

Minutes of BAME Forum Meeting 29.03.2021 at 7:30pm (On Zoom)

Present: Rev'd Ben King (Chair), Buki Adesote, Olu Adesote, Grace Adjei-Chukwu, Omar Bynon, Mathis Gravillis, Hazel (Mathis' signer), Joyce Haynes, Chinwe Joseph-Emele, Ann Okenwa, Nnamdi Okenwa, Meghan Reid, Patrick Rigabie, Michael Semuguruka, Yvonne Tiley

Apologies: Judith Nyabango

The meeting started at 7:40pm with a reading from Revelation 7:9-12 followed by a short prayer (Michael).

Ben interpreted the bible reading in light of the meeting, then briefly outlined the parameters for the meeting with a brief summary of what has happened since May 2020 at St Mark's on the issue of race.

Attendees were invited to introduce themselves, how long they have been at St Marks's and what they were hoping to get out of the meeting.

Ben asked if anyone had been a member of a forum like this one before and three participants informed that they have been. They shared their experience of being involved at such a forum and this was appreciated by attendees.

Note was made of the fact that BAME name is dated and that some organisations have changed their name to, for example, Diversity Network; need to explore this for our church.

Attendees were asked what they felt was going well at St Mark's in terms of race.

- Calls made to check up on families during the pandemic were very useful and this was felt as very positive.
- One attendee mentioned that people at St Mark's are friendly, checking on each other, this has kept her coming to our church.
- One attendee mentioned that some people at church would not say good morning in church or on the streets but would do so on zoom, but things have changed through prayer and that person would now stop to say hello.

- St Mark's feels like a family that even if not speaking to someone, one felt like they know them.

Ben then introduced the key issues that emerged from the survey and these were discussed as follows:

Belonging/inclusion:

It was felt that feelings of belonging were present but inclusion was not where it should be but, since the survey, improvements have been made. It was noted that we all have different personalities (some are shy etc). This part of inclusion needs more careful consideration.

Need for wider scope of inclusion for children and teenagers, need for a youth leader. It was noted that we had many youth in church but some have left because of lack of opportunity of a youth leader.

One attendee shared their experience that church felt like a safe place, a sanctuary, important to have activities for different days of the week than on Sundays only.

Representation and leadership:

Explore those who may have leadership roles at their places of work to have leadership roles at church.

It was noted of greater representation at streamed services, to explore for example those who did readings in the streamed services to do the same at church.

Explore people's abilities and release them to participate, however positive discrimination would not be the way.

Need to listen to the Spirit and explore different ministries to have diversity.

Worship:

To have praise and worship at church with different types of worship like gospel music, this would help to bring in other people.

Note was made of a birthday celebration and Yoruba language was used to sing to a member of the church which was good to see also it was mentioned of the bible reading in Yoruba language that was done (07.03.21 service). It was mentioned that this brings diversity but need to blend in and not only for example when it is Black History Month. Suggestion of, for example, International Women's Day was made, nevertheless appreciation was made of representation during Black History Month.

Note was made of dramatization of songs and worship to have more gospel songs and not just from hymns so as to overcome repetitiveness and introducing variety at worship.

Cultural/Social events:

Ben asked if we have had any events in the past. Men's group was mentioned which was used for socialising which had been ongoing.

A camping event was mentioned which was seen as a way of coming together outside church and was a good way to connect as families, bonding, kids having fun and families getting to know each other better.

Note was made of having cultural evenings which have been done for example at All Saints (Jamaica Independence Day celebrations, Jamaica flag colours, dishes/meals for everyone. Ghanaian evening involving costumes and dishes).

Following this, it was asked if there were any other issues to explore:

- Need of sign language evening was discussed
- Noted to bring others as well.

Possible way ahead:

To have future meetings as we have had good conversations at this meeting.

Hope of not drifting away once back in church as everyone enjoyed the evening.

Possibility of a BBQ once lock down is over.

The meeting concluded at 9:10pm with prayer by Ben.