide membership of 3,901,400, organized within 24,773 local assemblies (Church of Pentecost 2022). CoP operates within a centralized structure, with CoP in Ghana remaining the dominant element.

Membership of CoP-UK in 2020 (the latest available at the time of writing) was 21,248, organized through 162 Akan and English-speaking assemblies (Church of Pentecost-UK, 2021: 3). The English-speaking assemblies, known as Pentecost International Worship Centres (PIWCs), and representing some 40 percent of all assemblies, were first introduced in the UK in 2002 (Nyanni, 2018: 122), with the aim of providing a “well-structured, multicultural church, primarily for people of non-Ghanaian background” (Nyanni, 2018: 121).

Every five years, CoP issues a development plan (currently covering the period 2018-23), which it expects to be appropriately implemented locally in its churches across the globe, using the “spirit of the vision to explore community

interventions that are relevant in their respective societies to ensure that we take the nations for Christ” (Church of Pentecost, 2019: 18).

Key evangelism *goals* are set out in *Vision 2023* and tangible *actions* taken in response by CoP-UK are outlined in the Trustees’ Annual Reports (the latest being for 2020). Although these highlight a broad range of social engagement activities, a strong focus continues to be placed on traditional means of evangelism (albeit adjusted for the impact of the coronavirus pandemic), for example, tracts distribution, door to door visiting and street preaching – essentially “transactional” rather than “relational” methods.

## **KEY ISSUES FROM THE LITERATURE**

Three specific areas of literature provide relevant background for this research project: (a) the challenges for BMCs in working cross-culturally; (b) the changes in social context in which evangelism is taking place in the West’s postmodern culture; and (c) the positive role of relational approaches to evangelism within this culture.

### Postmodern culture

Frequent reference is made in this paper to postmodern culture (McGuigan 2006). Before reviewing the background research literature, it is important to outline briefly the key characteristics of this phenomenon. Brian Duignan (2020) suggests that essential aspects include: (a) denial of absolute or real truth; (b) scepticism toward overarching theories and certainties in knowledge; and (c) markers of pluralism [embracing many different religious systems and ways of thinking], self-referentiality [essentially, truth is as determined by the individual] and moral and knowledge relativism [morality and knowledge are just one way of seeing things, and there are others]. While there are clearly many sub-cultures within White British culture, I believe that the powerful overlay of postmodernism within the UK provides a useful general framework for analysis.

## Cross-cultural challenges for Black Majority Churches

At a time when Europe is becoming increasingly secular (NatCen Social Research, 2017), BMCs can often see their role as being to rescue Westerners from their “spiritual wilderness” and Western churches from a “state of apostasy” (Adogame, 2011: 81). By contrast to this Western secularization trend, the past 70 years have seen an enormous *expansion* of BMCs in the UK. These churches are now operating, in effect, in a new mission field (Adedibu, 2012: 47-49; Kwiyani, 2020: 34). The challenge however, for CoP-UK and many other BMCs which are trying to seize the new mission opportunities, is to find a way that enables them to move beyond their narrow, core ethnic bases and to penetrate the indigenous White British communities surrounding them.

The experience of many African migrants to the UK has been a feeling of alienation in a “strange” White British culture, sometimes accompanied by hostility and rejection by both White British people and the White British Church (Kalu, 2010: 9-34; Aldred, 2007; Burgess, 2011: 255). Against this background, BMCs have often provided mutually supportive communities and places of safety for their members (Kalu, 2010: 19). However, these “places of safety” have frequently become insular and defensive, generating a form of “fortress” outlook among their members, and fostering generally negative attitudes toward White British culture. They have also adopted a form of quasi military language in their evangelism strategies. An example is CoP’s use of the phrase “possessing the nations”, which is partly in response to the perceived hostile environment, but also driven by ethnic culture and theology (Adedibu, 2013b: 405-23; Mtata, 2011: 345). At a time when it is important for BMCs to engage effectively with White British culture, these evangelistic approaches are very likely to have the opposite effect to that desired, with their apparently excessive (if metaphorical) territorial claims being antagonistic to British culture (Neate, 2020: 12-13).

The processes of understanding and engaging effectively with White British culture appear essential tools in enabling BMCs to make evangelistic inroads among indigenous British people, yet BMCs have often been criticized for their inadequate efforts in this area (Adedibu, 2013b: 407, 418). Israel Olofinjana (2020: 62) argues that BMCs’ church planting strategies must “engage the local people and community in which they are situated”. Adedibu (2013a) robustly proposes that BMCs must break free from their cultural captivity, listen attentively and “develop appropriate cross-cultural skills to communicate the gospel to postmodern people in Britain”.

## Social context for evangelism

In our current, postmodern Western society, previous certainties are questioned and new approaches to evangelism are needed. George Hunter describes it well:

As the Enlightenment has faded, postmodern people are increasingly suspicious of people and institutions that claim authority, and they are increasingly dubious of ultimate explanations. They are rediscovering their intuition, and they own and trust their feelings more. They take in the world through what they see, touch and experience – not just through what they hear – and they explore spirituality and the supernatural. (2010: 103)

The personal stories told through the lives of Christians therefore become increasingly important, and integrity in their words, actions and behaviours (the incarnation of the gospel) is vital (Hunter, 2010: 103). Challenging his own church, Opoku Onyinah (2014: 128), International Chairman of CoP from 2008 to 2018, echoes this message, arguing, “Whereas modernity emphasized the message of evangelism, postmodernity emphasizes the incarnational message as expressed in a relationship. Evangelistic lifestyles must reflect one’s spirituality.”

Alongside recognition of the importance of incarnational relationships for effective evangelism in a postmodern context, an understanding of the *journey* by which people become followers of Jesus is also vital. A journey of faith in Jesus is a *process* in which *relationships* are an essential component (Booker, 2005: 4). In other words, relationship comes first, rather than last, and this understanding offers a significant challenge to some of the commonly adopted methods of evangelism used by CoP-UK (Neate, 2021).

## RELATIONAL APPROACHES TO EVANGELISM

A very wide range of evangelistic techniques is deployed in contemporary UK society. Examples include Disciple Making Movements (DMM), Alpha courses, Street Pastors, Healing on the Streets, schools outreach, compassion-based programmes, street evangelism and door-to-door visiting (Booker and Ireland, 2005: 4). Some of these programmes attempt to respond to the need, in a post-modern context, and see faith as a journey or process. Others, however, such as street evangelism, appear to largely ignore the cultural realities of the Western

context. In the essentially one-off transactions that occur between a Christian and a hearer in street evangelism, there is a key missing element – the element of relationship and friendship, and the consequent building of personal trust. Christopher Heuertz and Christine Pohl (2010: 41) rightly ask how we can expect an individual on a UK street to “confess their sins to complete strangers and give the rest of their lives to a God to whom they may have been introduced only a few minutes earlier?” Onyinah (2014: 122) emphasizes the importance of the Church developing practical, relationship-based evangelistic strategies. “Evangelistic lifestyles must reflect one’s spirituality: by extending invitations to friends to join and investigate that spirituality through Jesus Christ. This is a *journey of friendship* [my emphasis] where the invited friend is introduced to Jesus Christ and the salvation he offers” (Onyinah, 2014: 128).

With friendship very much on the agenda then (Evangelical Alliance 2012), it needs to be recognized that there is also a risk of friendship *evangelism* being viewed as an “instant fix” to the challenge of cross-cultural mission, with people who are not yet Christians “targeted” as friendship evangelism “projects”. This is something to be avoided at all costs. As Heuertz and Pohl (2010: 42) argue, “Befriending someone *merely so you can tell them the gospel* is a form of manipulation and a violation of trust.” Rather, the demonstration of true love for someone who is initially a stranger is surely to value them authentically, consistently and unconditionally.

## RESEARCH APPROACH

The overall objective of this research project, undertaken in early 2021, was to explore whether cross-cultural friendships by members of CoP-UK with White British people might offer a potentially more effective means of sharing the good news and love of Jesus Christ than the more traditional evangelism approaches currently used by CoP-UK. While summary data is included in this paper for all key areas included in the research, the particular focus here is on the experiences and attitudes of CoP-UK members and leaders towards White British culture. Taken together these are important influencers of cross-cultural engagement and friendship.

## Research methods and metrics

A mixed methods research approach, using questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion, enabled the quantitative data from questionnaire-based responses to be cross-checked with the in-depth, qualitative data collected via individual and group interviews and discussions (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018: 217). Three, geographically spread CoP-UK Districts (Reading, Leicester and Leeds) formed the basis for this research, generating 143 completed online questionnaires. Fifteen Zoom-based, semi-structured interviews took place (five each from the three Districts), with participants holding a wide range of roles and offering a broad spectrum of perspectives. Finally, an evangelism leaders focus group discussion was held (five participants nominated from the three research Districts). This provided the opportunity to reflect on key themes emerging from the semi structured interviews and to discuss these in a broader CoP-UK leadership context.

A good overall gender balance was achieved, with a 52:48 male to female ratio among questionnaire respondents. Almost half (49 per cent) were aged 18-34, with well under ten per cent aged 55 years or older. Akan-speaking assemblies have an older demographic, with nearly 70 per cent aged 35-54. By contrast, in PIWC assemblies, a nearly similar level is seen in the 18-34 age group.

The majority of respondents (83.2 per cent) were born in Ghana, 14 per cent elsewhere and only 2.8 per cent in the UK. Some 72.1 per cent of respondents had lived for over five years in the UK, with 46.2 per cent for more than ten years. However, only 0.7 per cent of respondents reported having lived their whole life in the UK.

The research questionnaire gathered a wide range of participant information, including (a) gender, age, country of birth, length of time living in the UK, area of residence, length of time as a member of CoP-UK, and CoP-UK assembly attended; (b) the composition of participants' close friendship groups; and (c) attitudes toward, and experiences of, friendship with White British friends, and views on White British culture. Attitudinal responses were assessed using a series of statements which participants were asked to score in terms of the extent to which they agreed or disagreed, using a Likert-type, ordinal scale (Jamieson, 2004).

The identification of the ethnicity of participants' closest circles of friendship was based on Robin Dunbar's research conclusion that human beings, irrespective of ethnic background, have a limited amount of social capital to be invested in friendships. Dunbar (2018: 35) suggests that approximately

40 per cent of our total social effort is devoted to just five people (the five most important to us), with another 20 per cent given to the 10 next most important. In other words, 60 per cent of our social effort is divided between just 15 people (those most likely to provide us with support). Using this approach, questionnaire participants were asked to identify, first, their closest five friends, and then, their next closest ten friends. In doing so, they were asked to state the ethnic background of each identified friend (classified as Ghanaian, Black (Other), White British or White (Other)).

### KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

Given the need for effective evangelistic approaches by CoP-UK, in the specific context of postmodern Britain, a key measure of success is whether “cut through” is being achieved to the UK’s indigenous population and whether White British people can be found as part of CoP-UK assemblies. A disappointing picture is painted by the research however, with Ghanaians forming the overwhelmingly dominant group in the Districts surveyed, with only a tiny representation of White British people (just 0.12 per cent overall). It is important to note that while English-speaking, PIWC assemblies were created to appeal to multicultural audiences and to reach the indigenous population, the evidence from the research suggests that there is no discernible difference in their ability to attract White British members.

The research results clearly show that certain evangelism tools currently adopted by CoP-UK – particularly the ubiquitous street evangelism – may not be working, and that a new approach may be needed. Indeed, only 11.9 per cent of respondents agreed that familiar methods of evangelism from Ghana worked as well in the UK, with two thirds (67.9 per cent) disagreeing.

Two particularly interesting paradoxes are revealed, concerning the potential role of cross-cultural friendship between CoP-UK members and White British people in sharing the good news and love of Jesus Christ. The first of these is that while four-fifths (81.8 per cent) of questionnaire respondents believe it is important to find ways of reaching White British people for Jesus, and nearly three-quarters (72.1 per cent) of respondents believe that making friends with White British people is a good way to share Jesus Christ’s love with them, only around half of this number (37.8 per cent) believe that it is important to *have* White British friends (with 30.8 percent disagreeing). This suggests that while the *idea* of friendship with White British people as an evangelistic approach appears attractive to many, a significantly smaller number see

it as their personal role to form such friendships. This disconnect would clearly need to be addressed if cross-cultural friendship were to be developed by CoP-UK as a new route to evangelism.

The second paradox, given the potential for greater levels of in-group community in traditional, Akan-speaking assemblies, is that questionnaire respondents from this constituency report that they are *more* likely than PIWC members to identify the importance of having White British friends. This suggests that counter to expectations and to CoP-UK policy, PIWC members are not necessarily more engaged in the drive for multiculturalism than their Akan assembly friends. This finding is also supported by the questionnaire data showing that there appears to be little difference between PIWC and Akan-speaking assemblies in the number of White British or White (Other) friends reported. While PIWC members report a slightly greater number of friends overall than members of Akan assemblies, this appears to be due to having more Ghanaian friends, rather than a broader demographic of friends.

The research points clearly to the relative lack of White British friends held by CoP-UK members. Seventy-two per cent of questionnaire participants listed *none* of their top five friends as White British and 68 per cent of respondents listed no White British friends among their next ten closest friendships. This paucity of close White British friends was also identified in the qualitative research. It might be anticipated that the younger adult members of CoP-UK would hold a greater number of White British friendships than their older peers (given the multicultural environments of further education institutes, for example). However, analysis shows that a greater proportion of those in the 18-34 age group than the 35+ age group report having their top five friendships with people of Ghanaian and Black (Other) ethnicity.

It is a universal phenomenon that human beings tend to develop close friendships predominantly with people from the same ethnic background (Bagci et al., 2014: 126; Lessard-Phillips, Fajth and Fernandez-Reino, 2020: 9). If CoP-UK decided therefore that increased emphasis should now be placed on building *cross-cultural* friendships in achieving their ambitious evangelistic vision, the current behavioural patterns of its members would need to be radically challenged to encourage the creation of space for friendships with White British people. One consequence would be a substantial break with default, ethnic “self-grouping”.

## ATTITUDES TO WHITE BRITISH CULTURE – A NEGATIVE LENS?

The willingness and enthusiasm felt by CoP-UK members to engage effectively with White British people and their culture – and the desire to invest in cross-cultural friendships – is likely to be significantly influenced by their attitudes towards that culture. Questionnaire responses gathered in this research reveal that only a quarter (26.6 per cent) of participants report liking White British culture, with 60.1 per cent registering a neutral reaction and 13.3 per cent expressing active dislike. Apart from perceived negative aspects of White British culture, practical communication challenges were also identified as potential barriers. For example, 57.3 per cent of respondents believe that White British people are more direct in their communication style than Ghanaians. This is borne out by research into high and low context cultures, demonstrating that a greater degree of “coded” language is typically used in African culture than UK culture in which communication is more explicit (Meyer, 2015: 29-60). A further barrier was identified in terms of perceived attitudes to privacy, with 53.1 per cent of questionnaire respondents believing that White British people have a greater tendency to protect their privacy. There is also a belief that Ghanaians and White British people seek different things in friendship; 39.2 per cent of respondents affirm this view, with only 26.6 per cent disagreeing. It would be valuable to explore this issue via future research and discussion.

In the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion, White British culture was often characterized in terms of “bad habits”. For example, drinking alcohol and going to nightclubs were perceived as challenges to be overcome through evangelization. One respondent commented, “It might be a cultural thing – but in Ghanaian culture and in my church ... we do not drink ... and obviously, alcohol is a big part of the British culture. So, if I need to cut through to them [White British people], I will have to go ... that’s friendship” (Respondent 14, 2021). Considerable wariness was expressed about the moral risks of engaging with White British culture, and the need to “protect the heart” from bad moral influences. Illustrating this point, another respondent commented, “For example, as a Christian, you cannot say I want to have a friend, so let me go to some places that for us we believe is not right as a Christian to go ... like nightclubs and the rest” (Respondent 6, 2021).

Overall, a significant tension emerged through the research. While participants were highly motivated by Jesus’ modelling of spending time with “sinners” and the marginalized in society, strong fears were also expressed about becoming “polluted” by worldly values, with several respondents citing St Paul’s injunction not to be “yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6: 14 (NIV)).

One leader participating in the Focus Group discussion raised a particular concern in this context; that strong cultural pressures existed within CoP-UK (and perhaps wider African society) which an individual would need to resist if they were to pursue friendships with those perceived as somehow “unacceptable”. The leader asked, “If I am approaching someone who is gay or lesbian, what would the society or the community of my fellow Ghanaians or my fellow Africans [think] when I begin to relate myself with them?” (Member B, 2021).

Interestingly, no positive facet of White British culture was spontaneously volunteered through the research responses (for example, music, theatre, dance, walking, leisure activities, sport, active and accountable democracy). Several explanations are possible. One explanation might be that respondents have not engaged in the breadth of White British culture in a way that would enable them to identify its positive features. Another explanation is that respondents might be aware of the various dimensions of White British culture, but still do not feel positive about any of them. A third explanation is that CoP-UK members perceive White British culture through a dominant, negative lens or narrative, which prevents positive attributes being recognized and appreciated. Some credence was given to this last potential explanation by a member of the evangelism leaders focus group who said, “There may be certain things that you [the British] do. It’s not a sin even in the Bible, but then because we have this kind of mentality or mindset about your culture, we will just generalize everything about British people and say [that] what they do is wrong” (Member C, 2021). Ironically, to the extent that the third of these explanations may have some validity, there is a danger of CoP-UK’s leadership and members repeating the attitudinal mistakes (but now in a British context) first exhibited by Western missionaries to Africa in the late eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which *African* culture was denigrated (Magesa, 2017: 114).

The importance of contextualizing CoP-UK’s evangelism approach in the UK *was* however, identified by a number of respondents who recognized that to bring influence in British culture, it is essential to avoid the risk of attempting to superimpose a form of perceived “superior” Ghanaian culture. The CoP-UK should respond to relevant *Western* needs, for example isolation and loneliness, rather than focusing on the more familiar Ghanaian issues related to material need (Focus Group, 2021).

## A RELATIONAL APPROACH

My clear intention from the outset has been that this research should not simply be aimed at achieving an academic goal, but that it should also be essentially *practical*, providing a useful and relevant framework for the leadership of CoP-UK in its ongoing development of evangelism strategy for the UK. With this in mind, I adopted a consciously relational approach throughout. This approach reflected my preferred personal style, but also recognizing its vital importance in gaining support for the conduct of the research and for subsequent relations with CoP-UK. As an “outsider” to CoP-UK, I was entirely dependent on co-operation with the Principal of Birmingham Christian College (a senior leader within the church and nominated contact point for the research) and several District Pastors (effectively “gatekeepers” of CoP-UK) to open the doors to the recruitment of research participants.

This relational style underpinned the semi-structured interviews and Evangelism Leaders Focus Group discussion. The result was that trust was built with interviewees, and free flowing, warm discussion generated, in the examination of a research topic itself focused on the role of cross-cultural *friendship*. Respondents were noticeably open and non-defensive in reflecting on CoP-UK’s current attitudes, behaviour and practices, and in considering potential future changes.

It is apparent that intentional development of close cross-cultural friendships with White British people has not previously been a significant element of CoP-UK’s overall thinking on evangelism. However, significant enthusiasm for a new approach was identified through this research (and “crystal-lized” through the research process itself). For example, several respondents described the personal benefit they had experienced from friendships with White British people, particularly in terms of providing opportunities to learn more about White British culture, and calls were made for CoP-UK’s leadership to be intentional in providing training sessions for its members on this topic (Focus Group, 2021).

The emerging enthusiasm of research participants for the role of cross-cultural friendships with White British people as a new evangelistic emphasis sends an encouraging signal that this approach has the potential to gain wider traction within CoP-UK. The relationally-based research process, and subsequent discussions with a number of CoP-UK’s senior leaders, have already resulted in several positive outcomes. These include opportunities to speak with groups of CoP-UK leaders about the research project, my appointment as Visiting Lecturer at Birmingham Christian College (teaching on my research to

CoP-UK local leaders), an intent to bring together selected leaders from CoP-UK and from the Vineyard Church in the UK (of which I am a member) to discuss the opportunities and challenges of cross-cultural friendships, and a clear desire by the head of CoP-UK in the UK to work collaboratively in progressing the issues identified in the research.

## CONCLUSIONS

CoP-UK (in common with many other BMCs) experiences a very significant gap between its evangelistic aspiration to “possess the nations” and the practical situation within its individual assemblies, where there are only very low levels of participation by White British people. The literature suggests that in the postmodern context of the Western world, the evangelistic imperative has shifted to a recognition of the importance of the incarnational nature of Christianity (our lives modelling the love and good news of Jesus Christ), the journey of faith understood as a process rather than a one-off transaction, and evangelism pursued best on a relational basis. The data suggests however, that CoP-UK continues to rely heavily (though not exclusively) on various forms of street evangelism which are essentially one-off transactions, rather than incarnational and relational.

While it is clear from this research that cross-cultural friendship with White British people as a means of sharing Jesus’ love and good news had not previously been identified as a priority by CoP-UK (and CoP-UK members have very few such friendships), considerable enthusiasm has been identified for the intentional development of thinking, teaching and practice in this area. The research also identified a largely negative perception by research participants of White British culture, posing significant challenges to engagement with that culture and to investment in cross-cultural friendships. Perseverance in meeting these challenges is likely not only to result in missional benefits for CoP-UK, but also to lead to greater mutual confidence, as the “mystique” of White British culture is progressively penetrated through cross-cultural friendships.

The relational approach adopted both to the research process itself and to follow up discussion, coupled with the refreshing willingness by research participants to reflect on current attitudes, behaviours and ways of thinking within the life of CoP-UK, has enabled the opening up of a very positive dialogue with senior CoP-UK leaders about relevant future action. Initial feedback from senior leadership of CoP-UK suggests that while the results of this research echo general understandings of the situation already held within the church, the crystallization provided by the data provides a powerful impetus for action.

The research findings from this particular case study have potential relevance, in the increasingly secular and postmodern UK context, for other Black Majority Churches, for other minority ethnic churches, and for everyone who is concerned to enable the God-given contributions of all ethnic groups to be “brought to the table” in God’s wider evangelistic mission. Readers are invited to consider how these research findings might be applied in the various settings in which they are active, aware that the detail of application will need specific local adaptation.

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## **INTERVIEWS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Interview with District Pastor A. 2020. July 2. Virtual.

Interview with Respondent 6. 2021. March 8. Virtual.

Interview with Respondent 14. 2021. March 19. Virtual.

Discussion with Member B, Focus Group. 2021. March 25. Virtual.

Discussion with Member C, Focus Group. 2021. March 25. Virtual.

Discussion with Focus Group. 2021. March 25. Virtual.