



BECOMING^{REVELATION} 7:9

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
ABOUT THE MULTI-ETHNIC CHURCH

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FAQ'S

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**WHY SHOULD I
BE CONCERNED WITH
WORKING TOWARD A
MULTI-ETHNIC / MULTICULTURAL
PRESENCE
IN MY CHURCH?**

Just then a religion scholar stood up with a question to test Jesus. "Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?"

He answered, "What's written in God's Law? How do you interpret it?"

He said, "That you love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence - and that you love your neighbor as well as you do yourself."

"Good answer!" said Jesus. "Do it and you'll live."

Looking for a loophole, he asked, "And just how would you define 'neighbor'?"

Jesus answered by telling a story.

"There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man. A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man's condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill - I'll pay you on my way back.'

What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?"

"The one who treated him kindly," the religion scholar responded.

Jesus said, "Go and do the same."

The story of the **GOOD SAMARITAN** is incredibly well known, but due to cultural distance, we may miss the impact of ethnicity in this parable. Jesus telling us we **MUST** include as our neighbor those least like ourselves. This means loving as ourselves those who make our skin crawl due to **POLITICAL DIFFERENCES**, **WORSHIP PREFERENCES**, or **CULTURAL CONFLICTS**. There is no extent of difference that can excuse exclusion.


Unfortunately, this is a lesson the church has been slow to learn.

**OUR CHURCHES TODAY ARE 10 TIMES
MORE SEGREGATED THAN THE
COMMUNITIES IN WHICH THEY SIT AND 20
TIMES MORE SEGREGATED THAN THE
SCHOOLS THAT SURROUND THEM.**

That means in order for churchers to remain homogeneous, they have to **"CONSCIOUSLY AVOID SEGMENTS OF THEIR NEIGHBORING COMMUNITY."**¹
Sound kind of like the priest and the Levite in the Good Samaritan story?

**WE DON'T WANT
TO BE THOSE GUYS!**

¹ Baron Witherspoon, Sr., *The Fallacy of Affinity: A Case for Cross Cultural Worship*, (Indianapolis, IN: Dog Ear Publishing, 2010), 47



Our separation as the body of Christ comes at a particularly dangerous time for the church in America. According to census figures:

Between 1990 and 2009, the population of the United States grew by 55,819,471 people.

over the same period,

Church attendance in the United States grew by 446,540 people.

(less than 1 percent of the total population growth).

This decline was most pronounced in zip codes with fewer than 79% Anglo population. This says that the church is failing, in particular, to reach ethnic minorities. At the same time,

America is growing increasingly diverse - and is projected to be a MAJORITY MINORITY nation by 2042.

If the church is failing to reach the populations that are increasing as a percentage of overall Americans, its decline will become even more precipitous. Building healthy multi-ethnic churches is an answer to reversing this trend.

**WHAT
THEOLOGICAL
BASIS EXISTS FOR THIS
VISION OF
CHURCH?**

Our primary reason for building the multi-ethnic church, is not cultural or demographic; it is biblical! Besides Revelation 7:9, here are some of the scriptures instructing us that uniting across every division of human origin is Christ's mandate for His Church.

JOHN 17:20-23

This scripture is foundational. Jesus here prays that we **WOULD BE ONE** and imitate in that oneness His unity with the Father. By this, the world would know that he was sent of the Father. Unity, then, becomes the primary apologetic for the gospel.

ACTS 13:1-3

This passage shows the power of the racially-reconciled church in action. Included in this dynamic, missions-sending leadership team were a Jewish Levite, a Sub-Saharan African, a North African, a Mediterranean, and a Tarsus born Jew raised in Jerusalem. It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians. A new word was needed to describe this incredible mix.

Ephesians 2:11-4:6

In this passage, Paul makes clear that every division has been done away with through the blood of Christ.

The Epistle to the Romans

It is well known that this book contains clear theology of salvation for Christians. It is less well known why this book contains the essentials of our faith. After all, Paul was no academician. The church at Rome consisted of both Jewish and Gentile followers until the expulsion of the Jews beginning around 49 AD. Years later, when Jews were allowed to return, conflicts between Jew and Gentile were rampant. Their disunity threatened the expansion of the gospel into Spain and points beyond. Paul wrote to bring together the church as a witness for Jesus. This provides just another example that cohesion among Christ-followers is not a peripheral issue; it is essential.

**WHAT ARE THE
MAIN BARRIERS
THAT EXIST IN
PURSUING
THIS VISION?**

A natural barrier exists because homogenous churches are simply more **COMFORTABLE**. Sociologically, **“RELIGIOUS GROUPS EXIST TO SUPPLY MEMBERS WITH MEANING, BELONGING, AND SECURITY.”**² These factors tend to be greater in a group of peoples with similar characteristics. In such a group, congregants are less likely to have their lifestyle or worldview challenged.

Attendees of a multi-ethnic church have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable; not everyone is willing to do that.

Mono-ethnic churches can also be explained as a response to the specialized needs of varying cultures. For example, the African American Protestant Church has historically provided a refuge of sorts for its congregants. Being part of a Black-controlled institution provided dignity and affirmation in the midst of an otherwise white-dominated and often oppressive society. In his **THE POST BLACK & POST WHITE CHURCH**, Efrem Smith details a number of gifts the Black Church has contributed to the American Church. These include the gift of participatory and celebratory preaching, the gift of a justice-oriented theology, and the gift of missional community engagement. Each of these gifts is rooted deep in the history of Africans in America and has contributed something unique to the American Church as well.

Another example is ethnic affinity churches. These bodies have traditionally served as places of belonging and are characterized by deep, family-like relationships. Though these churches will differ greatly in service style depending on the ethnic groups involved, they share in common the role of perpetuating a specific culture.

For example, Korean churches:

- Act as the social center and means of cultural identification for Koreans in America;

- Serve an educational function by teaching American-born Koreans the Korean language, history, and culture.

- Help keep Korean nationalism alive.³

A final barrier to pursuing racially-reconciling churches is that there are plenty of churches whose members are just trying to get by. Pastors have their hands full meeting the needs that already exist in their congregation. They may not feel that their communities and congregations will be better served by having a diverse church.

² Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 144

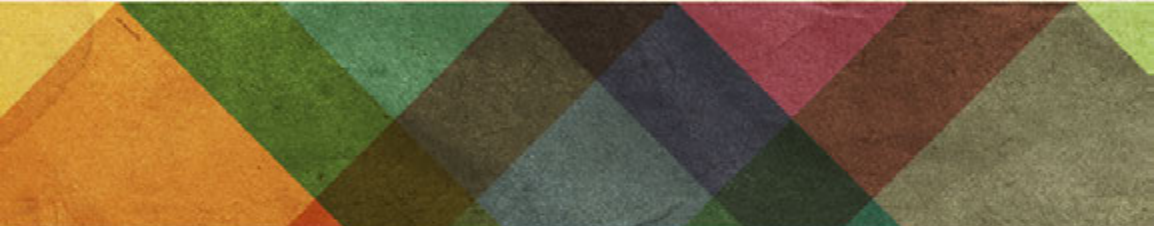
³ Chul Tim Chang, “Korean Ethnic Church Growth Phenomenon in the United States.” *American Academy of Religion*. Claremont, CA, 2006.

WILL
BECOMING A MULTI-ETHNIC
CHURCH
BENEFIT MY CONGREGATION?

Without a doubt, yes! Here are some of the benefits being in a multi-ethnic church provides:

We grow as Christ followers when we open our hearts to other perspectives - God is infinite and the cultural perspectives of every Christ follower have something to contribute to our understanding of him.

There is something missing when we have only homogeneous relationships in our churches. The New Testament church is many parts and one body. We are not complete without each other. (1 COR. 12)



Multi-ethnic congregations help address economic disparities. The study, **“RACE-SPECIFIC AGGLOMERATION ECONOMICS: SOCIAL DISTANCE AND THE BLACK - WHITE WAGE GAP.”** showed a key reason for blacks making much less was a lack of social networking. Building relationships across ethnic groups helps limit disparities.⁴

Members of multi-ethnic congregations are better equipped to fulfill the Great Commission. They learn to share together in the gospel across cultural distances and as a result can be effective in ministry outside of their cultural group.

**WHAT ARE SOME
KEY COMPONENTS OF CREATING
A HEALTHY
MULTI-ETHNIC / MULTICULTURAL
CHURCH?**

A great starting point is the seven core commitments of the healthy multi-ethnic church, as defined by Mark Deymaz in 2007. They are:

- 1. EMBRACE DEPENDENCE** - We must rely on God to build His multi-ethnic church.
- 2. TAKE INTENTIONAL STEPS** - The Vision must be set and communicated, then changes must be made to accommodate diverse others.
- 3. EMPOWER DIVERSE LEADERS** - Your church will never be diverse until diversity is on staff and visible.
- 4. DEVELOP CROSS - CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS** - Both leadership and the congregation must build relationship with those not like themselves.
- 5. PURSUE CROSS - CULTURAL COMPETENCE** - All should learn about other cultures to avoid offense in those newly forming relationships
- 6. PROMOTE A SPIRIT OF INCLUSION** - Leaders must pay attention to the little details that make others feel welcome (i.e. pulpit must be diverse every week).
- 7. MOBILIZE FOR IMPACT** - Move forward together as a unified church to build the Kingdom in your city.

These steps are not necessarily sequential, they are interdependent and continuous. But each one is necessary if you would build the multi-ethnic church.

One key to the above steps is that lead pastors move past the objection “**MY PEOPLE ARE NOT READY.**” Pastors must realize that their congregation will not push for the vision of diverse church independently. Recall as mentioned that congregants like church to be a happy, secure place for them. The impetus for change, especially uncomfortable change, must therefore come from pastoral leadership.

In other words, your people will continue not to be ready until you prepare them.

Also remember that it is critically important your staff and governing board (deacons, elders) be “**ALL-IN**” with this vision. Members who want to remain homogeneous must hear consistent message supporting diversity no matter where they turn.

**HAS ANYONE WRITTEN
ON “BEST PRACTICES”
IN THIS AREA**

There is an increasing amount of great research and writing on this topic. Here are the top 5 resources you should consider reading first to grow in your understanding.

DIVIDED BY FAITH

Sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith show how our separate churches are actually worsening racial division in other parts of American society.

THIS IS A MUST READ

BUILDING A HEALTHY MULTI-ETHNIC CHURCH.

Mark Deymaz details seven core commitments of the healthy multi-ethnic church and gives examples from the growth of Mosaic Church in Little Rock.

THE MULTI-ETHNIC CHRISTIAN LIFE PRIMER

This is an 8 week study designed with congregations in mind. It provides theological and relationship - building insights for those moving forward with diversifying churches. This study can be done individually, as a small group, and/or as a sermon series.

MANY COLORS

Soong-Chan Rah makes clear the need of the evangelical church to increase cultural intelligence. He makes an especially compelling case for the **"POWER OF LAMENT;"** the entire church mourning racial injustices jointly without guilt.

BRIDGING THE DIVERSITY GAP.

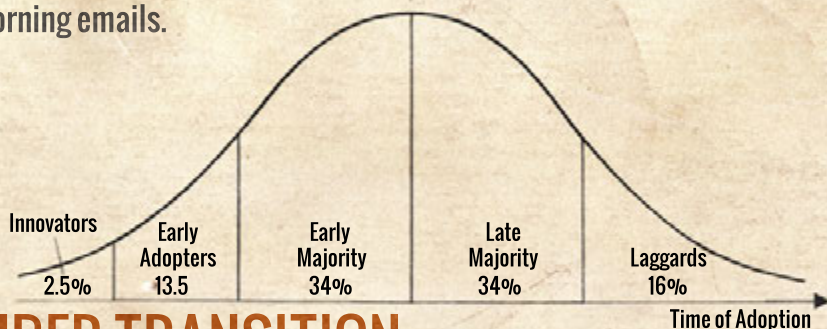
Alvin Sanders presents a **"HOW TO"** guide for ministry leaders looking to move forward with multi-ethnic churches and organizations

**WHAT CHALLENGES
WILL I FACE
IF I TRY
TO PURSUE THIS
VISION?**

No change is without challenges. Some challenges you may face are:

MISUNDERSTANDING:

Those who have not been taught the Biblical underpinnings of the multi-ethnic church may believe that a move towards inclusion is about **"POLITICAL CORRECTNESS"** or some other secular principle. They may also think that racial reconciliation is not a role of the church. Those who have difficulty with this must be lovingly brought along to understand that this too is part of the Gospel. Per the curve below, you can expect 50% of your congregation to either be highly skeptical (late majority) or downright resistant (laggards) to a vision of multi-ethnic church. Remember that when reading your Monday morning emails.



MEMBER TRANSITION:

Because accommodating diverse others will require some changes in the way you do church., there will likely be members who decide to fellowship elsewhere.

"TRANSITION" is the key here, rather than loss, because those who leave are likely to be replaced by those who are committed to the vision of multi-ethnic church.

LEADERSHIP STRESS

As a leader, you will be challenged each day to step out of your personal comfort zone to see through the eyes of those culturally different from you. Making all your attenders feel at home will become part of everything you do, from your messages, to the staff you hire, to the decorations you put up at Christmas. You will take on the burden of missionary in your home context. Your reward? The thrill of seeing God's Kingdom advanced in your community, across every division.

**SHOULD EVERYONE
PRUSE THIS
VISION?**

YES!

Based on reading the scriptures mentioned earlier, and others that support them, the biblical mandate is clear. The New Testament church is the multi-ethnic church.

As Christ-followers, we have been entrusted with the “**MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION.**” (1 COR 5:19) To reconcile ALL peoples to Christ, we must intentionally include ALL peoples in our local churches. If your church is homogeneous, there is almost certainly some group in your community you are passing by. To quote Christena Cleveland, a leading social psychologist in this area,

“I MEET PASTORS ALL THE TIME WHO INSIST THAT THEIR HOMOGENEOUS CHURCH SIMPLY REFLECTS THE HOMOGENEITY OF THEIR COMMUNITY. HOWEVER, WHEN THEY EXAMINE THEIR COMMUNITY’S CENSUS DATA, THEY DISCOVER THAT THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF DIVERSE PEOPLE ALL AROUND THEM.”

Nothing that Christ calls us to is easy, but if you pursue the multicultural church, you can be confident of God’s blessing on your efforts and your church:

HOW GOOD AND PLEASANT IT IS WHEN GOD’S PEOPLES LIVE TOGETHER IN UNITY!... FOR THERE THE LORD BESTOWS HIS BLESSING, EVEN LIFE FOREVERMORE.”

BE BLESSED

MULTI-ETHNIC CHURCH

A Church in which no more than 80% of its members (or attenders) are from one racial group.

MULTIRACIAL, MULTICULTURAL, MULTI-ETHNIC

These terms are used somewhat interchangeably, but they are not. Culture is an overarching term, relating similarities in worldview among a given group. Race is the grouping of peoples based on observable similarities in physical characteristics. (This is used as a sociological term even while affirming that there is only one race - the human race.) Ethnicity relates to similarities in cultural factors such as nationality, culture, ancestry, language, and beliefs. The bottom line is that we must work to do church across all of these barriers and socio-economic differences as well. All of these distinctions are of human origin. We cannot embrace them in our churches and fully embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ that tears down every dividing wall.

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES, PLEASE VISIT:

TRANSCENDCULTURE.COM - A consulting and organizational resource group dedicated to helping churches and Christian organizations reach across cultural and socio-economic divides.

MOSAIX.INFO - Founded in 2004 by Dr. Mark DeYmaz and Dr. George Yancy. Mosaix is a relational network of local church pastors and planters, researchers, educators and ministry leaders, alike, that exists to catalyze the growing movement to establish healthy multi-ethnic and economically diverse churches for the sake of the Gospel throughout North America and beyond

NOTES

The Cincy Mosaix group is aligned with the mission and vision of the Mosaix Global Network and several churches within Cincy Mosaix are members, but there is no formal affiliation per se. We consult with their leaders and encourage you to avail yourself of the many resources provided by that Network, which encourages "CITY COHORTS" such as ours.

To research the demographics of your church's area visit www.claritas.com/MyBestSegments/Default.jsp?ID=20

