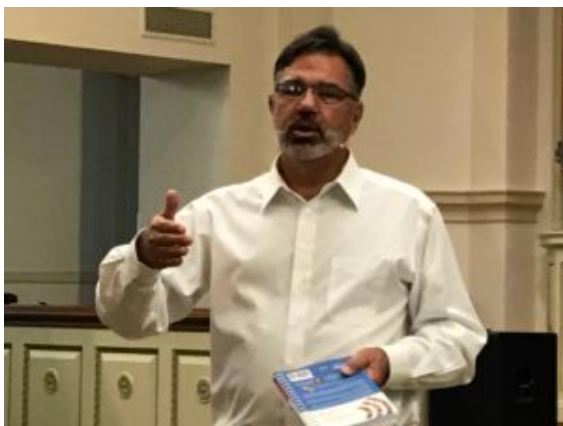


# Segregated churches lack credibility in diverse society

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WACO—Christians who worship in churches with people almost exclusively of the same race, culture and socio-economic class should not be surprised when society fails to take the gospel seriously, the founding pastor of a multi-ethnic congregation in central Arkansas said.

“An increasingly diverse, painfully polarized and cynical society is no longer finding credible the message of God’s love for all people as preached from segregated pulpits and pews,” Mark DeYmaz of Mosaic Church told the No Need Among You Conference.



The Bible points Christians toward a unity that draws together people from varied races, ethnic groups and cultures, Mark DeYmaz told the No Need Among You conference in Waco. (Photo / Ken Camp)

When DeYmaz served a large suburban congregation as a youth minister, he realized one day the only people of color he saw inside the church

building were on its janitorial staff.

“If the kingdom of heaven is not segregated, why on earth is the local church?” he asked. That question prompted him to start an intentionally multi-ethnic congregation.

The Bible points Christians toward a unity that draws together people from varied races, ethnic groups and cultures, DeYmaz told the conference at First Baptist Church in Waco, sponsored by the Texas Christian Community Development Network.

## **‘Mission flows organically’ in multi-ethnic church**

Scripture makes a powerful case in favor of the multi-ethnic church, he insisted. Jesus envisioned it when he prayed for the unity of his followers in John 17, Luke described it when he wrote about the church at Antioch in the New Testament book of Acts, and Paul prescribed it throughout his letter to the Ephesian church, DeYmaz said.

“When the church is homogeneous, it typically is internally focused,” he asserted.

On the other hand, when Christians worship alongside people of different races, ethnicities and socio-economic groups, “mission flows organically,” he added.

Multi-ethnic churches learn to use different metrics to measure congregational health, DeYmaz said. Rather than looking for “explosive growth” in membership, multi-ethnic churches examine the degree to which their congregations look like their communities and the impact they are making on those communities, he said.

# Be disruptive for God's sake

DeYmaz challenged his listeners to become “disruptive leaders” in a positive sense—people who “turn systems upside down” for the sake of God’s kingdom, just as Jesus did.

“Jesus disrupted darkness and gave us light ... disrupted the law and gave us faith ... disrupted sin and gave us salvation ... disrupted death and gave us life ... (and) disrupted time and gave us eternity,” he said.

“We live in a painfully polarized time, in a cynical and deeply divided society, but this should be the church’s finest hour—walking, working and worshipping God together as one, beyond the distinctions of this world that so often and otherwise divide.”

DeYmaz encouraged Christians who serve in community development to “begin thinking disruptive thoughts” and envision ways the church can be repurposed to redeem the community.

“Justice is not peripheral to the gospel. Justice is intrinsic to the gospel,” he said.

Any efforts to lead a homogenous congregation toward diversity that reflects its community should be built on a solid biblical foundation, DeYmaz said in a question-and-answer session after his keynote address.

“Begin with theology,” he said. “It’s not about political correctness but biblical correctness.”

## Core commitments

DeYmaz outlined seven core commitments to build a healthy multi-ethnic church:

- **Embrace dependence on God.** Moving a church to become more diverse demands prayer, patience and persistence, he said.
- **Take intentional steps.** Recognize the majority culture must adapt if it hopes to welcome people of other races, classes and ethnicities—not tell them in subtle ways to “check your culture at the door,” he said.
- **Empower diverse leaders.** Build a diverse team from the start, and commit the necessary financial resources to make sure they receive some financial compensation.
- **Develop cross-cultural relationships.** Be a humble student of those who are the experts of their own culture.
- **Pursue cross-cultural competency.** However, realize understanding is a process. “There is a 100 percent chance you will offend or be offended,” he said. “Work through the issues.”
- **Promote a spirit of inclusion.** Work to develop a culture that recognizes people of varied backgrounds as full partners in a shared vision.
- **Mobilize for impact.** “Don’t chase size; chase influence,” he said.