

Voices: Pursuit of the multi-ethnic church

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“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.” (Ephesians 2:14)



Steve Bezner

I'll never forget the moment I realized my pastoral duties had changed. It was the night George Zimmerman was acquitted in the shooting of Trayvon Martin.

That evening, I scrolled through the social media posts of countless church members, and I recognized the variety of opinions, the varying degrees of hurt and confusion and the deep differences of convictions—all *within* my church.

I had a revolutionary thought that evening: “*I don't pastor a white church.*”

Perhaps I hadn't in some time. But now, for the first time, it became clear to me: I pastored people from all sorts of ethnic backgrounds, and in short time, I would be climbing into the pulpit to speak the word of the Lord. I needed to preach the gospel of peace and grace to people who were—at that time—interpreting current events with very different cultural lenses.

That change did not happen overnight. We now are almost four years into our slow, but steady, pursuit of becoming more ethnically diverse as a church. To be clear: We have some advantages in that pursuit. For example, our church happens to be in Houston, the most ethnically diverse city in the United States (sorry, New York). But most of what we have done as a church has been something any church can do. Along the way, the Lord has seen fit to bring us fruit.

Here are some of the simple steps we have taken:

We publicly and repeatedly declare our church welcomes all races.

It may seem simple, but we regularly say from the pulpit our church welcomes all races. It happens in the course of sermons or announcements. But when we say it, people believe it. They invite their friends who are different ethnicities. Guests who are different ethnicities hear it, believe it and decide to stay.

Publicly declaring your intentions regarding becoming multi-ethnic eliminates confusion.

We preach on the issue of racial division and reconciliation.

When racial issues are prevalent in current events, we do not ignore them. We do not always approach them with the narrative frames provided by cable news, but we do address them from a gospel-centered, Scripture-

focused perspective.

When you acknowledge the issues, the ethnic minorities in your church appreciate being in a church that chooses not to ignore those issues.

We seek friendships with pastors and churches of different primary ethnicities.

I have been blessed to become friends with pastors in my community who are not white. We cooperate and collaborate on ministry together. We serve together. We pray together. We ask awkward questions regarding race. We are real with one another. We hold events together.

We did not do this so that we could minister together. We did this so that we could be friends with brother pastors in the area. As we prayed and conversed, ministry was birthed.

I cannot recommend this enough: Call up a pastor who is a different race from you and take that minister to lunch. Build a friendship.

We preach the gospel.

I will never forget the first time I had a one-on-one lunch with Pastor Blake Wilson, pastor of a growing African-American church in our neighborhood. "How can we minister to the black community?" I asked. His answer was quick, "Preach the gospel." He explained: When you preach the gospel and teach Scripture, you never go out of style. Teach the word, he exhorted, and it will apply to all ethnicities.

His advice rings true. The more we speak of the shocking grace of God, the more he surprises us by bringing more and more people of color into our church body.

Until the day every nation, tribe and tongue confesses Jesus as Lord, we hope to strive to become more intentional in our pursuits of a multi-ethnic

church. I hope you will join us.

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