

Christians urged to ‘grow up,’ celebrate differences

October 26, 2012

ARLINGTON—Churches must respond to changing demographic realities, or the world will pass them by, Michael Evans, president of the [African-American Fellowship of Texas](#), told a cross-cultural crowd in Arlington.



Marcelo Cavazos (left), interim superintendent of the Arlington Independent School District, and Andy Mangum, pastor of First Christian Church in Arlington, participated in a panel discussion at First Baptist Church in Arlington.

"The racial and ethnic foundation stones are shifting beneath us, and the church is falling behind," said Evans, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Mansfield.

Evans spoke on "Working Across Ethnic and Racial Lines" during an event at First Baptist Church in Arlington, sponsored by the Baylor University [Center for Ministry Effectiveness and Educational Leadership](#).

"The faces of our communities have changed," he said, noting 300 identifiable ethnic groups in Texas. In his own community, the Mansfield Independent School District student population was 70 percent Anglo in 2000. Currently, Anglos make up 44 percent of the students.

Rather than majoring on racial, ethnic and cultural differences, Christians should emphasize their shared commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ, he insisted.

"We are missing the bigger picture. We are the minority now—not as African-Americans but as Christians," Evans said. He pointed to a recent study that reported the number of American adults who consider themselves Protestants stands at less than 50 percent of the population for the first time in United States history.

Christians across racial and ethnic lines should "share a common concern for the rapidly decaying state of our society," he insisted.



Michael Evans,
president of the
African-American
Fellowship of Texas
and pastor of
Bethlehem Baptist
Church in Mansfield,
challenged Christians
to work across ethnic
and racial lines.

But in order to work together, Christians from varied backgrounds need to "grow up" and move beyond feelings of discomfort around those who are different, he insisted.

"We need to respect each other as authentic Christians," Evans said, recognizing cultural differences reflect the struggles people have experienced together, and they should be honored.

"People have their own story. Every church has its own story. Respect their story. Respect their heritage," he said. "Understand the importance of context."

Mature relationships are built "on common ground—not paternalism or

maternalism, and not with the idea we are going to fix how a fellow Christian does something."

Christians should learn to celebrate their diversity while rallying around their common mission and shared mandate, he said.

"We have different gifts. We do not all need to worship the same way. We do need to be consistent in our message," Evans said.

[Joel Gregory](#), professor of preaching at Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary, pointed to Jesus' prayer for unity recorded in the 17th chapter of John's Gospel. When Jesus prayed for unity for his followers, he had in mind people of all races and nationalities, Gregory insisted.

"We are all spiritual descendants of the 11 in the upper room, plus the Apostle Paul," he said. "We all belong to the same spiritual family. We have a shared spiritual ancestry. This is not a peripheral issue or marginal concern."

The conference also included a panel discussion that involved Marcelo Cavazos, interim superintendent of the Arlington Independent School District; Michael Glaspie, a city councilman and minister of education at [Mount Olive Baptist Church in Arlington](#); and Andy Mangum, pastor of [First Christian Church in Arlington](#). David Mosser, pastor of [First United Methodist Church in Arlington](#), facilitated the discussion.

For Christians, unity begins with confession and repentance of sin and with a heart of humility, Mangum insisted.

"We must learn to respect our own faith tradition in such a way that we see it as a gift to the world, not a blunt instrument to be used against the world," he said. "We become agents of peace when we take on the mind of Christ."