

Five comforts of monocultural church

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Our church is in the midst of a major [transition](#): it's becoming bicultural. The combined joy and pain of our growth is intense and surprising at every turn. Sometimes I wonder if this is how a tree feels when it begins to grow new branches. I often feel fatigued in advance by the complexity of the conversations we want and need to have, as well as scared of where we are going and what it will require of me.

It's at these times that I find myself contemplating the comforts of what we used to be, a monocultural church:

1. In a monocultural church, you have the benefit of the illusion that everyone understands you and you understand everyone. When you speak, you might be relatively sure that people will grasp the nuances of your phrasing, will laugh at your jokes, and won't mind if you wander off the subject. Likewise, you believe that you understand others and that conversations clarify rather than deepen mysteries.
2. On a few Sundays throughout the year, a monocultural church reminds itself that Christianity is global. But most weeks you can almost imagine that the Lord's Prayer was written in English, that the hymnal represents a distillation of the best in your tradition, that when you sing you are joining your voices with angels and archangels, who of course also speak and sing in English. It isn't until you are stumbling through the Lord's Prayer in another language—while someone else glides right through it—that the comforts of this illusion become clear.

3. In a monocultural church, you are in the right when you insist that church begin at 10 and end promptly by 11. This doesn't look like a cultural preference; it looks like the right and respectful way to do things. In a monocultural church, nearly everyone has the same understanding of time. If you say, "Well, I've got to run" after coffee hour, everyone understands exactly what you mean and is not offended.

4. In a monocultural church, when you make a pot of soup you can adjust the seasoning just the way you like it, and you can pretty well assume that others won't say quietly, "Why is their food so bland?"

5. A monocultural church feels like home. As the years go by, it increasingly looks like you, reflects your tastes and your preferences. You develop a shared language and traditions that feel as natural as breathing. You don't explain or justify. You just *do*.