



ETHNIC BLENDS **MARK DEYMAZ**

Beyond Percentages

In the early days of our church plant, some of our people would count heads in the service, not so much to chart the attendance but the diversity of the crowd from week to week. And I must admit to being one of them. We were concerned that the involvement of too many white people might inhibit the establishment of a truly diverse congregation. Fortunately, it did not. For while we believed the Holy Spirit ultimately would lead diverse individuals to walk, work and worship God together as one at Mosaic (Eph. 3:20-21; I Thess. 5:24), we recognized, too, that wishful thinking was not enough to brew ethnic blends.

The 20 Percent Rule

Time magazine recently featured an article asking the question, *Can Megachurches Bridge the Racial Divide?* In part, a 20 percent threshold was used as a measurement of Willow Creek Community Church's success in pursuit of diversity over the past 10 years. In fact, sociologists promoting the vision of the multiethnic church first established the 20 percent threshold near the turn of the century as a way of identifying a church as multiethnic, one in which no single ethnic group makes up more than 80 percent of the congregation.

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A Better Guideline

The fact is such numbers provide just one measurement to help determine where a particular church is along a perceived continuum in pursuit of New Testament unity for the sake of the Gospel. Additional factors that should be taken into account include the diverse composition of vocational and volunteer leaders, the broad acceptance of various styles of worship, and the cross-cultural transferability of forms and practices of ministry within the congregation. All of these further define the reality and credibility of a church that would describe itself as integrated. Practically speaking, then, pastors should be careful not to rely upon numbers alone in declaring their churches to be multiethnic.

With this in mind, consider where your church is today in the pursuit of the *perfection of unity* as envisioned by Christ in John 17:23. Ask yourself as well, *What is the next logical step that our church might take as we press on toward maturity in this area?* Think about realistic steps toward this goal. [We've posted links to two helpful articles on the subject at OutreachMagazine.com/DeYmaz.] The last thing you will want to do is split the church in the name of unity! Yet this is exactly what will happen if you move too quickly in pursuing this biblical vision without first building a shared understanding and commitment.

Ultimately the *quality* of cross-cultural relationships within the body, not the *quantity* of them, will serve you best in building a healthy, multiethnic church. For it is the quality of our relationships that validates our witness before people in desperate need of an authentic expression of God's all-embracing love.

Mark DeYmaz is the directional leader of Mosaic Church in Little Rock, Ark. (MosaicChurch.net). His book, Ethnic Blends (Zondervan), co-written with Harry Li, was released in April. In addition, Mark heads Mosaix (Mosaix.info) a relational network of multiethnic church pioneers, pastors and planters. Connect with Mark and other leading voices in the multiethnic church movement at the Multi-ethnic Church Conference, hosted by National Outreach Convention and Outreach magazine, Nov. 2-3, 2010, in San Diego, Calif.

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Certainly we should applaud Willow Creek's effort to transition an otherwise healthy, but homogeneous, church into a multiethnic one to better reflect the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. However, the vast majority of multiethnic church practitioners today not only feel that the 20 percent threshold is a bar set too low, but also, more importantly, recognize that so much more validates the authenticity of a healthy multiethnic church than the mere counting of heads on any given Sunday morning.