



Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church by Mark DeYmaz

The Mosaic Church of Central Arkansas gathers each week in 78,000 square feet of space that originally housed a Wal-Mart. The large glass front features two entrances and many windows. Just west of us is the nearest neighborhood; to the immediate east, a Kroger grocery store stands adjacent to the building. As people from the community pass by the church on their way to and from the store, it is not uncommon for them to put their hands to the glass, press their faces to the window, and look to see what's inside.

One Sunday morning, not long after we began meeting in this location, one African American woman did just that. She had been invited to come by two women from our church whom she had met at the Kroger. The women had encouraged her to come worship at Mosaic, learning that she had no other church to attend.

Before entering the building, then, she pressed her face to the glass and looked inside. And what she saw encouraged her to take another step forward.

Later, after this woman had become a member of Mosaic, she described her experience that day. When she saw the diversity of the people, specifically Blacks and Whites worshipping together as one, she understood intuitively that all people were welcome at Mosaic and loved by the God we were all singing and talking about.

Similarly, if we could strip away everything we know about God's love for all people and transport ourselves back to a time when the world thought YHWH (the LORD) was simply "the God of the Jews," perhaps we would better understand how a Gentile peering into an all-Jewish congregation might never have gone inside. In fact, if we had lived in those days, we would have seen, like Paul, that Gentiles living in the first century "were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12).

Fast-forward to the present day. Does a homogeneous church unnecessarily confuse the message of God's love for all people in a similar way? Will such a church, therefore, become increasingly cumbersome to the advance and proclamation of the Gospel in this century?

Why Is the Local Church Segregated?

According to research conducted by sociologists Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, 92.5 percent of Catholic and Protestant churches throughout the United States can be classified as "monoracial." This term describes a church in



Lewis Center
for Church Leadership

Leading Ideas

December 3, 2008

which 80 percent or more of the individuals who attend are of the same ethnicity or race. The remaining churches (7.5 percent) can be described as multiracial—churches in which there are a non-majority, collective population of at least 20 percent. By this definition, approximately 12 percent of Catholic churches, just less than 5 percent of Evangelical churches, and about 2.5 percent of mainline Protestant churches can be described as multiracial.

So, again, let me ask you a question: *If the kingdom of heaven is not segregated, why on earth is the Church?*

Surely, it must break the heart of God to see so many churches throughout this country segregated ethnically and economically from one another and that little has changed since it was first observed that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in the land. In an increasingly connected yet stubbornly sectarian world, it is time to recognize that there is no greater tool for evangelism than the witness of diverse believers walking, working, and worshipping God together as one in and through the local church. More than that, I believe the very progress of the Gospel throughout the twenty-first century will be largely dependent upon this pursuit.

What though, you may ask, is the basis for such passion and hope? And why am I (and increasing numbers like me) so sure that in reflecting the diversity of heaven, the local church will newly proclaim the Prince of Peace on earth in reformation and power, resulting in the salvation of significant numbers of seekers and skeptics alike to the glory of God? Is this a realistic goal or only the wishful thinking of mystics and mavericks among us? Indeed, I believe it is not only a realistic goal but it is the very prayer and intent of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for the local church. This, then, should inspire our faith, courage, and sacrificial abandonment to the cause.

Mark DeYmaz (mark@mosaicchurch.net) is pastor of the Mosaic Church of Central Arkansas and author of *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church* (Jossey-Bass, 2007) from which this excerpt is taken. © 2007 Mark DeYmaz. Used by permission.