



**Discussion on Multiracial/Multiethnic
Congregations**

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March 6, 2017**

- What does multiracial mean to you?
- What does multiethnic mean to you?
- What are the similarities? Differences?

How many of you serve within/attend a multiracial or multiethnic congregation?

In the article “A New Day for Multiracial Congregations” Michael O. Emerson says,

“Racial segregation of religious groups affects how we see ourselves as well as others. The separate groups that are reified through religious division result in categorization. Research links this process of categorization to several biases in our thinking, including:

- Identifying out-group members by their differences from the in-group, overly homogenizing the out-group.
- Favoring our in-group.
- Perceiving negative behavior of an out-group member as a characteristic of the entire out-group. (We leap from “Gerry of Group X shoplifted” to “Group X shoplifts.”) We don’t do this with our ingroup.
- Recalling only information that confirms our stereotypes of out-groups, dismissing contradictory evidence as an exception.”

Terrell Carter translation- Essentially, if we don't find regular intimate ways to build relationships with people who are different from us, we typically accept negative information that paints people of a certain group with a broad brush as fact.

Dr. Emerson goes on to say, “Religion in the U.S. contributes to racial division and inequality, and to cultural and political conflict, because it creates the very condition – racial segregation in an important social setting – that feeds the practices of racial categorization and the errors in perception that follow from it.

Racial segregation of religious groups also affects how we interact – and with whom – by creating the ethical paradox of group loyalty. The paradox is that even if comprised of loving, unselfish individuals, the group transmutes individual unselfishness into group selfishness.

So, in the more than 300,000 congregations in the U.S., members are busy creating group identity and forming moral persons. Those moral persons, acting morally, are aware of and help their families and the members of their own congregations first, making sure those needs are met before looking elsewhere to help. But racial segregation in congregations means we largely help people of our own race.”

Terrell Carter translation- If we don't regularly engage in opportunities to learn the multiple facets of a person or people group, we will be less likely to interact with them on anything but a cursory or peripheral level, which allows us to keep our preconceived notions about them intact.

Also, just because we may go to church with someone of a different color, race, or ethnicity, perform an act of ministry for them, or serve someone through a social service agency, that doesn't mean that we know them, like them, or see them as equal. Sometimes, it can actually lead to us having the opposite thoughts or feelings toward them.

What would you think about black people in general if most of them that you interacted with were poor or in need of resources?

So, what does it mean to be a **multiracial** or **multicultural** church?

Dr. Emerson's 20 Percent Rule

“Research on a variety of organizations has shown that it takes 20 percent or more of another group to have their voices heard and effect cultural change on an organization. Short of that percentage, people are largely tokens. Part of this 20 percent or more rule is mathematics. At 20 percent of another group, the probability of contact across the groups is 99 percent.”

For these reasons, Dr. Emerson defines a **multiracial** congregation as one having *less than 80 percent of any single racial group*.

What does **Multicultural** means?

- The existence of people who come from differing cultural backgrounds.
 - (Just because a church has black people in it doesn't make the church multicultural. Those black people may have come from the same cultural upbringing as the dominant culture in the church. All black people aren't from the hood.)

Similarities between the two?

- Both involve having people who don't necessarily look like each other.

Differences between the two?

- Although everyone may not look alike, everyone may have similar backgrounds/upbringing.

Food for thought:

One of the challenges facing any minority that begins interacting with/becoming a part of any historically white organization is they are asked/expected to adopt the characteristics of the dominant culture within that organization. This means that if they are black, they are expected to leave behind/minimize the majority of characteristics they developed through prior life experiences while they are around the dominant culture.

Also, in general, people who may look alike (have same skin color) are generally lumped together/viewed as one group even though there may be vast differences between them.

- For example, Africans and African Americans are viewed the same. Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans are lumped together as Asians.
- This happens despite the vast cultural differences between the groups.

What does this mean for you?

– Be aware.....

Benefits of multiracial/multiethnic?

Dr. Emerson says, “Involvement in multiracial congregations, over time, leads to fundamental differences. Friendships patterns change. Through national surveys we find that people in multiracial congregations have significantly more friendships across race than do other Americans. For example, for those attending racially homogenous congregations, 83 percent said most or all of their friends were the same race as them. For those not attending any congregation, 70 percent said most or all of their friends were the same race as them.

But for those attending multiracial congregations, there is a dramatic difference. Only 36 percent of people attending racially mixed congregation said most or all of their friends were the same race as them. And we found that those 36 percent were relatively recent arrivals to their racially mixed congregations.”

Dr. Emerson added this caveat, “Interestingly, over 80 percent of the people in racially mixed congregations said that most of the racial diversity in their friendships came because of their involvement in their racially mixed congregation.”

What are some of the challenges of multiracial and multicultural churches?

According to Ed Stetzer, “First, just because your church looks diverse doesn't mean it is diverse.”

“One of the things I have said is that often pastors who say they have multiCULTURAL churches really have multiRACIAL churches. Both are good, but being multicultural is much harder than being multiracial.

You can be multiracial if you simply have "persons of color" who attend your church. They may work in the same places, go to the same movies, eat in the same restaurants, but they happen to be persons of African-American, Asian, Anglo, or even Latino descent. They are not necessarily steeped in a culture, but have assimilated to a common culture.”

“However, a multicultural church is not simply about skin tone, but about the intentional engagement of cultures. So, a multicultural church will not simply have people who are African-American, but will engage to some degree in African-American cultural contexts. You will not just have people who are by their background from Latin America, but who will intentionally engage Latino culture(s) and context(s). You will not just have people who are second-generation Asian immigrants, but you will to some degree engage Asian cultural norms.”

Second, multicultural ministry is a recipe for conflict. If you're going to engage in multi-cultural ministry you're going to hurt somebody's feelings or have your feelings hurt.

(Why is this true? Does this have to be true?)

Third, multicultural ministry slows down ministry.

A multicultural church will grow slower than a monocultural church. It's simply a statistical reality that when everyone thinks similarly, they can engage others more quickly and more effectively and churches will grow. One reason for this is that healthy multicultural churches are built on cross-cultural relationships of transparency and trust; and these take much more time to form and develop than do those relationships with people of similar backgrounds.

Fourth, being a multicultural church takes a lot of listening.

Okay, Terrell, my congregation does have multiple members of varying races/ethnicities but nothing close to 80% as Dr. Emerson suggested. Are you telling me that we are failing at being multiracial or multicultural?

No, I'm not telling you that you are a failure. There may be multiple reasons that your congregation isn't as diverse as you would hope. This may be due to geography (not many minorities in area), affluence (our congregation appeals to people from a certain social strata), or other reasons.

My question is does your congregation/group lack diversity due to extenuating circumstances or due to a lack of effort to diversity?

What are the core ingredients of successful multiracial congregations? According to Dr. Emerson, they are:

- Intentionality. Although congregations do become multiracial without intentionality, they don't stay diverse without focused intentionality. For congregations to remain diverse, they must desire to do so.

- Diversity as a necessary means to a larger goal. Diversity cannot be an end in itself – this is not sufficient motivation to sustain the difficulties of being diverse. Instead, diversity must be a path to a larger goal. This is often communicated in vision and mission statements.
- Spirit of inclusion. This can be done in many ways, including through worship, small groups, diversity in who is seen “up front,” structures that encourage cross-racial relationships, and mission statements.
- Empowered leadership. Leaders of multiracial congregations need to be diverse, be truly empowered (not “token” leaders), and be experienced in managing diversity.

- Adaptability. Leaders and parishioners must develop skills of adapting to change, to each other's racial and ethnic cultures, and to each other's religious traditions and histories. Grace is essential.
- Undergirding these steps of course are much faith and prayer. Nearly all leaders of such congregations say the challenges and opportunities are too big to rely merely on themselves and their own understandings.

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Practical Next Steps: Think about solutions on Macro and Micro levels

Macro/Community level

- Consider developing or articulating a theology of race or a theology of racial reconciliation.
 - Make it a part of your congregation's core documents and public witness.
 - Vision or Mission Statement

- River City Community Church in Chicago- “We are on a quest to become a multi-ethnic community of Jesus followers that transform the city of Chicago through worship, reconciliation, and neighborhood development.”
- The mission of Riverside Church in New York is “to serve God through word and witness; to treat all human beings as sisters and brothers; and to foster responsible stewardship of God’s creation.”

- Adopt a congregation that is different from yours.
- Teach, allow ESL classes at your building
- Join/start a federation of churches within your city or community and meet quarterly.

Adopt an organization

- Adopt a school
- Adopt a nonprofit organization
 - International Institute
 - CREATE
 - St. Louis Mediation

Adopt a business

- Can check through Small Business Incubators

- Develop a teaching or preaching series on race
 - Gospel according to Broadway
 - Les Mis
 - Huck Finn
 - Hunchback of Notre Dame
- Devise a long-term plan for teaching and preaching prophetically about race
 - A simple conversation or sermon about race and reconciliation is not adequate to change our world or your context
 - Talking about race once a year is not adequate to bring about change in your context.

- Consider making an intentional plan to preach/speak/write about it on a quarterly basis.
- Utilize the lectionary and look for opportunities that naturally arise from scripture (for example: Jonah, relationship between OT Israel and everyone else, relationship between Jews and everyone else, passages that talk about relationships between different nations)
- Utilize holidays or cultural events (MLK birthday, Black History Month, Women's History Month, etc.)

When you teach or preach about race, preach prophetically.

- “It was generally the task of biblical prophets to speak to real conditions and concerns, which existed among Hebrew people—and to call people back into covenant relationship with God (and others). The biblical prophets, thus, stood with one foot in the past—reminding Israel of its history in God—and with one foot in the future, helping them see where God wanted them to go. Thus, the paradigm for the biblical prophetic preacher is a dialectical paradigm of history, existence and hope—past, present and future.”- C. Anthony Hunt

I will restate Dr. Hunt's words this way. Prophetic preaching reminds people how their past has influenced their present, while simultaneously providing them with hope for their future. An outline of a prophetic sermon could be:

- Address the Past- What has happened in the past that has caused us to end up where we are?
- Recognize where you currently are- Where are we now?
- Provide hope for the future- Where can we go in the future with God's help?
- Provide practical tips for heading in the direction that God wants for all people.

How do you speak prophetically in your context?

Addressing the past:

- Ask/identify the foundational practices/beliefs in your context that reinforce separation and segregation.
- Is God, history or local tradition being used as the excuse to keep things a certain way/keep certain people out?
- Don't talk about theory. Give concrete examples/experiences that listeners will recognize or being able to identify with.

Recognize where you currently are:

- Be truthful about current standing.
- Do it in love.
- Consider doing it in a way that does not attack anyone or point fingers.
- Ask if this is the best that God has for you.

Provide hope for the future:

- Remind them of what God wants for our human relationships.
- Remind them about what God says about the future of human relationships.
- Hold Christ up as the example of reconciliation.

Provide practical tips for people to implement change in their context

- Move people from just listening to taking action through tangible opportunities to participate.
- Whether it is a cross-cultural event at your specific location or somewhere in a different community, challenge people to go and get involved.
- Provide/suggest opportunities for people to build a relationship with the “wrong” type of person (adopt a school in a different neighborhood).
- Encourage people to become students of other races/communities instead of being an opinionated observer.

Be aware of the challenges that come about when you begin preaching about race

- At a minimum, people will push back and attempt to minimize what you are saying.
- Find a coach or support person/group.