



ETHNIC BLENDS MARK DEYMAZ

## Multi-*what?*

**I**n a recent message to his congregation at Willow Creek Community Church's downtown Chicago campus, Pastor Jon Klinepeter addressed "The Future of Willow Chicago." It caught my attention because of the following remarks.

"[We] will declare that this church is defined as a multi-cultural church. Not simply a multiethnic church where we want you to bring your ethnicity, but leave your culture at the door. We will not be a community that wants the color of your skin, but won't acknowledge the cultural realities that accompany that color."

Now I certainly appreciate the heart and passion of this pastor, as well as the direction in which he is seeking to lead his community of Christ-centered faith. Nevertheless his words beg the question, "What term best describes the diverse churches we are seeking to establish in these days for the sake of the Gospel?"

**"Like our churches, it seems that even our terminology is both unified and diverse!"**

### The Vocabulary of Diversity

Over the past 10 years of planting, pastoring, writing and speaking about the growing movement toward what I call *multiethnic* churches, I have found this to be true: *The terms we use are not as important as are the definitions.* In other words, the issue is not so much trying to get everyone to agree on a single term as it is expecting everyone to clearly define the terms they use. More than that, we should speak with humility and avoid the presumption that our term is the "right" term for everyone, or that it will be understood in every situation as we might intend.

For example, when I use the term *multiethnic* church, I mean exactly what Pastor Jon means when he speaks of his church as *multicultural*. At Mosaic, we ask no one to check their culture at the door, and we practice the principle of accommodation—not assimilation—as I have written about on many occasions. In addition, when I use the term *multiethnic church*, I intend to imply the intentional pursuit of economic diversity as well; again, as I frequently make clear.

Personally, I do not describe such churches as *multicultural* to avoid any confusion with the tenets of multiculturalism that are espoused on most college and university campuses today—the doctrine of tolerance whether religious or social, etc. Nor do I employ the term *multiracial* church; for as a theologian, I recognize that the Bible speaks of only one race—the human race—comprised of many ethnicities (Acts 17:26).

On the other hand, my friends in Christ-centered sociological circles typically use the term *multiracial* church when addressing the subject to address perceptions as well as realities and, more specifically, the historic division of black and white in the United States. And in Canada, the term *multicultural* church means exactly what it does for Pastor Jon. In both instances, it is perceived to imply only color in the pew and a failure to "acknowledge the cultural realities that accompany color." Still others will speak of a *transethnic* church, or even an *ethnically reflective* church. Once the terms are defined, however, I have found that in almost every case, the vision and mission are the same. Like our churches, it seems that even our terminology is both unified and diverse!

With this in mind, let us promote the vision of local churches on earth that reflect the love of God for all people as it is in heaven with boldness and clarity. But let us also speak with humility—with one mind, spirit and purpose—even if one term does not yet adequately serve us all.

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