

Commentary: One body, many members: God's guidelines for diverse ministry

July 8, 2025

This is Part 2 of a three-part series on a Christian response to diversity. Part 1 can be read [here](#).

Yeehaw, and amen! Yes, that really is an expression heard at some churches in my area.

[Cowboy churches](#) are some of the fastest-growing churches in the [Baptist General Convention of Texas](#). Their aim is to carry out the Great Commission and reach people, primarily rural people, who would not attend church otherwise. These tend to be predominantly white congregations.

Meanwhile, a growing number of Black churches in urban centers continue to hold to the best of their tradition while also [adapting to reach a new generation](#) with online media. Instead of responding in person to the pastor's call, "Can I get a witness?" by shouting, "Amen," they insert a raised-hands emoji in the chat on their computer screen.

Simultaneously, new church plants that target Spanish-speakers allow people to worship in their native tongue. *Alabado sea el Señor!*

Is all this Babel, or is it Pentecost?

In Part 1, I explored the biblical basis for why Christians should value diversity. In short, God doesn't undo Babel; he baptizes it and calls it Pentecost. God uses many languages to reach all peoples for the gospel.

Here, I will consider what this means for Christian ministry.

Clearly, the gospel is for all people, and so it crosses all lines of identity. So far, so good. I think all Christians would agree ... in principle.

However, given today's climate, how should this be applied in specific places in ministry? How do we balance a Great-Commission-motive to reach a specific demographic—be it rural, urban or otherwise—without letting that turn into a little Babel where we all try to speak the same cultural language?

A church story

When I was younger and preparing for ministry, my fellow students and I looked at the case of a certain megachurch in our town—Hunter Street Baptist Church. Many years prior, it had not been so “mega.”

The congregation had dwindled to the point it could barely keep its doors open. Then, it moved from its original inner-city location, which at the time was a “transitioning neighborhood,” to the suburbs.

The church still went by its old name, even though it no longer was on Hunter Street. The church transformed and began to reach young, suburban families. Considering this case as young students, we easily faulted it as white flight.

Then, I had a unique experience while in seminary. I, a white kid from the country, somehow ended up on the staff of a predominantly Black church. But not just any Black church. It was the church that had purchased Hunter Street Baptist Church's old campus—Sardis Missionary Baptist Church.

Sardis' pastor told me how his church had come to acquire Hunter Street's campus. Sardis was reaching the community around Hunter Street, and it had outgrown its old building. Hunter Street Baptist Church had not

wanted to move, and its pastor had decided he would lead that congregation to reach its community, or else the church would die trying.

Then, Sardis' pastor met with him and asked to purchase his campus. In fact, he told Hunter Street's pastor the Lord had told his congregation to buy Hunter Street's campus. After much prayer and discernment, Hunter Street agreed and moved to the suburbs. The result: Both congregations grew and began to reach their respective communities.

A hard truth

To be honest, I don't like that story. I had joined the staff of Sardis Missionary Baptist Church because I believed God wanted to reform and desegregate the church. That was 40 years after [Martin Luther King Jr. observed](#), "11 a.m. Sunday is the most segregated hour of the week." And yet, little had changed over those 40 years.

I wanted the churches to merge and become an integrated congregation. Or I wanted God to smite (what I had assumed was) the white-flight church and scatter its people like Babel of old. But that's not what God did. God turned Babel into Pentecost.

The challenge of diversity in ministry

I still believe congregations need to do more work to be inclusive of all people. White churches can hire people of color as ministers. English-speaking churches can offer a translation of their service in Spanish. Or better, they can hire a pastor who speaks Spanish and have it translated into English. I can list countless ideas of how we could do more.

And yet, I have to admit these matters are complicated. Urban churches often are the only place where Black people can express themselves freely

in their own cultural language. Spanish-speaking churches offer a place where Spanish-speaking Christians can unburden themselves and worship God in their native tongue.

If churches become multicultural and multiracial, they often end up defaulting to the lowest common denominator of cultural expression, which means they look and sound white. Valuing diversity in the church is the right thing to do, but it is not easy.

This does not mean we stop trying. We can do two things at once. We can lament the fact Sunday morning is still the most segregated hour of the week, and we can celebrate the fact imperfect communities continue to carry out the Great Commission.

Put differently, we still can strive to be ministers of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18), and we can recognize how God turns Babel into Pentecost.

What we cannot do is deny God values Pentecost.

Jesus' and Paul's challenge to the church

Although it is especially difficult at the local congregational level, we cannot simply ignore the mandate to reach all nations (Matthew 22:37-39) or deny the call for every nation, tribe, people and tongue to gather around the throne of Jesus (Revelation 7:9).

At the least, we cannot—in good faith—say to those of other cultures, “We do not need you.” We cannot, because the apostle Paul was clear, even though the body of Christ is made up of diverse members, the eye cannot say to the ear, “I don’t need you,” and the hand cannot say to the foot, “I don’t need you” (1 Corinthians 12:21).

If this is true, then how will predominantly single-culture churches address issues that affect those who belong to other cultures in our community?

Good news

I am happy to report, there are positive signs of change in my denomination. Now, [1 out of every 5 churches](#) in the BGCT is Hispanic. Additionally, many white churches are partnering with sister congregations to help in specific ways.

For example, a pastor recently told me an encouraging story about his church's work with migrant communities. His church is predominantly white, and many of the members hold certain political views that may seem at odds with this particular ministry.

Yet, some of these same members in his congregation had formed the security team that stood guard each week during the church's work with Spanish-speaking members of the city.

After some weeks of this, the leader of this security team told the pastor, "Well, Pastor, I guess we can disagree about immigration, but as Christians, we can't disagree about immigrants."

I want to applaud those who are striving to carry out this difficult task. Many feel under attack and discouraged. Too often, the news cycle clouds the vision of church members, and so the work to reach all people is misunderstood as carrying out a political agenda.

We must be clear: This is not some left-wing political ideology infiltrating our churches. This is not a matter of the political right versus the political left. It is a matter of right versus wrong. In fact, if we can keep partisan politics out of our churches, we can keep the gospel at the front and center of our work.

Can I get a witness? *Alabado sea el Señor. Yeehaw, and amen!*

This three-part series will conclude next week with Part 3. Part 1 can be read [here](#).

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