

Multicultural ministry crosses barriers of gender, race and class

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DALLAS—Just as Christ demonstrated a passion for reaching all people, his church should have the same mission, author and pastor Mark DeYmaz told a gathering of pastors at a meeting sponsored by the [Dallas Baptist Association](#).

DeYmaz from [Mosaic Church in Little Rock, Ark.](#), has written two books on the subject of building and sustaining multicultural churches—[Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church](#) and [Ethnic Blends](#).



Jesus is not the only New Testament figure who ministered to people across ethnic barriers, DeYmaz noted. Reaching out to Gentiles was the signature feature of the Apostle Paul's ministry.

Regardless of his audience, Paul's message always focused on "the gospel and Gentile inclusion," DeYmaz said.

Having a multicultural church is about more than the color of the faces in the pews, however, he said.

"When I say 'multiethnic,' I also mean economic diversity. In Paul, there are three big barriers—gender, race and class," DeYmaz said.

While there still is room for improvement in gender equality within the church, the areas of race and economics are where even greater work

remains to be done, he said.

Even if a church is in a community where 95 percent of the population is the same race, there still is opportunity for inclusion, DeYmaz pointed out.

"The first thing you recognize is that in every area of the United States, someone owns a shop and somebody sweeps it," he said.

Is the church in that neighborhood appealing only to the upper class or the upwardly mobile, or is it also bringing in "the sweepers"? he asked.

"Even if the whole community is white, somebody has some means, and somebody doesn't. So, on that level, you're working more on the socio-economic diversity and how your church can be more reflective economically," DeYmaz said.

Even if a community is perceived as being uniformly wealthy, there still is room to diversify, he pointed out.

"Who's mowing those lawns? Who's waiting on the tables in the restaurants? So, there's plenty of diversity, even if the perception is that this is how this neighborhood is," he said.

Some churches use their facilities to provide worship areas for ethnic congregations in addition to their own. DeYmaz sees that approach as less than ideal, but it can be the first step in a gradual process, he noted.

He offered as an example the early experiences of Mosaic. In the interest of unity, Hispanics weren't allowed to hold separate services. After a few months, however, many of those people moved on out of a desire to have different worship style.

"A few people would stay, but a lot of them were just passing through. We said, 'I guess that's just part of the cost of being multiethnic,'" he said.

Change came when the focus switched from everyone moving toward an English-centered worship experience to everyone moving toward a Christ-centered worship experience—homogeneous cells within a heterogeneous church, he said.

In response to a question concerning a church plant with four language groups meeting there, DeYmaz responded, "You have four churches, but a step forward would be to have one church with four groups focused on evangelizing and discipling their particular people group and moving them forward to one whole church over time."

The third service at Mosaic church is completely in Spanish and exists for evangelism and discipleship of first-generation Hispanics.

He admitted a casual observer might initially think it was a Spanish-language church meeting at Mosaic, but people who attend that service realize they are part of a larger body.

Fellowship meals with the entire body are regularly scheduled events that let members see the bigger picture, but people who attend that service also are encouraged to fit themselves into places of service, such as working in the nursery during earlier services.

Diverse leadership in the church also sends a message, he noted. "We don't hire white people to work with whites or black people to work with blacks—you have to lead people, no matter what the job is."

Churches who want to move toward diversity should take an inventory of where they are and where they want to go, and begin to take intentional steps in that direction. However, it can be disastrous to try to make a complete sea change all at one time.

"The last thing you want to do is split a church in the name of unity," DeYmaz cautioned.

Moving to multicultural ministry requires human effort and divine intervention, he acknowledged. "It's all God, and it's all us. We have to embrace dependence on God, but we also have to be intentional," he said.

Congregations need to understand the difference between assimilation and accommodation, he added.

"I want to have the church the way I like it, and I want to have a lot of diverse people like it the way I do things. That's assimilation. ... Accommodation is where the majority culture changes to make the minority culture feel welcome," he explained.

"We're not asking anyone to check their culture at the door. We're saying, 'Come in, and let's embrace your culture, and let's learn from you as you learn from us and celebrate all of that.'"

At Mosaic, a variety of choirs provide a variety of styles of music on a rotating basis, and not everyone gets their style each week.

DeYmaz offered the illustration of a 16-year-old who might want to stay in his room during the evening meal if meatloaf were served.

"What would you tell him? You would tell him to take his place at the table, because it's not about the meatloaf, it's about the family," he said. "It's the same thing: It's not about the music; it's about the family."