



ETHNIC BLENDS **MARK DEYMAZ**

It Can Happen Here

Precious Williams is a hairstylist who has cut my hair for as long as I can remember. As an African-American woman who grew up in Little Rock, Ark., she is a valued friend from whom I've learned much through the years. And in the fall of 2000, God used her to change my life.

While reclining in her chair one day and getting a cut, we were enjoying lighthearted conversation. At some point, however, we began talking about racism and, in particular, the systemic segregation of the local Church. I asked Precious if churches in Little Rock had always been divided along ethnic and economic lines. Had this affected her spiritually? Had it shaped her view of Christians, of the Church, of God?

I really don't remember all that she said in response, but I do recall what I asked her next: "Precious, do you think that Little Rock needs a diverse church, one where individuals of

Nearly 10 years later, the Mosaic Church of Central Arkansas, the church I planted in response to that call, is an established work of God's grace, where individuals from 30 nations walk, work and worship God together as one. And thankfully, we are not alone.

In 1998, a national study of American congregations found that just 5 percent of Protestant churches were racially diverse (where no one racial group is 80 percent or more of the congregation). In 2007, the same study revealed that large Protestant churches were three times more likely to be multiethnic than they had been in 1998. Large evangelical churches were five times more likely to be multiethnic. As noted sociologist Michael Emerson observes: "This is seismic change in a short time! Since large churches typically are the bellwether of change to come throughout Christendom, more change is coming. Yes, an old system is crumbling, and a new one—the multiethnic congregation—is emerging."

Outreach magazine recognizes the growing need for readers to understand why we should and how we can build healthy multiethnic churches in the 21st century for the sake of the Gospel. That's why I've been asked to write a regular column on the subject—to provide insight, information and inspiration that can help ministry leaders do just that. For as Chris Rice, co-director of the Center for Reconciliation at Duke Divinity School, says, "I believe God is not very interested in the Church healing the race problem; I believe it is more true that God is using race to heal the Church."

Mark DeYmaz is the directional leader of Mosaic Church in Little Rock, Ark. (MosaicChurch.net). He is the author of Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church (Jossey-Bass) and Ethnic Blends (Zondervan), which is scheduled for release in April 2010. Also in April, he and Erwin McManus will relaunch Mosaix (Mosaix.info), a relational network to help catalyze the movement toward multiethnic churches in the 21st century. Visit his blog at MarkDeYmaz.com.

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—Sociologist Michael Emerson

varying backgrounds can worship God together as one?"

Her answer came as no surprise.

"Oh, yes, Mark," she said, in a quiet but hopeful tone.

Closing my eyes, I pondered her words. What she said next shook me to the core.

"Mark, do you think it could ever happen here?"

Now in the precise moment that Precious spoke these words to me, I experienced two remarkable things.

The first was actually a physical sensation—the same adrenaline rush you get when someone scares you in the dark! Spiritually, however, something even more remarkable occurred. For though I had heard with my ears—"Mark, do you ever think it could happen here?"—in my spirit I heard, "Mark, would you consider doing it here?" It was a breakthrough moment in my life.