



Multicultural Ministry

Find unity while celebrating diversity.

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Every Tribe, Tongue, and Nation

What I learned about kingdom worship.

by *Bonnie McMaken*

A few months ago I attended a multi-church worship service. Even though all the involved churches were part of the same denomination, the congregations looked vastly different. To help us value those distinctions, the leadership team asked each community to participate in unique ways. A deacon from a predominately Latino church read one of the Scripture passages in Spanish. Several women from a Nigerian congregation led a praise song featuring indigenous instruments. Throughout the service, each church shared their voice in a variety of ways.

As I worshipped with those around me, I realized, *This is a peek at what Heaven will be like. People from every tribe and tongue and nation gathered around the throne.* It was a poignant picture of the kingdom of God: it's here, we can see and touch it in glimpses, but it's also yet to come. We await its arrival in anticipation, but that shouldn't deter our efforts here on earth.

For many, multiethnic ministry doesn't seem like a reality God can show us here and now. Perhaps that's the case for you. Maybe you've seen efforts for racial reconciliation fail, or do more harm than good. Or maybe you've been personally hurt by a church who didn't seek this important ministry the way you needed.





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But perhaps that's not your story. Maybe you've seen multiethnic ministry thrive, and you chose this resource because you long for encouragement from others pursuing similar goals. Whatever the reason, I'm so glad you've come to Gifted for Leadership to learn more about this significant aspect of the gospel. This resource is full of insight and practical ideas from those who have sought diversity and reconciliation in their churches, ministries, workplaces, and personal relationships. I hope you are challenged by what they've learned.

Peace of Christ,

Bonnie McMaken

*Contributing Editor, Gifted For Leadership
Christianity Today International*

Introduction





THE HEART OF THE ISSUE

An Army of Ones

Does diversity in the church work?

an interview with Craig Keener, Larry Osborne, and Mark Driscoll

Martin Luther King Jr. said that 11:00 on Sunday morning is “the most segregated hour in America.” Not much has changed since King made that statement. But is this a bad thing? As America has grown more diverse, and not just racially, the church has responded by creating congregations to appeal to specific subcultures. We see not only black congregations and white congregations, but also boomer and postmodern, contemporary and classical, liturgical and spontaneous.

Some of this has been spurred by research that indicates homogeneous congregations grow more rapidly by appealing to a definable target audience. But even there, no congregation is completely homogenized; differences of opinion will show up in even the most niched congregations. Working through differences is usually what leads to maturity. The question remains—how diverse should we strive to be?

We asked three church leaders to explore the model presented in the New Testament and compare it to their own experience.

Craig Keener is a white minister in a predominantly African American congregation.





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Larry Osborne pastors North Coast Church—a ministry that pioneered the use of “video venues” to create multiple congregations distinguished by worship style within a single church.

Mark Driscoll is pastor of Mars Hill Church, a community birthed from a postmodern context now wrestling with issues of diversity as it matures.

Biblical diversity is worth sacrificing for

Craig Keener

If God called first-century believers to surmount an ethnic barrier that he himself established in salvation history—the barrier between Jew and Gentile—how much more does he summon us to surmount all other barriers of our own making? Overcoming the Jewish-Gentile barrier is one of the dominant themes in the New Testament, and it provides a model for us today for overcoming every other barrier dividing God’s people.

It begins with Jesus. He focused his mission on Israel, but welcomed both Samaritans and Gentiles. While Jesus ate with tax-gatherers and sinners, not all his followers wanted to eat with Gentiles! The Book of Acts emphasizes how the Spirit equips Jesus’ followers to cross these cultural barriers. The Jerusalem church’s biggest struggles involved not Christology or eschatology, but how to embrace fellowship with Gentile believers.

Paul spends the last quarter of Acts in Roman custody because he refuses to compromise the message of God’s love for Gentiles. He was charged with profaning the Temple by admitting an Ephesian Gentile. From custody he tells Ephesian Christians that God has shattered the Temple’s ethnic barrier (Eph. 2:14) and established a new temple of all peoples by the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22).

Likewise, Paul writes to an ethnically divided church in Rome and emphasizes that Jews and Gentiles must come to God on the same terms, through Christ. He also turns to the practical questions of not despising each other’s customs regarding foods and holy days (Rom. 14). In Galatians Paul challenges a segregated lunch counter. And in Revelation, we see a vision of the future that brings all peoples together.

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Ethnic reconciliation is central to the Christian message: if we are reconciled to God, we must be reconciled to one another. Given this emphasis, we dare not use data about “homogeneous” churches’ rapid growth to ignore biblical invitations to diversity.

How can diversity be implemented on a congregational level? Obviously not the same way in ethnically homogeneous areas (like rural Iowa) as in multiethnic urban neighborhoods.

The demands are clearer where members of an older white church commute into a neighborhood that is now largely populated by minorities. For a church in a white suburb, however, challenging injustices (like redlining) that keep their suburb homogeneously white, might need to be a prior step to integration.

When dominant-culture churches do pursue integration, they must allow the diverse cultures they have welcomed a voice in shaping a truly multicultural church. The early church recognized the value of allowing Jewish and Gentile Christians to retain their distinctive cultures (Acts 21:20-25; Rom. 14), so dominant cultures must be mindful to not swallow up minority ones. We should also intentionally partner with and listen to churches of other cultures.

But I believe the most effective way to integrate congregations requires sacrifice. For many years I have seen churches welcoming visitors of other races, but have been disappointed by the few Christians actually crossing barriers. Instead of simply inviting others to join our churches, more white Christians should be ready to take the initiative, relocate, join minority churches, and serve under their indigenous leadership.

In 1987, during the deepest crisis of my life, African American Christians embraced me, a white Christian. I discovered that their church knew how to deal with pain better than the white churches of which I’d been a part. In time I was ordained in a black Baptist church in North Carolina, taught in an African American seminary, and lived for a number of years in a neighborhood segregated only by my presence. Today, my seminary is half African American, and I am an associate minister at a 5,000-member black church.





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Integration is not going to become reality without intention and sacrifice.

Mark Driscoll's response:

The sacrificial attitude Craig calls for is in direct opposition to the consumer attitude many people have toward the church. He recognizes that believers are to, as Paul says, reflect the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:1-11). This means sacrificing our own desires, and putting the preferences and needs of others first.

I also appreciate Craig's warning that dominant-cultures not swallow up minority ones. Here Paul's wisdom from Romans 14 is most helpful. We need to respect the differences that exist among us, but it is the responsibility of those mature in Christ to be flexible and accommodating toward others. It is the combination of sacrifice and accommodation that allows diversity to flourish.

Larry Osborne's response:

I have no beef with those who decry an older white congregation commuting into a changing neighborhood rather than handing over leadership to those who now live there. Such an island of ethnic or cultural homogeneity is the antithesis of the Body of Christ, and does nothing to show the world that we are his disciples.

However, diversity is too often seen through just one lens—racial diversity. Many churches trumpeted as models of diversity are racially diverse but culturally homogeneous. They share a passion for urban values, a university mindset, or a bias for social activism. But those who don't share those same passions are not only excluded, they're often the object of negative comments or diatribes.

The great sign of biblical unity is not a heterogeneous gathering—it's a body of Christ where traditions, languages, preferences, and customs are allowed full bloom; where those who don't understand or enjoy what goes on in one setting still defend it as if it were their own, "because any friend of Jesus is a friend of mine!"

Homogeneity is the first step to diversity

Larry Osborne

Jesus gave his life to break down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile. His bride, the church, includes every tribe and every tongue. New Testament instructions command us to diligently maintain unity—both for the sake of pleasing him and drawing the lost.

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But is God's call for unity and diversity within the church at large to be mirrored in every local congregation? I think not. And for those who think so, how far do we push the value of diversity for diversity's sake?

If it's wrong for a congregation to be mostly homogeneous, is it also wrong for a particular service to be geared to and thus populated by like-minded and homogeneous worshipers? What about a youth ministry; a worship service in an old age home; an outreach in a different language? Must these be replaced by more diverse gatherings? No, they're a necessary starting place.

The New Testament's exhortation for unity is not a call for uniformity. On the contrary, our unity in Christ is most clearly seen (and most impressive to the world) when we value and support one another despite profound differences. And if these differences are not allowed to be in full bloom, how will they be seen and celebrated?

Much of the argument over the merits of homogeneous versus heterogeneous ministry is rooted in the assumption that homogeneity flows out of (or eventually produces) a segregated, divided body where love and genuine reconciliation don't happen. While that may be true of churches that were once intentionally divided by race, socio-economic status, or denominational conflicts, it's simply not true of many churches today.

Here at North Coast Church, we've used principles of homogeneity to greatly increase our diversity. Rather than asking everyone to gather for a blended service, we've emphasized and honored our differences by providing a wide variety of worship venues, each targeted at a specific homogeneous group. At present, our people can choose from 18 different worship options each weekend based on worship style, time slot, or location.

Since becoming one church with multiple styles, we've become far more heterogeneous than we were as one church attempting to blend everything together. What we had in the past was compromise. What we have today is diversity.

Those who choose to worship in "Traditions," our hymn-based worship venue, love the fact that we also have a worship venue called "The Edge"—as long as they don't have to suffer through the loud music and big subwoofer. They're supportive, and even fiercely

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protective, of their brothers and sisters who like it loud. The same goes for those who choose “The Edge.” They can often be seen giving a tour of our venues to guests, proudly showing off the diversity—but equally thrilled that they have a service where the timeless message can connect with the culture of their peers.

This attitude of mutual support and honor—without the need to sing one another’s songs—reflects the biblical norm of unity amid genuine diversity. To paraphrase the apostle Paul’s analogy, the foot is not saying to the hand, “We need to become a combo foot-hand.” It’s happy to be a hand and it’s glad to have a foot. And both are cared for and honored.

If homogeneity is used to intentionally keep some people out, it’s evil. But if used to empower and celebrate differences, while enabling us to reach more people with the gospel, it’s a pretty wonderful tool.

Mark Driscoll’s response:

Larry is focused on attracting lost people to the church. He correctly understands that many come into the church with the attitude of a consumer. Consequently, they may be unwilling or unable to place the needs and preferences of others above their own self-interest.

So, Larry advises churches to provide multiple congregations with a variety of worship styles. This allows differing groups of people to enter the church without sacrificing their preferences, and enables the church, as a whole but not at the sub-congregational level, to become increasingly diverse (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

But should we not also be wrestling with the implications of Romans 14-15? There Paul instructs Christians to demonstrate their maturity by becoming increasingly flexible and accommodating to those with weaker faith.

How do we move people beyond their own consumer driven self-interest into the Christ-like maturity that looks out for the interests of others? It seems part of maturing in our faith means learning to sacrifice our preferences; this may even include our worship preferences.

Craig Keener’s response:

Different settings require us to pursue ethnic reconciliation in different ways, depending on the cultures and respective histories involved.





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“Blended” congregations are valuable, but Larry offers another viable model for diversity by welcoming each culture to practice and preserve its own customs (Acts 21:20-25). As a white Christian in a black church, I can affirm that I appreciate the worship style of my church and wouldn’t want it “whitened”!

But beyond affirming one another’s differences, we also need to explore ways to learn from one another. We must keep Christians from different cultures in relationship with each other, and talking across cultural divides.

Perhaps this means visiting other services, sharing leaders, or inviting representatives from other cultures to communicate their vision and needs so we can work together (e.g., Acts 11:27-30).

Know the destination: a life of reconciliation

Mark Driscoll

I was recently late to my cousin’s funeral because I spent the better part of an hour lost in the woods driving around. I later realized that the directions were fine, but I had typed in the wrong address. Likewise, it is important for churches to not simply have good directions, but determine the correct destination. And, regarding diversity in the church there are really only two destinations: Babel or Pentecost.

Babel was the first human attempt at cultural uniformity—hanging out with people like me because I find myself so wonderful. Babel was a small city built to house a few people. This city was marked with walls to separate insiders from outsiders, thereby allowing them to resist diversity and avoid hospitality toward strangers. Instead, their aspiration was simply to gather together a homogeneous community to make their name great on the earth. God’s response to their project was judgment. He confused their languages, and thereby forced diversity upon them.

The way a church travels toward Babel is by asking, “How can we glorify ourselves by growing our ministry?” This desire leads to a false gospel that does not call me to love my neighbor and show hospitality toward those who are different from me. This gospel expects that I love only those who are like me and who share my same values and interests.





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Conversely, Pentecost is God's attempt at kingdom unity through diversity—hanging out with people unlike me because God has been gracious to us all.

Pentecost is not a city shaped by human hands to house a few, but the beginnings of a cosmic kingdom built to welcome people from every culture.

The way a church travels toward Pentecost is by asking, “How can we glorify Jesus by expanding his kingdom?” This desire leads to the true gospel that calls me to love my neighbors who are unlike me, and welcome them into Christ's church.

Therefore, the real issue is not will we pursue diversity, but will we follow the gospel of Jesus Christ? If we are following the gospel, diversity will occur as a result of the reconciliation accomplished in Jesus Christ. If we are not experiencing diversity, this may indicate we are lost in the woods following the directions of a false gospel of convenience and self-promotion.

At our church, true gospel diversity is something that has grown as the church has matured.

When we began, we were comprised primarily of college students and a few young couples. We had a handful of children, and no one with gray hair. Today, three of the fastest growing groups in the church are children, grandparents, and older couples.

More important, the young and old are learning to love one another and labor together to see the gospel move forward in our city. Our church is increasingly becoming a loving, multi-generational, and diverse Pentecost community, rather than a church of Babylonian affinity.

Larry Osborne's response:

Mark Driscoll is right. Homogeneity can be a tool for self-aggrandizement and evil if used to keep out or repel those who “aren't like us.” This is not only wrongheaded—it's sin. Acts makes that abundantly clear.

But to set aside or refuse to use a ministry tool simply because some have abused it would be a mistake. Imagine the apostles tabling signs and wonders because of Simon the Sorcerer's bastardization.

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Like any ministry tool, homogeneity can flow out of the flesh or out of the Spirit. When motivated by the Spirit, it can be a powerful tool to reach out to a specific mindset or demographic that would otherwise remain untouched. It embodies Paul's exhortation and example of becoming all things to all people that we might win some.

If it results in the lost coming to Christ, and Christians coming to a deeper maturity that includes appreciation, tolerance, and support of those who are socio-economically or culturally different, then bring it on.

Craig Keener's response:

Mark touches on a biblical crux in God's plan for our diversity. Whereas God confused the tongues at Babel to scatter the people, he multiplied tongues at Pentecost to unite us.

Here and elsewhere in Acts, God lavishly demonstrated that his Spirit is now empowering the church to cross all cultural and linguistic barriers. I know that some Christians fear the way some have abused multiculturalism, but Mark's contrast between Babel and Pentecost helps to remind us of the true source of our multicultural unity.

Revelation offers a pervasive contrast between the values of Babylon (the prostitute) and New Jerusalem (the bride). In Revelation we see members of all peoples and languages worship the beast, but we also see members of all peoples and languages worship the lamb.

Multiculturalism can be abused, but under the Lordship of humanity's rightful ruler, Jesus Christ, we can celebrate a true cultural diversity.

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Thought Provokers

- *“Ethnic reconciliation is central to the Christian message: if we are reconciled to God, we must be reconciled to one another.” Respond to this statement. How is this reflected or not reflected in your ministry?*
- *Do you find a tension between encouraging a culture to preserve its own customs and challenging people to think in new ways and appreciate new cultures? How has this article broadened your view of that delicate balance?*

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PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

Ethnic Blends?

How do you develop a racially diverse leadership team?
Are quotas the right recipe?

by Mark DeYmaz

In the spring of 2006, I received a call from the local NBC affiliate wanting to feature our church in a segment on people and institutions of faith making a difference in the lives of Arkansans. They wanted to describe the diversity of our church—a story of interest, in part, because we are located only three miles from Little Rock’s Central High School where, in 1957, nine black students (the Little Rock Nine) were denied entrance, despite a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court ordering the desegregation of public schools throughout the United States.

When I inquired into the producer’s interest in Mosaic, she said, “I want others to know that your church is not just diverse on the outside but diverse on the inside as well.” In other words, what had caught her attention was the fact that our leadership—indeed, our pulpit itself—is fully integrated.

The leadership at the church in Antioch (Acts 11:19—25; 13:1) serves as a model for enlisting diverse leadership within a local church setting. Luke was compelled, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, not only to mention the names of the men involved as prophets and teachers at Antioch, but their countries of origin as well.





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This made clear that the church, like the gospel itself, is for all people, and that a diverse team is best fit for leadership in a “house of prayer for all the nations.”

According to the Encarta World English Dictionary, quotas define “the number or quantity that is permitted or needed” within a given setting. In other words, those in positions of authority determine the limits as to who, what, and how much is needed. Of course, there is no place in the New Testament where racial quotas are prescribed, but that doesn’t mean diversity was not a high priority.

Recruiting with intentionality

We should not expect to integrate our leadership teams through random prayer or wishful thinking. Diverse individuals of godly character, theological agreement, and shared vision do not just arrive on waves of whim. Like the best of college coaches, multi-ethnic churches must continually be on the lookout for potential recruits. When we find them, we should establish a dialogue, mindful that there may be an opportunity for formal partnership together at some point in the future.

Intentionality is the middle ground between quotas and wishful thinking.

Years ago I was cautioned by an African American pastor of a large congregation in Little Rock that I should never presume to have achieved integration simply because diverse individuals were involved:

“Mark, if you hire or otherwise empower African Americans only to lead your church in worship, you may inadvertently suggest to people, ‘We accept them as entertainers.’ If you hire or otherwise empower African Americans only to work with your children, you may inadvertently suggest, ‘We accept them to nanny our kids.’ And if you hire or otherwise employ African Americans only as janitors, you are quite clearly stating, ‘We expect them to clean up after us.’ It is only when you allow us to share your pulpit, to serve with you on the elder board or alongside you in apportioning the money, that we will be truly one with you in church.”

With that in mind, we currently have a vacancy to fill in our pulpit and we are intentionally looking for an African American replacement.





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This decision is affected to some degree by the fact that we are located in the South. Because we desire at least three individuals to share the pulpit, we are also informed by the fact that my partner, Harry Li, is Chinese American and I am white.

At this time as well, a white woman and another white family are raising support to join our staff team. Once they do, our staff will consist of five whites (one who is deaf), three blacks, two Latinos, one Chinese American, and a woman from Antigua—a pretty healthy mix.

Another white man has also recently shown interest in joining our team. The balance of diversity can quickly shift if leaders are not intentional.

While quotas should in no way dictate the diversity of your staff, potential hires must be considered in light of both the current and future composition of the team. Saying yes to someone of a particular ethnicity or other valued descriptive (one who is deaf or blind, for example), may mean saying no to someone else like him or her later on.

Intentionality will safeguard the diversity of your staff, and therefore the credibility of your church, by ensuring that no one people group becomes so dominant in number as to undermine the vision.

Break the cycle of sameness

Of the 7 percent of churches that can be currently classified as multi-ethnic, a significant number are led by mono-ethnic staff teams. Although the diversity of these congregations is commendable, the challenge for such churches going forward is to recognize that more work needs to be done.

In one church I know, over 100 people were hired, over the course of eight years, to fill positions of leadership. But only two minorities were hired in ministry positions, and one in an administrative role. Yet this was a town that was nearly 40 percent black! Each time a new pastor was hired, the leaders would say, “We are pleased to announce that we have found the best man for the job.” He was always white and in many other ways reflective of core leadership.

When a position becomes available in most churches, leaders tend to contact those they know and trust for names of those they’d recommend for the job. The people we contact and those they recommend are, more often than not, people just like us in ethnic, economic, and educational background.





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Consequently, the people we know recommend people they know, and by the time résumés are submitted, interviews conducted, and decisions made, the new hire—”the best man for the job”—looks just like us. Indeed, we may have searched the country, but only through a limited field of contacts.

Those intent on building a healthy multi-ethnic church should develop relationships with people outside their own ethnic and economic background in order to break this cycle. Our intention to hire an African American speaker has meant connecting with other African American church leaders to express our desire. Without this network of relationships, the task would be much more difficult.

If you don’t have connections outside your own ethnic group, start by simply picking up the phone and introducing yourself to pastors and professors, ministry and business professionals alike. Of course, once the church is established and diversity takes root, the process of finding candidates becomes much less contrived.

Again, let me illustrate from our own experience at Mosaic.

Philip Lamar (white) was one of my former students. Responding to Christ as a senior in high school, he spent most of his college years actively pursuing ministry. A gifted evangelist with a heart for internationals, Philip soon began traveling to Guatemala to work with orphans; there he picked up Spanish as a second language. When he came back to Little Rock, I invited him to join me in planting Mosaic and to apply his passion, gifting, and experience in reaching out to Latinos living here. It was the summer of 2001.

Several years before, Philip had met Inés Velasquez (Nicaraguan) while visiting friends in Texas. He introduced her to me, and by November of 2001, she had also joined our emerging staff team. Inés, in turn, recently introduced me to a young woman named Jamna Abdullah, one of her best friends from Nicaragua. Jamna was in town visiting just prior to beginning seminary training in Guatemala.

During her stay, we began a dialogue that very well may lead to her involvement with us at some point in the future.

Diversity at a discount

Hiring a diverse staff isn’t the only way toward a multi-ethnic team. Even if there is no money to hire additional staff, diverse volunteers can be positioned for maximum impact.

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For example, the first call I placed in this regard was to Harold Nash, the African American leader of an inner-city ministry in North Little Rock. At that time, I invited him to join me in planting Mosaic and to share the pulpit. However, concluding that it was not God's will for him to leave his ministry at that time, Harold accepted the invitation as a volunteer.

In that capacity, he served alongside me for five years as a teaching pastor and for four years as an elder. Two of our initial worship leaders also served in the beginning as volunteers; one was black and the other was white. Rotating from week to week and, at times, singing together, their unity of mind, spirit, and purpose helped to model both an attitude and expectation that diverse leaders could and should serve side by side at Mosaic.

However, let me also provide you with a word of caution. If you are revitalizing or transforming an existing church, it is important not to move too quickly in adding or making changes to your leadership team. In other words, you do not want to split a church in the name of unity! Yet this may happen, for instance, if without any preparation at all, the (homogeneous) body is told one Sunday morning that you have hired someone quite different from yourself and them, who will, from now on, share the pulpit. It could happen if you too quickly enlist volunteer worship leaders to change the music in style and format, replace pictures of a white Jesus with those that depict him as Latino, or programmatically legislate the desegregation of midweek small groups or Sunday school classes.

Once again, although intentionality must govern the approach to the revitalization or transformation of a church, as well as its leadership team, so must wisdom be displayed through prayer, patience, and persistence.

Restrictive thinking related to roles and ethnicity is formulated by fear, ignorance, or outright racism. Sadly, many remain largely unaware of conditioning that has long shaped the American psyche and its effect on who we are or how we make decisions from day to day.

Indeed, the time has come to change our approach to staffing and commit ourselves to ethnically diverse leadership. Let's extend opportunities to various men and women of sound integrity, theological agreement, and shared vision and invite them to join us as partners in proclaiming the love of Christ in and through the local church. More than that, let us show the world through such diverse interaction just what that love looks like.

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Thought Provokers

- *What is the racial makeup of your leadership team, whether staff or volunteers? Do you think it's reflective of your community? How?*
- *Why is it important to dedicate yourself to diversity within Christian leadership teams? What message does it send to those you lead?*

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PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

One Lord, One Faith, Many Ethnicities

How to become a diverse organization and keep your sanity

forum with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship leaders

C*hristianity Today* convened key leaders in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship to talk with editor David Neff about how the organization became so multiethnic. Each participant personally knows the struggles and triumphs the organization has experienced in achieving this goal. Between them, they have nearly 90 years of campus ministry experience in IVCF: Phil Bowling–Dyer, national director of black campus ministries; Orlando Crespo, national director of Latino Fellowship; Jim Lundgren, director of collegiate ministries and vice president; and Jeanette Yep, vice president and director of multiethnic ministries.

What does it mean for an organization to be committed to multiethnicity?

Jim Lundgren: Here is the secret that took us decades to learn: we realized that this is really about changing ourselves as an organization, not about just having the right makeup of people present. My hope is that other organizations will move a little more quickly than ours did by recognizing from the beginning that the presence of minorities is only a small piece of the puzzle.

True multiethnicity is going to change your worship style. It's going to change how you make decisions and who makes decisions. Those





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from other cultures bring a different perspective about the way decisions are made. Some groups are more authoritative, other cultures are much more process-oriented. You're going to have to work out those differences.

Jeanette Yep: To really work, multiethnicity must be a value-driven commitment. We've made slow and steady progress, albeit with many steps backwards, because of our value-driven commitment to reach the campus in all its ethnic diversity. You must also be prepared for a long process, composed of small steps requiring faithfulness along the way. I think that's what wipes many people out.

Phil Bowling-Dyer: Organizations must first commit to regular prayer regarding multiethnicity. Multiethnicity is not just a trendy policy; it is the manifestation of a scriptural value that is countercultural. Those who commit to multiethnicity will be dealing with issues on different physical and spiritual levels, and they will need the power of the resurrected Jesus to bring things together.

What were the key, perhaps even controversial, steps you took that made multiethnicity a reality?

Yep: In the early '80s, I chaired a task force that proposed several organizational changes. One was to change our purpose statement, to be explicit about our desire to reach students of every ethnicity as we evangelized the campus. Second, we asked for a vice president of multiethnicity, who would report to the president and ride point on this issue. And then we asked for money. We asked for a portion of every dollar raised in InterVarsity by staff workers, which we called a "tithe," to be designated specifically to support multiethnic staff, because we knew funding was such a large barrier for them.

Our proposal was so fundamentally new for any Christian organization, and certainly new for InterVarsity, that we thought it would be rejected outright. But president Gordon MacDonald approved our proposal. And we just couldn't believe it.

Lundgren: Money is always a lightning rod, but the urban regional directors of IVCF told Gordon, "We've got to have it. This is really crucial." Some staff resisted, saying, "I'm not receiving my full salary, I haven't even been able to raise my whole support." Others questioned whether this was just a "politically correct" move on InterVarsity's part. And so we repeatedly asked, "Is this a biblical value? Or are we buying into the campus cultural pluralism?" For some people, it's taken several years of talking through those issues before they've come on board.





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But the majority was very supportive. In many parts of the country, staff went even further and taxed themselves again. For example, here in Chicago, in addition to their 1 percent “tithe,” staff members voted as a team to give another \$500 a year per person out of their own support.

Orlando Crespo: It is critical for organizations to not only say they are committed to multiethnicity, but to demonstrate that commitment through structural changes. Even if it’s just small baby steps, at some point an organization needs to make these changes, and even small changes can help to bring bigger changes later. So for us to have a vice president of multiethnicity starting in the 1980s, that step slowly brought on other significant changes later on.

What is the relationship between pursuing multiethnicity and pursuing racial reconciliation?

Lundgren: You can’t do multiethnicity unless you have a high value for reconciliation. You have to be willing as an organization to go back in your history and deal with areas where people have been hurt by the organization or by other people in the organization—white people on white people, black on black, whatever the case may be, and not just cross-ethnically but also within ethnic groups.

It’s so easy for an organization to say, “Let’s forget about the past and only look to the future, this stuff happened long ago and it doesn’t affect us now.” But it does affect you. And you either have a value as an organization to go back and work out hard relationships or you don’t, and if you don’t, you won’t move forward in racial reconciliation.

Yep: I once apologized to a Vietnamese student, although both of us were living here in this country, for the ethnic Chinese people’s exploitation of the Vietnamese in the mid-1970s. Although I wasn’t in Vietnam at the time of the atrocities, as a Chinese American, I’m part of the larger Chinese family and need to accept those collective sins as my own. This story was repeated by a speaker at the 1993 Urbana Missions Convention, and afterward, at a gathering of international students, the Japanese students bowed before the Korean student delegation and publicly asked forgiveness for wrongs done against Korea when it was colonized by Japan.

Though there will always be moments of hurt between and among people, by taking this path an organization will discover that the reconciling work of Christ can find full expression and open the door for true progress.





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Crespo: Reconciliation can only be done with the help of ethnic minorities. They can expose the subtle or not so subtle racism within an organization. And they must be in the middle of the deconstructing and restructuring of any organization moving toward greater multiethnicity. They cannot just serve as consultants who make recommendations from the margins for those who have the real power to bring change to the organization, who are typically white.

Bowling-Dyer: There will also be whites within an organization who understand the issues and whose input will be helpful, but organizations must make sure they hear the people of color first. This is one of the first signs that an organization is truly moving toward multiethnicity—they listen to the voices of those not like themselves.

Many organizations start on this path and then give up. Why?

Lundgren: One thing that keeps predominantly white Christian organizations from continuing in this process is that when they start succeeding they take a lot of flak. For a two- or three-year period it's really intense.

It comes from all sides. The people who loved what you were say, "Why are you changing? Why is what we loved and the reason we joined this organization disappearing?" Then when the people of other ethnicities start feeling at home in the organization, they start being honest with you about what's really hard about being with you. And so the person who is trying to lead this process says, "I've made everybody who used to love us hate us, and the people I've worked hard to bring in aren't saying 'thank you'; they're telling me everything we're doing wrong."

But if you persevere, listen to both sides, bring them together and keep them talking, there is a certain strength that comes from hanging with it. Eventually people say, "Okay, the leader is really serious about this. I'll trust him or her." It's not that all the criticism goes away, but it gets to a point where you can start having some successes and everybody can celebrate.

Bowling-Dyer: Pursuing multiethnicity requires that organizations truly risk. But they should do so and not be afraid of failure, because it is through failure, through confronting racist tendencies and prejudice then pushing and working through them, that they will come out on the other side.

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How do you know you've reached the end of the journey?

Crespo: To become a truly diverse community is a life-long process. The moment we think we have arrived is the moment we start moving backward and away from diversity. The very fabric of our diverse country means that someone, somewhere is being excluded at any given time. There are always newcomers we must embrace.

Yep: Being multiethnic is more meaningful than just being bicultural. It is also more difficult. It involves interacting with people of many different cultures. There are many expressions of Latino/Hispanic, Black/African American, and Asian American cultures, as well as many variations of white/European culture. You may be able to understand and embrace one culture that's different from your own. But embracing multiethnicity, although it is much harder, is also more reflective of the Kingdom.

Bowling-Dyer: It is a long-term discipleship process because it is not just about a change of values and policies; or just about a change of people's hearts and actions; or just about a change of the perceptions of others outside the organization. It requires changing *all* of these parts. Those who choose this way should be prepared for a long and arduous journey filled with arguments, misunderstandings, and painful change. The fruit of such a journey, however, can be truly incarnational evangelism that reaches new communities, broader biblical insights that propel an organization forward, and more diverse and better-equipped Christian leadership on all levels.

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Thought Provokers

- *“You can't do multiethnicity unless you have a high value for reconciliation.” Respond to this statement. What do you see as the difference between the two concepts (multiethnicity and reconciliation)? How do they work in harmony?*
- *How are the two aforementioned values (multiethnicity and reconciliation) at work in your organization or ministry? Where do you see room for development?*





ONE WOMAN'S STORY

An Unlikely Friendship



How two women transcended race and culture to become sisters in Christ.

by Janice Swinton

Some years ago, while on a short-term mission trip to China, I became the source of much amusement. During a visit to a McDonald's in Canton, a group of Chinese stopped to stare at me, chattering away in their native tongue while calling their friends over to take a closer look. They weren't rude, just curious. It was probably the first time they'd ever seen an African-American, so I wasn't offended.

Four years later, back in America, I had the same experience—and it's continued to this day. Because it's so rare for African-Americans and Chinese to be friends, people stare whenever my Chinese friend, Minli, and I are together. But we simply ignore the stares because we know God brought us together.

Minli and I first met at the University of Kansas. She came from Beijing, China, and I from Kansas City, Kansas. Neither of us was aware of the other. I moved into "Sunflower House," a student cooperative, and Minli lived with her mother. The following spring, when Minli's mother relocated for a job, Minli moved into Sunflower House.

The first time I saw Minli, I asked her to lunch. Even though we were total strangers, she accepted. Over a meal we shared about our lives, and I told her about my trip to China. Afterwards, we often ran into each other and chatted in the house.





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One Friday night, I spotted Minli on my way out to a Bible study, and she asked me where I was going. When I told her, she said she wanted to know more about God. I decided to skip the study and invited her to my room instead so we could talk.

Once in my room, I told her about my faith in Christ. I dug out a Chinese Bible I'd saved as a souvenir from my missions trip and gave it to her. She was amazed I had one—and I was amazed at God's purpose for my saving one!

After that conversation, Minli and I hit it off. We cooked, ate, and talked together. She prepared genuine Chinese meals such as Szechwan Beef and my favorite, Jiaozi Dumplings. I introduced her to sweet potato pie, and her favorites, greens and corn bread. Did our different cultures hinder our relationship? Not at all—they enhanced it!

I never felt led to push Minli into accepting Christ, but soon after we met, I invited her to a retreat for international students sponsored by my church. The special speaker was a Chinese Christian who had a distinguished career as a chemical engineer and chancellor of a major Chinese university. God knew Minli was career-minded, so he allowed her to see she could be both successful and a Christian without compromising being Chinese. Later, Minli also encountered another Chinese Christian, a successful female professor at Washington University, who exuded the gentleness and peace of a believer. These two events started Minli on the road to wanting what she saw in them and hadn't seen in other Chinese.

Several months later, Minli accepted Christ in the privacy of her room after reading her Bible. When she came over that evening to tell me of her decision, I prayed with her and encouraged her to confess openly that she believed in Jesus as her Lord and Savior.

With this, our relationship deepened. The Lord used me to help disciple her. Minli opened up about how women were treated in her native land and the opportunities they were denied because of their gender. As she told me about the subtle discrimination she faced as a minority in America, as an African-American female, I knew exactly where she was coming from. Minli also talked of the subtle racism she faced on campus because students and colleagues looked upon her as different because she was “Chinese.”





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As we prayed about these types of events together, Minli became not just my sister in Christ but my friend. I told her about the time I wanted to go to the Philippines to work with an indigenous ministry there, but the Caucasian missionaries told the Filipino pastor I shouldn't be allowed to come because I was "black." Then I told her about an incident on my missionary trip to China. When I shared my testimony in an evangelistic meeting, one of the Caucasian ministers made jokes about me "sliding backwards into the pulpit, dancing and twirling about as I shared," referring to the stereotype that black people use lots of theatrics when they preach. He later apologized.

But as I shared these experiences that had hurt me deeply, I also explained to Minli what I'd learned through them: how important it is to keep focused on God. These incidents—and others—could have turned me away from Christianity, but they didn't, because I'm learning to look to Jesus instead of others for my self-worth. Although Minli has faced a lot of pressure to reject Christianity from nonbelieving Chinese friends, she's always managed to bounce back. But it hasn't always been easy.

One of the things that helped us both in our university days was an international potluck/fellowship I hosted every Thursday night. It included Chinese, Korean, Malaysian, African, Filipino, and African-American student believers. We shared our food, faith, and culture.

Everyone seemed surprised at how an African-American woman could relate to these different cultures. At Minli's baptismal service, a Vietnamese Christian sister told me she was amazed at how the Asian students had bonded to me.

"Why should you be amazed?" I asked. "God's the creator of all cultures and races. If we're truly in Christ, we can relate to all cultures without exalting one over the other."

I truly believe God planned my friendship with Minli. He sent me to China to give me insight into her land, and even to save a Chinese Bible. He put in her heart a desire to know the God she couldn't freely explore in her homeland. He brought us both to the university in the same year and month to attend school. He placed me in Sunflower House and later brought her there. And he allowed Minli to become friends with an African-American woman who could relate to her situation, love her, and help lead her to the very best friend anyone can have—Jesus Christ.

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God doesn't do things the way the world does. Too often we're programmed to think we can't be friends with people of other races or people we consider "different." But as my friendship with Minli—now going on six years—has proved, God can arrange a friendship between what the world considers an unlikely pair, and use our individual cultures, experiences, strengths, and weaknesses to forge a relationship that's mutually supportive and strengthening. Minli and I have grown together in a friendship that's always transcended culture to touch the heart. It's a friendship we know is ordained of God.

Janice Swinton is editor of Sistahs, a magazine for African-American Christian women. She and her husband, James, live in Kansas. This article first appeared in the September/October 1996 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN. Copyright © 1996 by the author or Christianity Today International/ Today's Christian Woman magazine.

Thought Provokers

- *Have you ever avoided pursuing a friendship with someone just because the differences between the two of you (race, culture, or otherwise) were intimidating? How did you work through those fears?*
- *How can you, as a leader, open the doors of communication with others about racial reconciliation? What do those you lead need to hear and learn about pursuing relationships with those of a different culture?*

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BIBLICALLY SPEAKING

Racism vs. Gracism



Pastor David Anderson has a radical remedy for our nation's racial ills.

Interview by Edward Gilbreath

Recent headlines, like the Don Imus controversy or the Supreme Court ruling on school diversity, remind us that race is still a dividing point in our nation. In his new book, *Gracism: The Art of Inclusion*, David A. Anderson explains how a commitment to diversity and inclusion in the body of Christ can help us overcome our cultural divisions.

Anderson is the founding pastor of Bridgeway Community Church, a 2,000-member, multicultural congregation in Columbia, Maryland. His church's cultural and racial blend has made him a leading voice of racial reconciliation in the evangelical community.

Whether it's Don Imus, the immigration debate, or Barack Obama's presidential bid, it seems racial tension is still alive and well in our nation. What do some of these current events tell us about the condition of race relations?

The ongoing racial tensions we have in our nation show how we're still on the problem side and not on the solution side of the racial divide. It's important for us to get on the solution side, so we don't continue to respond to these controversies the same way, with the same voices saying the same things over and over again.





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“Gracism” is the answer to racism. When a Don Imus says the sort of things he said about women and African Americans, our normal response is to slap his hand, call him a racist, twist his arm to apologize, and then demand that he lose his job. That’s how we normally deal with the issue of race. But that response is still problem-centered. It’s still reactionary. How about practicing gracism instead?

What is “gracism”?

Gracism is the positive extension of favor to people, both in spite of and because of color, class, or culture. It’s not affirmative action but intentional actions of grace and affirmation. So whenever we see a racist act, instead of responding in a way that is punitive, gracism calls us to respond in the way that God—that Jesus— might respond.

How does gracism behave differently than racism?

Racism is to speak, think, or act negatively against someone else based solely on his or her color, class, or culture. Grace, on the other hand, is God’s unmerited favor extended to humankind. Something you can’t earn, you don’t deserve, and you can’t repay.

Gracism turns racism on its head. It reaches out to people in a way that desires true understanding. It means thinking positively about others, in spite of the labels and stereotypes that have been attached to their skin color, economic status, or cultural background.

Some folks might wonder, *What about justice?* Isn’t grace without justice a cheap grace?

Justice and repentance are important, but we must get first things first. True reconciliation begins with forgiveness. It doesn’t say, “First, you apologize and grovel, and then maybe I’ll forgive you.” We’ve not found the sociological or spiritual healing that we need in our world because we have not done this one important thing, and that is to forgive. Forgiveness begins the healing process.

When you think about it, God is the biggest gracist of us all. He was making the first step and extending grace when we were still in the midst of our sin and not even thinking about Him, and yet he wants to be in relationship with us and include us in His plans.





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So in practical terms, what will gracism look like in our churches, communities, and institutions?

It should look like the majority population, whoever that is, reaching out and into the minority population to serve, learn from, and partner together for common purposes. It should involve fellowship across racial and economic lines. It will play itself out through what I call “grace-onomics.” This is when knowledge, as well as relational and financial networks, is shared freely to help others succeed.

In the book, you talk about “The Seven Sayings of a Gracist.” How can they help us live out gracism?

The seven sayings grow out of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12 about the interdependence of Christ’s body and the special role each member plays. If we could cling to them, and not only say them but do them, they can give us practical principles for making gracism real.

For instance, the fifth saying is “I will stand with you,” and is based on Paul’s teaching about there being “no division” in the body (1 Cor. 12:25). If I’m in the majority culture or a position of power, what this means is, I have chosen to stand with those in the minority culture or with those who are in a weaker position of influence. So if a board of directors has ten people who are male and two who are female, and we’re about to make a major decision, the gracist in the room says, “How is this decision going to affect the women in our organization?” If I make a corporate decision to expand my company into an urban area, the gracist in the group might say, “What will this mean for the people who live in that neighborhood?” See, it’s standing with people and considering people before you make the final decision.

There have been other Christian books and movements that have preached a message of racial unity and reconciliation. Promise Keepers, among others, led the way in the 1990s. Then the thrill began to fade. How do you envision gracism being worked out in our churches in a way that lasts beyond the hugs and apologies and feel-good declarations?

By teaching gracism, you’re not just teaching white people to be kind to blacks, or black people to be kind to whites. You’re creating a culture where everyone is thinking all the time, “How can I be one who includes? How can I be one who lifts others up?” And so, what you’re teaching is Scripture—it’s the theology of Jesus.





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Bridgeway is very multicultural. How did you achieve such diversity in your congregation?

We teach on it and we preach on it every chance we get. But we also live it out in our church and small groups by including different kinds of people on our staff and in leadership roles. We celebrate multicultural unity by featuring a variety of musical styles in our worship and hosting international dinners for the congregation. Ultimately, it requires a commitment to intentionality.

Bridgeway was planted as a multiethnic church, but any church can develop a heart of gracism and inclusion. If you are a mostly white church and you realize you have Latinos and African Americans and Asians in your community but they're not coming to your church, the gracist church leader and layperson say, "Why not?" It should bother them.

The racial reconciliation message tends to emphasize whites reaching out to other races. But it works the other way as well.

Absolutely. Reconciliation is a two-way street. If a white person visits an all-black church, the gracist in the room will say, "I have the responsibility to reach out and welcome that white person."

But it's also important to understand that gracism is bigger than race. We can show gracism to anyone who is on the fringes and needs to be invited back into our communities. A community of gracists will always be thinking about how they can reach out and show favor to those on the fringes, whether it's the homeless, the disabled, the divorced, or the ex-convict.

How did you develop your passion for gracism?

Gracism is really a crystallization of a vision that started when I became a Christian at 18. It was one of those Damascus Road experiences, where I immediately knew what God wanted me to do for the rest of my life. I knew I was called to be a pastor, but I also knew that I wasn't being called to minister to just one portion of the church. I wanted to build bridges of reconciliation so I could bring my friends who were white and Asian and Hispanic to the same church.

Did you grow up in a multicultural church?

No. I grew up in a black church, and I thank God for that heritage. But as a young Christian, it felt limiting. I was reaching out to people of all races, trying to lead them to Christ. But I didn't have a church to bring





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them to where they could feel at home. I realized that most of the churches around us were either all black or all white. So I felt a burden to do something about that. As a kid, I had several racial experiences that shaped me and prepared me for where I am today.

Tell us about one of those experiences.

When I was 12, there was a white kid on the school bus who used to always call me the n-word. I tolerated it for a while, but one day I lost it and beat the guy up. I took my time walking home from the bus stop that afternoon.

When I got home an hour later, my mom confronted me at the front door. The boy had come to the house and told her that I bloodied his nose.

I pleaded my case with my mom, and told her he had called me the n-word. I thought she'd take my side. Instead, she told me, "David, that's not how we act as Christians. When someone hurts us, we do not try to hurt them back." Then she said, "You need to turn around, walk to that boy's house, and apologize to him and his mother." I couldn't believe it! But that experience sowed the seed in my life that you don't respond to hatred or injustice in the way your flesh wants you to.

How can we keep the call of gracism in front of us?

We have to figure out for ourselves what it means to be a gracist in our daily lives. Once you internalize it, you'll know what to do when the opportunity hits.

In the book, I share an e-mail that I received from a white woman who had been listening to me teach about gracism for a long time. She talks about how she was standing in line to board a Southwest Airlines flight.

Southwest seats are unassigned, so passengers line up in groups of A, B, and C to board the plane. As this woman was standing with her group, she saw a Mexican family of five trying to butt their way into line. They spoke only Spanish, and they didn't seem to know where they should stand. All the other passengers repeatedly blocked the family from getting in and gestured them to go to the back of the line. But the family was confused.





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At this point, the woman began to wrestle with the Holy Spirit, as God brought to her mind the message of gracism. She felt like all the other passengers; she didn't want this family cutting into the line. But once the Spirit spoke, her heart began to soften. She waved to the family to get in front of her. When they got into the line, she said she looked at the Mexican mother and saw tears in her eyes. She was so grateful. The woman who wrote me the e-mail said she was ashamed that it had taken her so long to do the right thing. She eventually figured out that gracism was calling her to reach out to this family.

Like this woman, we all have opportunities to be gracists. Whether it's helping people from a different country or responding in love to some hateful remark, we are called to act the way Christ acted.

Edward Gilbreath is the author of Reconciliation Blues: A Black Evangelical's Inside View of White Christianity. This article first appeared in the September/October 2007 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN. Copyright © 2007 by the author or Christianity Today International/TODAY'S CHRISTIAN magazine.

Thought Provokers

- *Think of the woman in the Southwest line—have you ever had an experience like that? How did you respond? How could you incorporate gracism into your response in the future when you encounter a similar situation?*
- *Bridgeway Community Church is intentional about celebrating their multiculturalism in tangible and distinct ways. How do you honor the diversity within your ministry or organization? How can you do this more?*

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LEADERSHIP ISSUES

The Many Faces of Friendship

3 sets of diverse friends open up about the joys and challenges of bonding.

by LaTonya Taylor

As an African American who's spent the majority of my life in predominately white settings, I find most of my friendships are cross-cultural. While I've connected with several friends over life issues like singleness, hobbies like shopping, or shared career goals, I can only think of two or three current friendships where the mutual give-and-take includes honest discussions about race and culture. Sometimes that's simply because the friendship is just a light one. Other times, I'm just not up for the risk of shaking things up by sharing my real thoughts.

Here are the stories of six women who've found ways to develop cross-cultural friendships that include such openness. Some took dramatic, intentional steps to find friends of another culture, while others discovered relationships as close as their neighborhood. All agree that these friendships enrich their lives, their faith journeys, and their worldview.

**Amy and Gabriela:
Accept What Each Has to Offer**

"Is Miss Gabi your maid?" the little girl asked Amy Calkin, gesturing toward Gabriela Cantu. Amy and Gabriela were teachers at a small



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Christian school in a predominately Hispanic neighborhood on the west side of Chicago. A young student and her mother had stopped by the apartment Amy and Gabriela shared not far from the campus.

The girl knew Gabriela, 41, was her school's principal. So her question stunned the women into uncomfortable laughter.

"I was saddened because her question revealed how she thought white and Mexican people interacted," says Amy, also 41. "She didn't realize Gabriela and I might be friends."

The two met in 1986 and bonded as first-year teachers. As their friendship grew, they hung out outside of work, taking road trips, working out together, and eventually becoming roommates.

Their friendship developed easily, they say, because each had previous cross-cultural friendships—Amy as an Army brat who moved often, and Gabriela during college.

As a result, their friendship is one that includes as many insights about faith and life as it does about race and culture. For Gabriela, Amy's friendship provided an ongoing example of how to take risks.

"There's a saying: 'Dime con quién andas, y te diré quién eres,'" Gabriela says. "'Tell me who you hang out with, and I'll tell you who you are.' Amy's willingness to make this neighborhood hers has been an example to me of how God can use you even when you're outside your comfort zone."

Amy's support and example gave Gabriela the strength to move out of her comfort zone—eventually leaving the school and applying to graduate school. "I don't like change," Gabriela says. "But seeing how Amy's adapted helped me to move when I felt God calling me in a different direction."

For Amy, Gabriela's friendship became a new comfort zone as she figured out how to be herself in her new neighborhood. Amy immersed herself in the community, joined a neighborhood church, tried new foods, and spoke Spanish when she could—which led to a problem she hadn't anticipated.

"I'd adapted so well to the community, people would say, 'Amy, you're not white. You're Puerto Rican!'" she says. "At first, I was relieved I didn't stick out. But gradually I became uncomfortable. I'd rather they

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said, ‘We haven’t met too many white people we can be ourselves with, and we appreciate that about you.’”

Those comments triggered what Amy calls a “slow dawning” of personal and spiritual growth rooted in her experiences in her neighborhood. “I realized that although I was called to this community, I didn’t need to change who I was to follow God’s will for me there. I didn’t need to be ashamed of being white, of having more education, or of being raised with different cultural values or political views,” Amy says. “I’m aware of the differences I have with many people in my community, but I’m not threatened by them. As I processed those things, Gabi was safe to talk to. I could relax with her.”

Although their lives have changed significantly since their early days together—neither woman works at the school anymore, and Gabriela has married and lives in another neighborhood—their friendship has been a constant.

“Our friendship has lasted because we each have something to offer the other,” Gabriela says. “We’ve shared our worlds in a reciprocal way just by being ourselves.”

Diane and Natalie: Listen to God—and Your Friend

Diane Foster and her sons sat at their kitchen table, reading a U.S. history book as part of their homeschooling curriculum.

They came to a section describing the Trail of Tears—the devastating government-forced exodus of more than 15,000 Cherokee Indians from their land in the southeastern U.S. to present-day Oklahoma. Then Diane’s four-year-old asked a life-changing question.

“Mommy, why did we do that?” he asked. “If I met a Native American, I would say ‘I’m sorry.’”

“God’s Spirit spoke to me through that,” says Diane, 51. She felt a burden for reconciliation with Native Americans. When she shared her concern with her pastors, they commissioned her to build relationships with Native Americans on behalf of their Maryland church.

After several months of searching, Diane found the American Indian Cultural Center and was elated when Natalie Proctor answered the





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phone. She invited Natalie and her tribe, the Piscataway, to visit her church and share their culture with its members.

Natalie, 44, was cautious. “Many Native Americans have had terrible experiences with white people and with Christians,” she says. In her case, she was forced to sit in the back of her church growing up and could only receive Communion after white members. Mainstream organizations that invite her to share the Piscataway history often have a more welcoming atmosphere than churches where members frequently respond defensively or with suspicious questions. As the tribal leader of the Piscataway, Natalie didn’t want to expose her tribe to a potentially hurtful situation.

When Natalie explained her misgivings, she was encouraged by Diane’s response. “Diane listened and then prayed about how to comfort Piscataway people,” Natalie says. “She never once said, ‘You people need to get over it.’ Instead, she asked God how to show us that there are people who really want to get to know who we are and what God has given us.”

Diane credits that patient response to God’s work in her life. “God was leading me to books and videos that taught me about the history of Native relationships with non-Native people, especially in the church. God gave me a sense of caution and holy fear, because I understood why it was so important to listen rather than speak. And I realized Natalie needed to see action, not just hear words.”

As a result of that conversation, Diane and Natalie agreed to have a church group meet with members of the Piscataway. After that contact, the Piscataway agreed to share their history and culture at the church’s international night.

Natalie assumed that would be the end of her relationship with Diane. Instead, it was the beginning of a friendship that intentionally focused on healing the rift between Native and white Americans. “We’ve seen God’s love through each other, and that’s helped us both,” Diane says. “Our relationship is a small part of the big picture of what God calls us to do—to move beyond reconciliation into relationship.”

Their friendship—and the ministry they have speaking about it at different churches—also challenged Natalie to hear God’s voice. “I wanted to do whatever God had for me to do—with a Native woman,” Natalie says. “When God coupled me with Diane, I

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struggled with the fact she wasn't 'my people.' But God told me, *She is your people, because I'm not about color. I'm about those who believe in me. It's not God's heart for us to be apart.*"

Jen and Sheron: Risk Being Real

It's been a few years since Jen Lemen and Sheron Burgess were neighbors. Today, Jen lives in Takoma Park, Maryland, and Sheron lives in Miami, where they met. But each woman knows that whether it's by phone or over e-mail, they can pick up where their last conversation left off.

"We catch each other up, but we don't have to warm each other up," says Jen, 36. "That's how you know you have a best friend."

Their friendship took off six years ago after the births of Jen's daughter and Sheron's son. One day, as they pushed their strollers along the path at a local park, Jen mentioned the pressure she felt to lose her baby weight. As the conversation turned toward body image, Sheron decided to be honest about her experiences.

"I said bluntly, 'You know, black women don't place the same value on slimness. I don't,'" Sheron recalls.

What seemed like a surface comment about a casual matter was actually a brave step for Jamaican-born Sheron, 39. It was one of the first times she'd talked openly about cultural differences with a white friend.

"Jen and I had been spending lots of time together, and I knew she wanted a genuine friendship," Sheron says. "That meant I needed to let my hair down and share that I defined myself very differently from the way she defined herself."

That conversation opened the door for Sheron and Jen to talk about other ways their diverse backgrounds shaped their lives. Over the next few years, many of Jen and Sheron's casual conversations included such honest exchanges.

Sheron wondered if her directness would end her fledgling friendship with Jen, but Jen says she saw Sheron's gently offered frankness as a gift. "I care deeply about being real with people, and talking about the things that divide people of different races," Jen says. "It's hard to





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The Many Faces of Friendship

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know what those things are unless you have a friend who's willing to tell you."

Specifically, Jen says, Sheron's openness caused her to rethink the meaning of racial reconciliation. "Sheron helped me understand that bridging racial barriers is more than thinking that if white people would just be nice to black people, and black people would just forgive white people, then we'd all be friends," Jen says. "Our talks have given me a deeper curiosity about other reasons cross-cultural encounters don't always pan out."

Both women say their friendship works because more universal experiences form its backbone. Most of the time, they talk about the ups and downs of marriage and life with young children. They also share an interest in philosophy: Sheron as a doctoral candidate completing her philosophy dissertation, and Jen as an online community organizer in the Emergent church.

Although honesty's an important part of a genuine cross-cultural relationship, Sheron says, it's best to have a clear sense of a potential friend's motives and commitment.

"I don't think you should take that kind of risk with just anybody—it's not fair to you," Sheron says. "But if someone is earnest about being your friend, you can put your feelers out gradually. In our case, speaking honestly was worth the risk."

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Thought Provoker

- *Have you ever felt a burden for reconciliation with a certain people group? Why do you think the Lord calls us to continue the work of reconciliation Christ began and will finish? Where can this idea be found in Scripture?—One woman (Amy) describes her experience of discovering her own cultural identity in the midst of another culture. Why is it significant we understand ourselves while intentionally celebrating differences in others?*





LEADERSHIP TOOLS

Building Multicultural Understanding

3 steps to racial reconciliation.

by *William Fraher Abernathy*

The cry for racial justice was not heard during my youth in Virginia. Where I lived, the population was close to 50 percent black. We engaged in the typical segregationist practices of that day in our schools, theaters, and neighborhoods.

Not until much later did I realize God was working on my heart concerning the race issue. Eventually I felt called to multiracial ministry, where I came to a new appreciation of the sovereignty of God as celebrated in black congregations.

My convictions turned to action as my wife and I became the first white members of a local black church. Here's what we learned:

1. **Develop relationships.** Healthy cross-cultural ministry comes about through developing relationships. Those relationships can only come about with the passage of time and with time spent together.

Relationships across racial lines must be based on understanding and empathy. Guilt and pity are the worst possible grounds for such relationships. Go in humility, be willing to learn, earn trust, give it time—and relationships will develop.





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Building Multicultural Understanding

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2. **Avoid taking charge.** The dominant culture has to avoid taking charge. Whites especially are prone to doing that. We also must avoid the perception that we are going in to help. Rather, we should understand how we can be helped by our ethnic brothers and sisters.
3. **Genuinely appreciate other cultures.** Whites must come to genuinely appreciate other church traditions and expressions of worship and ministry. The white way is not always the right way.

Early on I realized I needed to develop an understanding and appreciation for African-American history and culture. One way I did this was to read books like *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, or the biography of the late Medgar Evers by his wife, Myrlie, or the writings of evangelicals like Tom Skinner and John Perkins.

As Christ's ambassadors, we must be faithful to expose racial insensitivity and disrespect when we see it; to challenge racial stereotyping in conversations, in jokes, and in sermon illustrations; to speak against racial injustice wherever we find it; and to take action to make racial reconciliation a reality whenever possible.

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Thought Provokers

- *In your church, are you part of the dominant culture or are you among the minority? What unique challenges accompany being a part of this group?*
- *What specific cultures are present in your ministry, church, organization, or community? How can you appreciate the differences between your culture and others? In what ways can you help those you lead see and value the distinctness around them?*





Additional Resources

More places for more help.

The Church Enslaved: A Spirituality for Racial Reconciliation,

by Tony Compolo and Michael Battle (Augsburg Fortress, 2005).

Two of the most vocal activists on racial issues in the church seek nothing less than a conversion of American Christianity. To achieve reconciliation within and among the denominations, they argue, both the black and the white church need to acknowledge and overcome substantial problems in their traditions. The authors provide a blueprint for how racially-reconciled churches can encourage activism in the cities, church involvement in politics, and responsible use of the Bible, ultimately helping to transform American society itself.

Church Unity Myths, a downloadable resource from

ChristianBibleStudies.com. What draws believers together? What drives them apart? James Edwards contends that unity is not based on sentiment, and that many attempts to bring unity to the church are misplaced experiments in sociology. In the book of Acts, Edwards finds a better basis for bringing believers together.

Enter the River: Healing Steps from White Privilege Toward Racial Reconciliation,

by Jody Shearer (Herald Press, 1994). Shearer explores definitions of prejudice and racism, the different effects of racism on white persons and people of color, affirmative action, and many other issues. The accessible presentation provides a strong foundation for study and action.





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Additional Resources

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Gracism: The Art of Inclusion, by David A. Anderson (IVP books, 2007). Pastor David Anderson responds to prejudice and injustice with the principle of gracism: radical inclusion for the marginalized and excluded. Building on the apostle Paul's exhortations in 1 Corinthians 12 to honor the weaker member, Anderson presents a biblical model for showing special grace to others on the basis of ethnicity, class or other social distinction. He offers seven sayings of the gracist with practical examples for building bridges and including others.

Multiracial Congregations, a downloadable resource from ChristianBibleStudies.com. This study takes a look at the cultural history and diversity of the New Testament church as Christians seek to integrate all peoples and nations into the church of Jesus Christ. How would true integration affect the life of the church as a whole if we dared to take the challenge? Are we truly prepared for what would come next? These are some of the questions discussed in this Bible study, as it explores how four pastors from the Latino, Asian, black, and white communities respond to the book, *United by Faith*, that calls for pursuing multiracial churches as the biblical pattern.

Teaching Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Learning and Teaching, by Judith E. Lingenfelter and Sherwood G. Lingenfelter (Baker, 2003). This book guides readers with little understanding of cross-cultural challenges in ministry and helps them see how cultural sensitivity and effective teaching are inseparably linked. Chapters include discussions about how to uncover cultural biases, how to address intelligence and learning styles, and teaching for biblical transformation. It is ideal for the western-trained educator who plans to work in a non-western setting. Missionaries, "tentmakers", and those who teach in an increasingly multicultural North America will find this book helpful.

Unity in Diversity, a downloadable resource from BuildingChurchLeaders.com. The church will always face diversity. This theme shows how to blend all these differences into one joyful family of God. The articles in this theme welcome people of different family structures, economic conditions, ages, races, educations, and religious backgrounds.





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