

ETHNIC BLENDS **MARK DEYMAZ**

Small Church, **Ethnic Blend**

Recently I caught up with my good friend Artie Davis, a champion for small city and smaller church pastors. Artie is the lead pastor at Cornerstone Church (CornerstoneCommunity.com), a multisite, multiethnic church in Orangeburg, S.C. (population 14,000, of which 75 percent is African-American; 21 percent white; and 2 percent Hispanic). In addition, he leads TheSticks.tv conferences and has written the soon-to-be-released book *Craveable Church*. We discussed the significance of multiethnic ministry in the small city and smaller church context.

What We Know and What We “Own”

Pastors serving in a smaller setting understand that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), Artie says. But given that most churches remain segregated by race and class (having less than 20 percent diversity in the attending membership), there’s a seeming disconnect between what they know and what they own. “What we know in our heads must find a place in our hearts so that our hands will do the work of establishing churches that reflect the diversity of the community, and in so doing, present a credible witness of God’s love for all people,” Artie says.

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You’ve Got Yours, I’ve Got Mine

In addition, Artie challenges leaders not to be satisfied with a “you’ve got yours, and we’ve got ours” mentality. This not only perpetuates segregation within the church, but in the community as well. Thankfully, he notes, times are changing: “Within the past five years, I know of at least one church that changed its bylaws to allow nonwhites into its membership. It’s sad such a rule was even on the books at all; but I’m thankful leaders had the courage to make the change. Now they need to act on their commitment, intentionally.”

Perception vs. Intentions

In an increasingly diverse society, pastors of large and small churches should recognize that people act on their perception of

a church, not on our intentions for the church. “While pastors of homogeneous churches may proclaim everyone is welcome, intentions are more often than not undermined by community perceptions, namely, that only certain people attend; that is the reality that most who attend are of the same race and class,” Artie says. The reality, then, does not accurately represent our Savior’s love for the world, His arms wide open to whosoever would come.”

The Emerging Multiethnic Congregation

Yet increasingly, churches large and small are finding the courage and resolve to pursue diversity for the sake of the Gospel.

In 1998 a national study of American congregations found that just 5 percent of Protestant churches were racially diverse (no one racial group is 80 percent or more of the congregation). No differences existed between large churches (1,000 attendees) and smaller churches. When this same study was conducted 10 years later, a major change had taken place. Large Protestant churches were three times more likely to be biracial in 2007 than in 1998; large evangelical churches were five times more likely to be so. Rice University sociologist Michael O. Emerson has described the change as “seismic” and a sign of more change to come as the multiethnic congregation emerges.

Diverse, Indigenous Leadership

As a final caution, Artie suggests that church planters feeling called to smaller cities should not expect to establish healthy multiethnic churches apart from the involvement of indigenous leadership. “Small cities have distinct cultures all their own that may take years to understand and negotiate apart from others who have lived or grown up there,” Artie says. “Involving indigenous, diverse leaders is not only biblical and effective, it will save you time and money!”

Mark DeYmaz is the founding pastor of the Mosaic Church of Central Arkansas (MosaicChurch.net) and the author of Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church and Ethnic Blends. As executive director of the Mosaic Global Network (Mosaic.info), he hosts a free teleconference each Thursday at 4 p.m. EST with live Q-and-A focused on the multiethnic church. Details are available at Mosaic.info/mosaic-weekly-teleconference.

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