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Dr. Victor Clay, Senior Pastor
Dynamic Life Baptist Ministries

Biblical Rational For Multiethnic Ministries Eight Core Commitments Of A Multiethnic Church

"Why has the local church been unwilling or unable to do what the culture has done, that is, to convert people of various ethnic and economic backgrounds around the cross if Jesus Christ?" "In order for the church to fulfill its biblically mandated mission of love and unity, we must develop cross-ethnic relationships with others different from ourselves."

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also. (1 John 4:20-21)

To develop relationships that transcend ethnic and economic barriers, are essential for building a healthy multiethnic congregation. To build a healthy vibrant Christ-like multiethnic church, congregation, or ministry we should provide opportunities for open dialogue and commend those who have the courage to discuss such things, and the commitment to deal lovingly with them. The reality we must all face is that, no matter who you are, your ethnic background, the customs of your culture, or the color of your skin, you can (and will) most likely misunderstand or be misunderstood from time to time. People in a multiethnic church must, like two people in a marriage, will themselves to stay engaged or married (in covenant) relationally with one another, especially in those moments when feeling, emotions, and actions may be challenging them to leave or return to a more comfortable setting, such as the homogenous setting.

If sports teams, that are not normally Christian understand the importance of developing cross-ethnic relationships for the sake of the team and a common goal to win, should we not expect believers to understand the importance of doing so for the sake of the gospel and the local church?

Eight Core Commitments Of A Multiethnic Church

I. The church must embrace the biblical mandate of the gospel.

- A. Envisioned by God – Genesis 1
- B. Envisioned by Christ – John 17:20-23
- C. Commissioned by Christ – Matthew 28:16-20
- D. Empowered by the Holy Spirit – Acts 1:8, 10-11; 1 Corinthians 12
- E. Described by Luke – Acts 11:19-26; 13:1

F. Revealed as a mystery by Paul – Ephesians, Acts 19:817; 20-21; Ephesians 2:11-33; 3:3-5; 6:19-20; Colossians 4:2-4

II. The church must embrace Holy Spirit dependency.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit and of faith that cannot otherwise be attained through human efforts. Such a church can only exist and thrive when they commit themselves to prayer, patience, and persistence while seeking and striving to walk together as one new man in Christ Jesus.

III. The church must embrace intentional steps.

Intentionality is both an attitude and action, by those who have developed or are developing the aptitude for a multiethnic church. While many people mean good when they make statements like, “We welcome all people to our church from various ethnic or economic backgrounds to come be a part of ‘their’ church.” But what they really mean is, “as long as they like what we like, the way we like it, and do them the way we do them.” Healthy multiethnic churches will be established not by assimilation of people but accommodation.

There is a slight difference in the terms. The word *assimilation* means “to integrate somebody into a larger group so that differences are minimized or eliminated.”¹

Yet the word *accommodate* means “to adjust actions in response to somebody’s needs.”²

This means that we must be careful not to ask or expect those who are different ethnically or culturally to leave their culture or color at the door to become a member of “our” church. Therefore, it is the burden of those in the majority to adjust themselves intentionally, evaluating their own attitudes or actions to accommodate diverse people groups and cultures.

IV. Develop Cross-Cultural relationships.

Cross-cultural relationships take time to form and cannot be agenda driven. Because trust is not easily established, in an environment where people are different than them.

We all must honestly recognize at various times the prejudicial thoughts and feelings because of past conditioning, myths, and false information, that result from family, social settings, peer interaction, community factors, and media.

The word *prejudice* can be defined as “a preformed opinion concerning someone or something.” This word is used to describe the negative or inaccurate opinions we have formed of others with whom we have had (in some cases) little or no relational contact. Church must provide opportunity for open dialogue and commend those who have the courage to do so. (Keep the ring on.)

¹ *Encarta World English Dictionary*, 1999, s.v. “Assimilation.”

² *Encarta World English Dictionary*, s.v. “Accommodate.”

V. The church must embrace diversity in leadership.

To establish a healthy multiethnic church, there must be the empowerment of diverse leaders, from the pulpit to the Sunday School class, and every place or position in between. This would include paid staff as well as volunteers. Acts 13:1

VI. The church must pursue cross-cultural competence.

The church must embrace multiethnic Education Awareness/Competence. The understanding we need to bridge the ethnic and cultural divide in our churches, is gained through and from experience and interaction with diverse people groups and cultures, especially when the commonality is the Lord Jesus Christ or the Gospel.

To build a healthy multiethnic church, congregation or ministry, we must commit ourselves to understanding cross-cultural education/awareness of idiosyncrasies of language, customs, traditions, styles, and mannerisms that are different than our own. Once this is practiced or emphasized cross cultural competence will allow us to interact with a more informed and sensitive ministry, to those of various ethnic and economic backgrounds.

The church leaders must become the learners if, in fact we are to succeed in establishing diverse ethnic congregations of faith in Christ.

The ongoing development process, “an observable continuum such as the one developed by Cristina Lopez of the National Council of La Raza is helpful.”³

A. Destructiveness

Cultural destructiveness – “acknowledges only one way of being and purposefully denies or outlaws any other cultural approaches.”⁴ “The emphasis is on using differences as barriers.”⁵

B. Blindness

Cultural Blindness – “fosters an assumption that people are all basically alike, so what works with members of one culture should work within all other cultures.”⁶

There are a wonderful variety and diversity of ethnicities within the human race. Each one is worthy of recognition and celebration.

C. Awareness

Cultural Awareness – “Makes us sensitive to other ethnic groups [and] usually involves internal changes in terms of attitudes and values, ... it also refers to the qualities of openness and flexibility that people develop in relation to others.”⁷

³ Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 103.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid..

⁷ Ibid., 104.

D. Sensitivity

Cultural Sensitivity – “is increased over time through training, effort and experience. It ‘involves actively seeking advice and consultation, as well as a commitment to incorporating new knowledge and experiences into a wider range of practice.’”⁸

E. Competence

Cultural Competence – developing “a general proficiency in working with people of various cultures ... It defines individuals who ‘value diversity, conduct self-assessment, manage the dynamics of difference, acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge and are able to adapt to diversity and cultural contexts of the communities they serve.’”⁹

Those seeking to establish a multiethnic ministry should surround themselves with cross-culturally competent people who can be trusted to provide insight and training across the board, from the nursery to the pulpit and every station in between. So as, to understand life from another perspective.

VII. The church must embrace a Spirit of inclusion. Philippians 2:3-4

We must be willing to put aside our own personal biases and preferences in order to lead others together as one before the Lord.

VIII. The church must embrace mobilization for impact. Ephesians 2:22; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8

To mobilize for impact, we must seek not so much to take the Gospel to the community but rather through the community by embracing an “incarnational” approach. Healthy multiethnic churches will have a well-balanced strategy for global missions, based, in part, Acts 1:8. Multiethnic churches must not become so heavily invested in the community that they see no reason to go abroad.

⁸ Ibid., 105.

⁹ Ibid.