

the **POWER** *of* **ALL**
Building a Multivoiced Church



Sian and Stuart Murray Williams

Study Guide

Chapter 1

1. Review the anecdotal stories of multivoiced church experiences. Share a similar story from your past with the group.
2. The authors define multivoiced church as “an alternative to the dominant tradition in which large numbers of the Christian community are passive consumers instead of active participants. It replaces reliance on one person . . . with an expectation that the whole community is gifted, called, empowered, and expected to be involved in all aspects of church life.” Reflect on your current church experiences. How is your experience similar or different from what is experienced in a multivoiced church?
3. In multivoiced churches there is an expectation that everyone contribute something. How does that make you feel and why?
4. On page 18-19 the authors describe four expected responses to the idea of the multivoiced church. Which of the four are you drawn to? Which of the four best describes your reaction to the idea of multivoiced church? Share with the group why you picked the response you did.
5. If you would decide to try becoming more of a multivoiced church in your current church setting, how would this look different from what you currently experience?
6. Review pages 21-22 and the four areas (worship, learning, community and discernment) in which a multivoiced church can offer a fresh alternative. Which of these do you feel are most relevant for your current culture?
7. On page 24 the authors suggest that in post Christendom “We will need churches that can function as communities of discernment and resistance, churches that can hold us accountable and support us in making surprising lifestyle choices, churches that are multivoiced enough to help us wrestle with issues and work through struggles.” How do you see your church addressing some of these needs? How could a multivoiced church approach help your church become more relevant?

Chapter 2

1. Read Acts 2. On page 31 of the book, the authors suggest the foundation for multivoiced church is found in the Acts 2 story. Where do you agree and/or disagree with the authors interpretations (on pages 27-31) of this historic event? Why?
2. On page 31 the authors suggest “Where a community meets impacts the way its members interact and the practices they adopt . . .” Imagine your church meeting in a different setting. Describe how that might change your interactions with one other?
3. According to the authors “Many churches do have experience of multivoiced community, but in most this is subsidiary, dispensable, and unsupported by training in how to participate.” (pg.33). What training might your church need and where do you think you might find it?
4. Read through the summary on pg 33-34 of how the early church met. This was natural and normal for them. In what ways do you find this appealing?
5. What would you need to change in your life to make this type of community of faith possible today? What steps would you need to take to make that happen? What needs to change in your church? How and why?



6. Read Corinthians 11-14. What multivoiced expressions are you most drawn to and why?
7. Chapter 2 concludes with the statement that “The Gospels indicate that multivoiced church is rooted firmly in the teaching and practice of Jesus.” In what ways do you notice this happening in the ministry of Jesus?

Chapter 3

1. There is evidence (based on the early writings of Tertullian, Clement of Alexander and the Apostolic Constitutions) that multivoiced church was the norm for early Christian communities. What practices from their writings stood out to you and why? Which of these practices are present in the church today?
2. On page 52, the authors begin a summary of the Christendom shift. How did this shift change practices in the church? How is the church still experiencing the results of this shift?
3. On pages 54-61 there are descriptions of various renewal movements that sought to return the church to a more multivoiced experience. Which of these renewal movements are you most drawn to and why?
4. Has there ever been renewal in your church? What practices were most important during those renewal times? What similarities or differences do you see in your renewal movements compared to those summarized in the book? How/why did your renewal movements start? If they “stopped” how/why did this happen?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 14. What aspects of multivoiced church do you notice? Which would you most like to practice in your church and why?
6. On page 62-64 there is a summary of five learning’s from history. Thinking of your current context, which of these do you feel would bring the best chance of renewal for your church? Why? Which of these do you feel the greatest resistance towards? Why?

Chapter 4

1. Chapter 4 begins with a summary of renewal movements that focused on multivoiced worship. Which of these movements most excite you and why? Which of these give you most pause and why?
2. According to the authors, multivoiced worship “means simply that when God’s people gather, our corporate worship is expressed by many people and in many formats, tones, and accents.” (pg 69) How is this similar or different from your current worship experience?
3. The authors follow this by sharing various ways multivoiced worship may express itself in a church setting. Which of these do you see already in your church? Which of these would you like to try in your church setting and why? If you did try them, what do you imagine happening?
4. “Creating an ethos within which multivoiced worship can flourish is vital.” (pg 77) What steps do you believe would need to be taken to create this ethos in your church? How might you take part in creating an ethos of multivoiced worship?
5. “Ground rules” (pg 81) are necessary for all to feel safe during multivoiced worship. What ground rules would your group agree on that would make all feel more comfortable with a multivoiced worship experience?



6. Multivoiced worship can also create its own unique problems in a community of faith. Listed on pages 85-86 are a few. Have you ever experienced any of these? If so, share your story. Share other problematic experiences you may have had in multivoiced worship. If not, which of these do you fear most and why?
7. There are suggestions of how to address these problems on page 87. What other ways would you add to make it more possible to persist with multivoiced worship in your church?
8. What benefits are there in multivoiced worship that one would not experience in a more monovoiced worship time?

Chapter 5

1. Reflect on your experiences of sermons. What have you appreciated and what challenges have you faced?
2. What might a shift to a multivoiced learning experience offer to those sermon times during a worship setting?
3. On page 90 the authors suggest that, “sermons in the churches are the last bastions of unchallengeable monologues in contemporary culture.” What are your thoughts about that statement? How have the cultural, societal and media shifts affected your experience of a monovoiced sermon?
4. On page 92 is a statement, “Members of the church will have expertise on a wide range of issues that preachers do not.” Share the areas of expertise that you bring to the Scriptures from your day to day lives. In what creative ways might your expertise contribute to a more multivoiced sermon?
5. The authors suggest the dominance of the monovoiced sermon damaged the churches witness and is a result of the church succumbing to the cultural shifts of Christendom, the medieval church, and the response to the reformation. How do you feel the dominant role of monovoiced preaching is affecting the church and its witness? How might a multivoiced approach improve the church and its witness?
6. Discuss together the five concerns related to monovoiced sermons on pages 96-97. Where do you most agree and why? Where do you disagree and why? What else might you suggest in support for a more multivoiced sermon?
7. On pages 98-108 are suggestions that can be used to create a more multivoiced sermon experience. Which of these have you experienced? Describe what it was like? Can you remember what you learned? If you have never experienced any of these, which are you most drawn to and why?
8. What would it be like to replace one or more of your sermon times in church with one of the author’s suggestions? What risks might there be? What resistance do you feel? What might be the benefits?

Chapter 6

1. Look over the many “one another” passages on pages 115-117. The authors suggest that “our familiarity with them and the sheer number of references to “one another” obscures their significance.” Read several of the verses that you are drawn to out loud. What new insights on these passages do you have after reading the chapter on multi-voiced community?



2. If your group or church would embrace the “one another” ministry as a community of faith, how might this change what you expect from your church leaders? What might you as a group or church take responsibility for and what might you release to your church leaders?
3. On page 121 there are several questions related to Matthew 18 and “the rule of Christ.” As a group discuss some or all of these questions.
4. Matthew 18 has been used for “church discipline” by the clergy in abusive ways. Have you ever experienced this? If you feel comfortable share how. How might applying Matthew 18 in a multivoiced community setting foster healthy relationships in a church?
5. Think about a church that would apply all of the “one another” passages in their life as a multivoiced community. Would that be a church you would like to participate in? How close or far away is your church from the imagined one you desire to attend? Explain your answer. What one step might your group take towards this dream church?
6. How might a church begin to practice this multivoiced community-building process?
7. Page 126 the authors write “Institutional membership is not sufficient.” True friendship is what embodies the “one another” ministry. Would you say that you have true friends in your current church, Sunday school class, small group or other group in your current church setting? Why or why not?
8. What kinds of things are happening in your church that are either fostering or diminishing the possibility of friendship in your faith community? See page 129 for questions that can help.
9. On page 129 the authors begin conversation about communities of disciples. They mention a variety of resources that can help the multivoiced community become a community of disciples. Have you experienced any of these? Have you read any of the books mentioned? If so, share your experience.
10. The authors offer several suggestions on page 134 related to what becoming a community of disciples might mean in practice. Which of these suggestions are you drawn to and why? What other ideas might you have?

Chapter 7

1. The chapter opens with the following declaration, “All communities need to develop and agree on processes for making decisions.” How do you agree or disagree with the statement?
2. On page 138 the author’s ask these questions. “Is the church to make decisions in the same way as other communities? Should they have rules, bylaws and constitutions that they can refer to when disputes arise or they are exploring new possibilities? Are similar leadership structures and decision-making processes appropriate?” How might your group answer these questions?
3. Read Acts 6:1-7 or 15:1-22. What can we learn from the practice of the churches we encounter in the New Testament as they resolve disputes and reach decisions?
4. After answering question 3 and reviewing the Episcopal, Congregational and Presbyteral model on pages 141-144; how similar or different is your church process of discerning and deciding?
5. Discuss the definitions of language, ethos, training and focus on pages 145-146. Make sure your group understands these terms in a similar fashion. Then answer, “Which of these 4 things would you address first in your community of faith to improve your process of discerning and deciding as a multi-voiced church and why?”



6. Of the resources and descriptions of faith traditions on pages 147-151, which are you most drawn to and why? Is there anything from any of these traditions that you would like to add to, or recapture from, your faith tradition?
7. A multivoiced church needs a certain kind of leader. On pages 152-154 is a description of the qualities of multivoiced leadership. Which of these qualities would you affirm in your leadership?
8. On pages 154-155 are several questions related to listening to many voices. Your group may want to discuss these together.

Chapter 8

1. “Is it worth it?” Clearly there are positives and various disincentives and struggles that go along with creating a multivoiced church. Tell the group why you think becoming a multivoiced community is worth the effort. Or maybe you would like to tell the group why you think it is not worth the effort.
2. On pages 159-161 is a list of reasons not to adopt the multivoiced approach in your church. Which of these speak for you?
3. There are cultural shifts that may make becoming a multivoiced church important. Which of those listed in the book do you agree or disagree with? What additional reasons might you give?
4. On page 167-168 are several reasons why persons may want to go through the process of becoming a multivoiced church. Which of these speak for you or to you and why?
5. The authors make a bold statement that a multi-voiced community is more likely to be missional than a monovoiced one. How do you feel about that statement?
6. On pages 171-173 is a list of skills that persons in a multi-voiced community might learn. What value do you see in learning these skills? How might these help your group become more missional?
7. Do you think a multivoiced church would be attractive to those who are exploring Christian faith in your area? Why or why not?
8. The book ends with the question, “Where do we go from here?” As a group, answer that question. What would you like to do with what you have learned and experienced in this study? Will you try to apply some of these principles in your small group, Sunday school class or church? If so, how and why? If not, why not?

