

18
**Examining Models of
Multiethnic Churches**
D.A. Horton

20
Better, By and By
Nicole Massie Martin

23
**Crossing Relational
Boundaries for Church
Unity**
Carl Nelson

24
**Diaspora Churches
on the Move**
Sam George

26
**Missional
Hospitality**
Walter Kim

Evangelicals

Magazine | Winter 2023/24 | Vol. 9, No. 3

A Multicultural Vision for the Church

CHARLES YU



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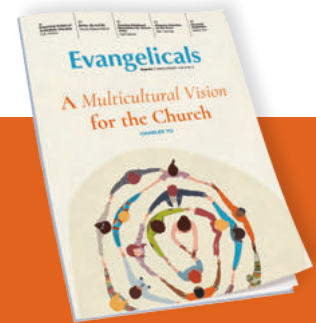
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The Magazine of the National Association of Evangelicals



Also in This Issue

6 Comment

Evangelicals pray for the Middle East, pursue racial justice and reconciliation, and consider the contributions of immigrant churches.

9 Calendar

Here you will find upcoming events held by and for the evangelical community.

10 Worth Noting

The NAE passes a resolution on Preserving Our Democracy, urges Congress to reauthorize PEPFAR, and honors the legacy of former NAE President Arthur Gay.

12 Living United

Mekdes Haddis shares how the NAE is working to build bridges of reconciliation through resources, events and a learning cohort.

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The U.S. population is more racially and ethnically diverse than it ever has been, and it is expected to become even more diverse in the future. This is already the reality for younger generations, in which there is no ethnic or racial majority. Even rural and small-town America is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. So, what opportunities do these changing demographics bring to the church in America? Is it possible that God is doing something new?

In the cover article, Pastor Charles Yu asks us to consider what it means to “image” God. As image bearers, we communicate God’s essential qualities, he says. We do this individually, but we also image God in community. God’s love crosses differences.

The church in America has not loved across racial and ethnic differences well. Indeed, it was white majority churches and denominations that made monocultural churches a necessity. Today most Christian leaders and pastors in America articulate the value of ethnic and racial diversity in their places of ministry and influence. But too often while diversity initiatives result in greater diversity of color, they end with cultural assimilation.

Is there something deeper and harder that God is calling us to?

The authors in this magazine issue press into this

question. Like most things worth pursuing, there isn’t a quick fix or a one-size-fits-all approach. This work requires humility, curiosity, courage and a bit of trial and error. But this massive demographic shift impacts all of our churches — whether majority white churches, churches filled with first- or second-generation immigrants, historic Black churches, or churches of any ethnic makeup.

Together we explore the biblical foundation for multiculturalism in our churches, review different models of multiethnic churches, consider the importance and role of the diaspora church in America, and begin to capture a vision for the glorious multicultural, multiethnic and multinational kingdom to come. 



Prayers for the Middle East

“ The images of terror, kidnappings, hostage-taking, and war have shaken our hearts to pray even more for the peace of Jerusalem and the surrounding region. Terrorism must be condemned wherever it stands... As David said in Psalm 122, ‘May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels.’ Pray with me for hostages to be released, for protection and comfort for those facing terror, for peace to be established, and for the grace of God to be made known.”

Doug Clay, general superintendent of Assemblies of God USA

“ There is deep heaviness in the world right now and so much to be in prayer about — Israel, Gaza, Ukraine and more. Every life lost breaks the heart of God and every prayer offered to him is another step in breaking the chains in this world. Our God is bigger. Our God is in control. God can change ANYTHING. God can change ANYONE. God can change it ANYWHERE. God can change it ANYTIME. Let’s lift our prayers of faith to God. The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect (James 5:16).”

Christine Caine, founder of Propel Women and advocate for A21

Pursuing Racial Justice and Reconciliation

“ Without building a historical and biblical foundation of race, one will not have the ability to sit and listen, empathize and engage with people from different experiences and backgrounds. Without curiosity, we won’t be able to see our blind spots. Once our eyes are opened to the realities of our brothers and sisters, it’s easy to engage in pursuing justice and reconciliation.”

Mekdes Haddis, director of the NAE’s Racial Justice and Reconciliation Collaborative, in The Christian Post

“ America’s racial history may be one of the most contentious struggles of our modern political landscape. Many fear that reckoning with America’s racial sins may erode patriotism or national morale. But as Christians, we know healing is not found in hiding from the past (Proverbs 28:13). Denial of our racial past or attempts to revise it are strategies to justify ourselves, to clean up our own reputation by minimizing America’s misdeeds or by national mythmaking. But we will only find God’s mercies for healing and hope as we confess and repent in faith.”

Mika Edmondson, lead pastor of Koinonia Church in Nashville, Tennessee, in Christianity Today



“ The record of the people of God, in so many ways, is a record of their failures as well as their successes. I think we can be more effective in living for Jesus Christ today if we’re aware of the challenges that our brothers and sisters have faced in the past and how they have responded to the challenges and opportunities of their day.”

Philip Ryken, president of Wheaton College, in Christianity Today following the release of a report of the history of racism at the university

Roaring Fire of the Immigrant Church

“ As I talked to immigrant clergy for this story, one theme kept coming up: what the American church is missing. They see the American church, and the U.S. in general, as having great material wealth but being poor in matters of spirit and heart. One pastor likened the American church to a mansion with a beautiful fireplace, but no fire burning. The immigrant church, she said, is a tiny hut with a roaring fire inside.

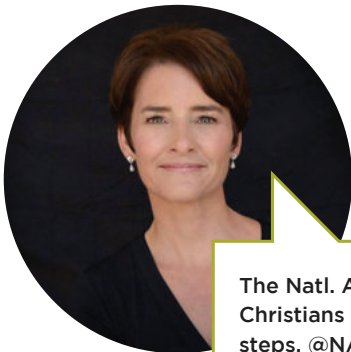
I felt that fire at the Nations Worship Service. There was an intensity and urgency that I never experienced at my childhood Southern Baptist church. I imagine many Americans who’ve left the church long for that intensity.

Neither demographers or church leaders can say for sure what American Christianity will look like in 10, 20 or 30 years. Constantly changing migration patterns are just one of many variables in the equation. What is certain is that right now in Austin, Texas, the immigrant church is on fire.”

Patrick M. Davis, Texas Standard reporter, in an article about the Diaspora Network in Austin, Texas



The National Association of Evangelicals “condemns the horrific violence in Israel and Palestine, and mourns the tragic loss of life in the region.” Statement: <https://t.co/QiGhhUJrNP>.
Kate Shellnutt @kateshellnutt



The Natl. Assoc. of Evangelicals has launched an online tool to help Christians assess where they stand on racial justice & take next steps. @NAEvangelicals President Walter Kim said the assessment is intended to “challenge, encourage and inspire” change.
Julie Roys @reachjulieroys

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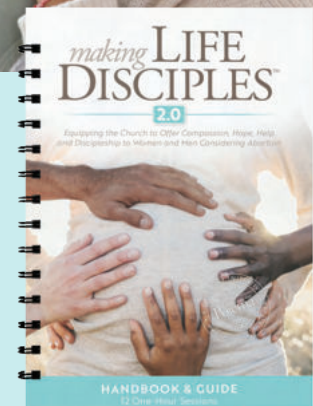
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- 1 Prayerfully watch the first session of *Making Life Disciples* at MakingLifeDisciples.com
- 2 Consider leading or identifying someone in your church to lead a life team using MLD as your basic training to get started.
- 3 If you already have some kind of "life team" at your church, consider using MLD to enhance your efforts and take you deeper.



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EVANGELICAL CALENDAR

Please join the evangelical community at these events hosted by the NAE and its members. **Your prayers are welcome, too.**

Many of these events include downloadable resources for promotion and participation.

JANUARY 22-26, 2024

Christian Student Leadership Conference

Washington, DC

National Association of Evangelicals
[NAE.org/cscl](https://www.nae.org/cscl)

The Christian Student Leadership Conference is a place where college students who care deeply about today's pressing issues come to learn how to faithfully and effectively offer a Christian witness in public policy.



FEBRUARY 7-14, 2024

National Marriage Week

Marriage Is Worth It!
[NationalMarriageWeekUSA.org](https://www.NationalMarriageWeekUSA.org)

Join with others across the country to organize a marriage event or online programming during the week leading up to Valentine's Day. Focus on practical ways to strengthen marriages in your church and community.



FEBRUARY 14-16, 2024

ABHE Annual Gathering Orlando, FL

Association for Biblical Higher Education
[ABHE.org/annual-meeting](https://www.ABHE.org/annual-meeting)

This annual meeting serves as the rallying point for 200 institutions of biblical higher education in North America. Leaders in biblical higher education gather to confer and sharpen their gifts and abilities.

APRIL 9-11, 2024

The Outcomes Conference Jacksonville, FL

Christian Leadership Alliance
[OutcomesConference.org](https://www.OutcomesConference.org)

The Outcomes Conference is an experience for nonprofit Christian professionals who want to build mission-critical competencies through expanded leadership training.

JANUARY 24-26, 2024

Presidents Conference

Washington, DC

Council for Christian Colleges & Universities
[CCCU.org/2024-presidents-conference](https://www.CCCU.org/2024-presidents-conference)

This meeting unites Christian college and university presidents for a unique time of Christian fellowship, networking, strategizing, advocating and learning.

FEBRUARY 29, 2024

Collegiate Day of Prayer

Across the Country

[CollegiateDayOfPrayer.org](https://www.CollegiateDayOfPrayer.org)

There are many ways to join us for this united, multi-generational day of prayer for revival and awakening on college campuses in America.



APRIL 21-23, 2024

EPA Christian Media Convention

Lexington, KY

Evangelical Press Association
[EPAconvention.com](https://www.EPAconvention.com)

The annual Evangelical Press Association convention presents an opportunity for Christian communicators to explore new ideas through powerful seminars, workshops, discussion and presentations.

JANUARY 29-FEBRUARY 1, 2024

ECO National Gathering

Greenville, SC

Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians
[ECOnationalgathering.org](https://www.ECOnationalgathering.org)

At its annual gathering, ECO will explore *metanoia*, the Greek word for a complete transformation of the mind and heart. Together they will look for practical ways that churches can live out God's call.

APRIL 23-25, 2024

Orange Conference 2024

Atlanta, GA

Orange
[TheOrangeConference.com](https://www.TheOrangeConference.com)

This three-day event will bring together kids, youth and next-gen ministry leaders for inspiration and practical ideas to maximize impact and sustain ministry.

WORTH NOTING

✓ Preserving Our Democracy

At its most recent meeting, the Board of Directors of the National Association of Evangelicals passed a resolution to affirm the value of representative democracy and to highlight challenges that need to be addressed in the United States.

“Today our democracy faces threats as the quality and tenor of political discourse continues to coarsen, increasingly untethered from a shared factual basis. Across the political spectrum, trust in our institutions, leaders and even the rule of law has reached a dangerous low,” the Preserving Our Democracy resolution states.

NAE President Walter Kim said, “The trust breakdown leads to a fragile society, not a flourishing one. As church leaders, we have played a role in this crisis by what we have done and left undone, and we resolve to advocate and demonstrate a positive, biblical vision for our common life together.”

Especially in light of the coming election season, Christians across the country have a unique opportunity to model a kind of engagement that

looks different from the world around them. The NAE commends our publication, “For the Health of the Nation,” and its video curriculum for small groups, as a critical resource for churches, schools and citizens who seek a positive, biblical vision for our national life.

Despite our profound differences, may we find common ground with our fellow citizens to meet these challenges so that our nation may flourish. The Bible urges us to pray for all people and for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2), and so we call on every evangelical Christian to pray diligently for our country and our leaders.

Next Steps

Read the resolution at [NAE.org/preserving-our-democracy](https://nae.org/preserving-our-democracy).

Get FREE access to “For the Health of the Nation” small group curriculum at [NAE.org/rightnowmedia](https://nae.org/rightnowmedia).

Listen to our podcast with Ryan Burge on institutional trust at [NAE.org/burgepodcast](https://nae.org/burgepodcast).

✓ Honoring the Legacy of Former NAE President Arthur Gay

Arthur Gay, former president of the National Association of Evangelicals (1982-1984) and World Relief (1991-1996), died on July 26. The positive impact he left at both organizations remains to this day.

“Art Gay was one of the most gracious leaders I have ever known. He was a great encourager, always curious and wanting to learn more,” said Galen Carey, NAE vice president of government relations. “Art was an example of generous orthodoxy, speaking the truth in love.”

One of the highlights of Gay’s NAE presidency was in 1983 when he introduced President Ronald Reagan at the NAE annual gathering prior to the president’s speech in which he famously referred to the Soviet Communist system as the “Evil Empire.” Under his leadership, World Relief expanded its

refugee resettlement program in the United States and launched new international programs in Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Myanmar, Yugoslavia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Kevin McBride, NAE board member, reflected on the importance of Arthur Gay’s timeless encouragement to church leaders today. Read his article at [NAE.org/yourcall](https://nae.org/yourcall).

✓ Partnering in Mental Health

Did you know that:

- Suicide is a leading cause of death among Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders aged 10-24;
- During 2020, one in five adults experienced mental health challenges, and less than half of these individuals received care; and
- Forty percent of Americans today struggle with anxiety or depression?

Government leaders and mental health professionals are starting to realize how indispensable faith leaders are to addressing the mental health crisis. The National Association of Evangelicals was recently invited to participate in two events organized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Gabriel Salguero, NAE board member and president of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition, spoke as a

panelist on best practices in mental health, alongside other national leaders in the faith community.

Faith leaders and communities are essential to changing the stigma around mental health issues and to creating cultures of healing. Partnering with civic and political leaders on some of the most pressing challenges is one of the unique ways that the NAE serves the Church.



✓ Urging Congress to Reauthorize PEPFAR

New HIV infections are down 42 percent from just 20 years ago when President George W. Bush made combatting HIV/AIDS a priority. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has saved over 25 million lives and allowed 5.5 million babies to be born HIV-free. PEPFAR has enriched communities, pushed on progress for human rights, and supported democracy around the world.

With PEPFAR in need of reauthorization, the National Association of Evangelicals joined with the George W. Bush Institute and other leaders to call on Congress to reauthorize PEPFAR without delay. Along with World Relief and the World Evangelical Alliance, the NAE also commended a letter from over 350 African leaders appealing for its swift reauthorization and directly addressed the concern raised by some members of Congress questioning whether PEPFAR funds have been used to perform or promote abortions:

We assure the United States Congress that the claim that PEPFAR supports or promotes abortion is to us strange, unfounded and unfortunate. In

fact, at regular PEPFAR review meetings, partners are reminded that PEPFAR does not fund certain interventions, including abortions. We urge you not to allow unsubstantiated claims to stand in the way of the United States of America's continued global leadership in ending HIV/AIDS by 2030.

As of this writing, the PEPFAR program still lacks reauthorization. The NAE encourages its members to send letters to their congressional representatives through the NAE Advocacy Center at [NAE.org/takeaction](https://www.nae.org/takeaction).





Mekdes Haddis is director of the Racial Justice and Reconciliation Collaborative at the National Association of Evangelicals.

Living United

How the NAE is Working to Build Bridges of Reconciliation

The events of 2020, including George Floyd’s death, brought a racial reckoning to the United States that many in the evangelical community and the society at large were ill-equipped to address. The heightened awareness created an opportunity for the Racial Justice and Reconciliation Collaborative (RJRC) at the National Association of Evangelicals to lead the discussion on how our community could move toward actionable steps in building bridges for racial justice and reconciliation.

Assessing Our Commitment

Informed by six months of listening to the fears, hopes and desires of evangelical leaders, the RJRC set out to develop tools to support leadership training, gather resources and host events to cultivate and care for leaders in the frontlines of this work.

Many denominational leaders expressed the need for a simple tool to cultivate curiosity and give people a first attainable step. In September 2023, the Racial Justice Assessment tool was launched. The assessment asks 20 questions aimed at creating curiosity in unengaged individuals and prompting further investigation through a suggested list of resources. With a sometimes overwhelming number of resources available, this tool helps evangelicals move forward wherever they are in the journey of racial justice and reconciliation.

Offering Space for Renewal

On the other side of this work are many BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) leaders who seek to help

their respective organizations move toward greater clarity and commitment in pursuing racial justice. It is not easy work, and many have experienced hurt, frustration and burnout. There are not many conferences or retreats organized with them in mind.

This is why the NAE hosted its first BIPOC retreat in November at the Billy Graham Training Center, featuring Sheila Wise Rowe, a racial trauma counselor. This time facilitated a unique spiritual oasis to help leaders of color rest and recover from the heavy lifting they do in primarily majority culture organizations.

“Burnout is so close for any of us in ministry. For those of us who serve in predominantly white institutional spaces it’s even closer. Offerings like this retreat are ‘I see you’ moments. So many people said they had never been in a space like this before,” said Jenn Chen, a mission leader with Pioneers, who attended the retreat.

Another attendee, Monica Mitchell, board chair of William Carey International University, agreed, “I was able to interact with others who are at the forefront of pushing





In November, the NAE hosted a retreat for leaders of color engaged in racial justice and reconciliation work in Christian ministry for a time of rest and reflection.

forward in multiethnic inclusion. In my small group, we were vulnerable with each other, we prayed and cried together. It was revelatory to see that our stories are so similar even across races. We have some of the same hurts. We struggle with the same vulnerabilities.”

She continued, “God is doing something new. The NAE’s retreat encouraged me to go deeper and fully surrender. God reminded me that I’m not alone in this work. He has called others to this work as well. I was reenergized, affirmed and refreshed.”

Providing a Cohort of Learning

Beyond personal development, the RJRC sponsored Living UNDIVIDED, a 7-week cohort for high-level evangelical leaders to grow in racial justice and reconciliation. The program offered participants a biblically-based and historically informed interactive learning environment designed to equip them in leading their organizations to pursue justice and reconciliation.


For Carl Greene, executive director of the Seventh Day Baptist General Conference, the experience reinforced the importance of a posture of learning and practicing vulnerability. “The content of Living UNDIVIDED was good, but what makes this experience stand out from other trainings I’ve done is how experiential it is. It forced me to practice taking risks by sharing my own story and perspective with a circle of people that I don’t usually interact with.”

Randy Davis, executive director and CEO of National Network of Youth Ministries, observes that the cohort was a unique opportunity to hear others’ stories and to be moved

by them. “When I hear the pain in others’ voices, it should pain me. Even though there are things that separate us — our histories and racial identities — we’re still a community, and we need to figure out how to do community better,” he said.

Greene reflects on how important the experience was for building his own confidence as a leader. “I sometimes shy away from difficult discussions regarding race because I’m afraid of saying the wrong thing or not providing the right nuances. The Living UNDIVIDED cohort built my confidence by allowing me to hear more voices responding to my perspective, to receive honest feedback, and to gain confidence that this was a safe place to try some things out with brothers and sisters in Christ.”

Pursuing racial justice and reconciliation is a lifelong journey for every disciple of Jesus. It requires listening, learning, repenting and hard work. It is both personal and communal, and it impacts our institutions and the broader society. The NAE is committed to continuing to learn how to support the evangelical community in this area and how to build bridges for greater gospel witness. **E**



Take the Racial Justice Assessment and learn more about the collaborative at [NAE.org/rjrc](https://www.nae.org/rjrc).

Consider hosting a Living UNDIVIDED cohort at your ministry at [Undivided.us](https://www.undivided.us).

A Multicultural Vision for the Church

CHARLES YU





Let's start with the easy part. God envisions a multicultural kingdom on this earth.

Revelation 5:9–10 says, "... you [Jesus] were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

The passage tells us that one day, God will take individuals from every tribe, every language, every people, every nation and create a single kingdom. This multicultural, multilingual, multinational kingdom will serve God by becoming his priests and will exercise authority in this world.

This idea is not controversial. What is controversial is the question of how God's vision of a future multicultural kingdom should manifest itself in the present in our local churches, denominations and other Christian institutions.

The question came up for me because as an Old Testament scholar, God called me to help a predominantly white church become more multicultural. After I took the job, I realized I needed to figure out what it means to be "more multicultural." One answer lies in statistics. A popular metric says a church is multiethnic if no single ethnic group comprises more than 80 percent of the congregation. If that were what it means to be "more multicultural," my job would not be that complicated. I would need to find ways to increase minority attendance, perhaps by changing how we do advertising, online branding, staff recruiting, etc.

But is that really the answer? Are we missing something?

Why Does God Want a Multicultural Kingdom?

As I thought more about this, I realized what I needed was to ask a prior question: Why does God want a multicultural kingdom? We know he wants one, but why? Knowing *why* would tell us the essentials, the must-haves, of this multicultural kingdom.

I found my answer in the Bible, and I'll put it upfront: God wants a multicultural kingdom, because a multicultural kingdom images God to the world.

We're familiar with the idea of humans being created to be the image of God in Genesis 1. "Image of God" in Hebrew is *selem elohim*, and this phrase refers to something physical that represents the essential qualities of a deity. So as a human being who images God, I have eyes, God can see; I have ears, God can hear; I have a mouth, God can speak. My personhood tells us that God is a person. To be God's image means I communicate his essential qualities.

What is often neglected when we discuss this concept is that this imaging function isn't limited to just the individual; we also image God in community. For example, a marriage between a man and a woman images God's



love for his people. This theme is repeated throughout the Bible: God is the husband, and Israel is the wife; Christ is the husband, and the Church is the bride. Thus, the union of two different sexes represents God's love for a people different from him.

This theological basis for biblical sexual ethics also serves as the basis for God's vision for a multicultural kingdom. God wants his people to be multicultural, multiethnic and multinational, because he wants to create a community that reveals his love that crosses differences. He wants to create such a community in this world, because we humans are not wired to love this way. We are wired for tribalism.

Our Tribalist Instincts

When I walk into a room full of strangers, my first instinct is to scan for someone whom I think I can connect with — someone my age, my background, maybe someone in my ethnic group. This is basic to who we are as humans. But this most basic of human instincts leads us to form groups of similar people and look down on and fear those who are different.

Andrew Sullivan writes, "Tribalism, it's

"Tribalism, it's always worth remembering, is not one aspect of human experience. It's the default human experience."

always worth remembering, is not one aspect of human experience. It's the default human experience. It comes more naturally to us than any other way of life." This tribalism is

responsible for some of the greatest atrocities in our world; it is the leading cause of injustice, cruelty, violence and warfare — and it is utterly intractable. Our world has no solution for tribalism; all we have are tribes vying for dominance. This most basic of human instincts is one of the most destructive parts of our sin nature. It is sin with a capital S.

In response to this tribalistic world, God envisions and empowers a new community that loves differently. Jesus says in Matthew 5:46–47, "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?"

His point is profound: Love in and of itself is not a big deal. It's not whether you love, but who you love. This world does indeed love — but selectively. The Church is called to be different, because God is different. God's solution to the problem of tribalism is for the Church to be the coming together of different peoples, different languages and different cultures to form a community where we maintain our differences and love each other precisely for those differences.

Pentecost marks the beginning of the Church and the debut of the Holy Spirit's work in the Church. The very first thing that the Holy Spirit does is give the Church the ability to speak across language barriers (Acts 2). In so doing, God creates a multilingual, multinational 3,000-person megachurch, a community where people from different cultures and different languages do life together. God wants to create a people of multiple cultures who love each other and who image his love for those who are different. He wants this people to be a visible, embodied

alternative to our tribalistic world that cannot love across differences. A multicultural kingdom images God for the sake of his mission to the world.

Essential Components

This understanding of God's multicultural kingdom means that the vision cannot be reduced to merely having more diversity in the congregation, the student body or staff. It requires two other essential components.

1. We need to re-envision discipleship to include cross-cultural competence.

For God's vision to work, he needs me to become a person who is drawn toward those who are different. He needs me to become a person who is naturally fascinated when I meet people of a different background, ethnicity, race or nationality. I want to learn from them. I want to know how they see God, or what they can teach me about how they relate to God. Developing cross-cultural competence needs to become a core part of Christian discipleship.

2. Multicultural means multiple cultures.

For decades, our church drew many people of color, but as we started thinking through God's multicultural vision, we came to realize that many people of color feel like outsiders; they feel like permanent guests in their own church because they do not have the cultural knowledge to shape the direction of our church. A few figure it out by assimilating to the dominant culture and codeswitching.

This way of doing church does not fulfill God's vision. Merely having people of color in our community (*multicolorism*) while implicitly or explicitly asking them to assimilate to the dominant culture undercuts God's vision. The point isn't merely that we have people of

different races and ethnicities. The point is to become a community where people love and learn from each other's cultures, and that cannot happen unless the different cultures find a place to manifest in our churches and institutions. So, for us, becoming a multicultural church means becoming a church of multiple cultures.

For our church, we are cultivating intentional culture-specific spaces — Chinese language worship, 2nd Gen+ Asian American ministry, African American ministry, Spanish-language ministry, etc. — because we want different cultures to manifest at our church, and that means empowering people of specific cultures to design and lead their space. At the same time, we are cultivating intentional multicultural spaces through gatherings that are led by a multicultural team that intentionally designs experiences to reflect multiple cultures — a fusion where nobody gets to feel like this is their space, but there is room for mutual learning and appreciation. This challenges the impulse toward tribalism and builds a new corporate identity.

Embodying God's vision of a multicultural kingdom in the present may look different in different contexts, but re-envisioning discipleship to include cultural competence and embracing multiple cultures are key to becoming the kind of community that images God's love across differences to this broken world. **E**

Examining Models of Multiethnic Churches

How Immigrants Join Existing Church Communities

Throughout my 27-year journey in Christ, my wife and I have served in various roles in eight multiethnic churches located in Atlanta, Kansas City, Raleigh/Durham, Long Beach, and Riverside, California. The churches varied in size, ranging from 12 to over 10,000 members, and encompassed a wide range of ages, from newly established church plants to those with over 100 years of operation. The following perspective on models of multiethnic churches intersects personal experience as a third-generation Mexican American immigrant and academic research.

Interactive Tested Models

In “One New Church,” Manuel Ortiz defines a multiethnic church as a congregation that “includes culturally diverse people who meet together as one congregation, utilizing one language, usually English.”

There are significant challenges to address when it comes to ministering to multiple generations, especially those who are first through third generation immigrants. The three commonly known interactive models for immigrants joining an existing church community include isolation, integration and assimilation.

1. Isolation occurs when the host and immigrant cultures coexist in the same space but have minimal or no meaningful interaction. It’s like a family welcoming someone needing a home. If neither the host family nor the individual desires to intentionally intertwine their lives, they will coexist in a state of relational segregation until a change in living situation

becomes necessary.

2. Integration refers to the interaction between host and immigrant cultures as they navigate ongoing challenges that naturally arise.

3. Assimilation is when the host culture welcomes immigrants and over time, the immigrant culture dissolves, leaving only the host culture.

I have observed both positive and negative outcomes with each model. Below are brief summaries of the outcomes.

Isolation

- Positives: Immigrant churches were given the opportunity to establish their ministries. The host and immigrant pastors established a timeline of their partnership, and the immigrant church departed when they acquired their



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own building.

- **Negatives:** The lack of interaction left immigrants feeling marginalized. Second and third generation immigrants experienced displacement from both cultures when many of them identified as a hybrid of each.

Integration

- **Positives:** Diversity in leadership often led to congregational diversity. Visitors were more likely to remain over time because they felt valued.
- **Negatives:** Residual effects from cultural phenomena such as the 2016 election, COVID-19 and George Floyd served as a litmus test, revealing the extent of integration in churches. Social media platforms exacerbated internal conflicts, resulting in a higher exodus of members and visitors from churches that had limited integration. In contrast, churches with diverse multiethnic communities and well-established systems experienced less attrition.

Assimilation

- **Positives:** Churches were able to visually represent a multiethnic presence.
- **Negatives:** Immigrant families who questioned host culture traditions or expressed a desire for more integration were often told that the host culture would not change and that they may need to find another place of worship.

In the Moment

The complexities of the interaction between host and immigrant cultures become even more intricate when the comprehensive needs of second and third generation immigrants surface. In addition to the intrafaith issues listed above, generational preferences and rhythms related to language, relationships and technology also play a role. Studies have shown normative second and third generation needs are further complicated by mental health awareness, especially among foreign-born adopted children, cultural transmission battles within diverse family structures and the

formation of personal and national self-identity.

One approach that I have found helpful in this milieu is *misión integral*. This approach, championed by C. René Padilla, aims to address the needs of all members of every ethnicity through a comprehensive gospel response, while also acknowledging the distinct differences and challenges experienced by second and third generation immigrants.

As the demographics in North America become more diverse and immigrant narratives gain prominence, it is important for local churches to come together to discuss, fast, pray and seek biblical wisdom on how to foster meaningful unity that embraces cultural, ethnic, political and socioeconomic diversity. This should be done by prioritizing comprehensive discipleship without compromising the demonstration and proclamation of the gospel. **E**



May 24, 2007 was the day my dad became a pastor. Over the years, I've witnessed generational differences within our Latino church as a pastor's daughter. There are those who came to Charlotte from Central America, displaced from their poverty- and violence-ridden home countries. They came here in pursuit of safety, building homes and families here. There are those of us who were born here, embracing American culture and

the culture of our parent's homeland.

Generational differences play out in our churches as parents and their children disagree on issues in our communities, our personal lives and the expression of our faith. Disagreements are often rooted in the challenges of balancing a commitment to the customs from our homeland and the lived experiences of children of immigrants in a complex context.

Today's Latino church needs to hold on to Peter's words in 1 Peter 3:8 as we grapple with differences: "Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble." The parents and children of our churches are called to serve and learn from one another in love, compassion and humility as we pursue flourishing and growth as a community.

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Better, By and By

Hugs when you enter the sanctuary. Hands lifted and feet moving as we engage in corporate worship. Invitations to “high-five your neighbor” throughout the sermon and to “turn to your neighbor and say...” whatever is emphasized by the preacher. The collective close with common refrains of “come here, Jesus” and “He died on the cross” and “on the third day, He rose with all power in His hands” call us into choral call and response.

Statements that need no conclusion help us remember who we are and where God has brought us from. A simple start like, “when I think of the goodness of Jesus...” or “I looked at my hands and they looked new...” or even “God is good all the time...” draw us simultaneously closer to God and to each other in the faith that brought us over.

This current reality in the Black church is not happenstance. It stems from a deep history that has been shaped simultaneously by racism and hope, oppression and

overcoming. As early as the late 1600s, Americans witnessed the impact of racism preventing black slaves from worshiping in the same places as their white masters. Yet, this separation by racism provided a sacred place for hope as slaves gathered to hear the story of Jesus who loved them and would one day deliver them out of the land of bondage.

The oppression that forced people like Richard Allen and Absalom Jones out of white Methodist churches in the late 1700s led to overcoming of faith as new Black churches and denominations were born. For generations of Black Americans,





faith in Christ was not limited by what they learned or read. It was shaped by what they experienced as they depended on God.

Today, the Black church still fulfills multiple roles in our lives. It is the place where we find safety from the challenges of the world. It is the place where we remember history when society seeks to erase it away. It is the place where we find belonging in a time of deep fragmentation.

According to Barna’s 2021 report, “Trends in the Black Church,” two-thirds of all Black adults and eight in 10 Black churchgoers said an association with the Black church brought comfort, as it is a place where Black people have control in their lives. When powerlessness prevailed in culture, the Black church has historically been a place of empowerment, courage and hope. But how can these riches of history and faith be fostered in the context of multicultural worship?

When powerlessness prevailed in culture, the Black church has historically been a place of empowerment, courage and hope.

While it is easy to turn inward, younger generations may help historically Black churches to turn outward to receive more diverse worshippers and members. This can happen when non-Black worshippers and Black church leaders are willing to take two important steps:

1. Embrace “otherness” as part of spiritual formation.

When non-Black people join Black churches, they are first struck with a sense of otherness that is different from anything else they’ve experienced. Yet, this sense that they are not like everyone else has proven to be a key factor in shaping faith, particularly for white Americans. One white couple who felt called by God to join a Black church in the southside of Chicago described their experience as “truly transformative.”

Through their church community, they were able to build relationships with people they would not have known in any other capacity. Black pastors will need to embrace this sense of otherness as well, knowing that while the principles of the gospel will not change with multiculturalism, the ability to see others as an important part of that gospel will improve.

2. Build trust through submission.

While efforts toward reconciliation have been meaningful, expanding the makeup of the Black church will require new layers of trust. Non-Black worshippers will need to adapt to the leadership and authority of a Black pastor, even when society says otherwise. They will need to understand the hierarchy of historically Black churches that tend to give more credence to pastors, elders and church mothers than they do to others, regardless of one’s background or expertise. Black pastors and leaders will have to build trust with non-Black congregants through conversation and care, sometimes giving greater time to newer members than to others. It will take time to shift the racial stereotypes that perceive Black leadership as less capable, but mutual trust can be cultivated with submission and care.

Traditional Black churches have so much to offer to multicultural worship. They can provide a collective narrative of hope and perseverance to a generation that is longing to be known by God. While the journey toward this vision of diversity will take time and we may not always know how to make it work, we can press forward believing, as my grandmother sang, “We will understand it better, by and by.” **E**



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Carl Nelson is president and CEO of Transform Minnesota.



Crossing Relational Boundaries for Church Unity

In recent years Minneapolis–St. Paul churches have experienced first-hand why the Church must be united across race and ethnicity.

A significant breakthrough began in 2017 when 30 Black and white pastors from Minnesota went on a four-day Sankofa trip through the Southeast United States to explore our history of slavery, racism and segregation, and to learn how those systems affect us still today. The trip was repeated in following years, and today more than 130 pastors and leaders have made this journey. The experience deepens relational bonds and elevates spiritual unity between these pastors, which soon became essential when crises hit.

Within days after George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis, Black and white pastors from across the region were calling each other, strategizing in Zoom conferences about how to help one another, and standing together in key intersections as a public witness of their unity. Friendships and ministry commitments, forged in recent years, made it possible for leaders to spring into action as a crisis erupted.

When all the grocery stores in some urban neighborhoods were burned or looted, urban congregations set up emergency food shelves, supplied by a pipeline of food donations mobilized from suburban and rural churches. Some of these food shelves were a primary food source for several months in the most badly damaged neighborhoods.

Just before this, as the pandemic was setting in, it became evident that the economic fallout of COVID was hitting

African American churches the hardest. Several pastors who had journeyed on Sankofa together created The One Fund to pool their monies and give emergency assistance to Black-led churches. The first gifts to the fund were pastors who donated their \$1,200 stimulus check to help fellow pastors. Unrestricted grants were quickly dispersed to allow churches to keep paying pastors’ salaries, pay utilities and keep lights on, and to make a switch to online worship gatherings.

In the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder, the need to serve and rebuild communities grew exponentially. Many Black churches were the closest at hand to these neighborhoods and had the greatest ability to serve them. The One Fund expanded its initial goal and was able to raise nearly \$1 million that was distributed to Black-led churches and ministries to run food shelves, do homeless outreach, provide youth programming, and mobilized prayer and patrol teams to intervene in crime hotspots.

In Minnesota, our ability to face multiple crises together was possible due to the deep relational connections that already existed across racial and ethnic boundaries. In these moments, we recall Jesus’ prayer in John 17 that we would be one so that the world would believe that God sent Jesus to make all things new. **E**



Diaspora Churches on the Move

Sam George, Ph.D., serves as the director of the Global Diaspora Institute at Wheaton College Billy Graham Center and as a global catalyst of the Lausanne Movement. He is of Asian Indian origin and has lived, studied and served in five countries, and currently makes his home in the suburbs of Chicago. He teaches and researches migration, diaspora missions and World Christianity globally. He has authored or edited 15 books, including a recent three-volume series on “Asian Diaspora Christianity.”

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF IMMIGRATION IN SHAPING AMERICAN CHURCHES?

America is an immigrant nation, and American Christianity is immigrant or diasporic at its core. The different waves of immigrants from many different shores of the world have led to different streams of churches in America. Over decades and

generations, they have interacted with and borrowed from each other. Some joined the streams while others switched, abandoned or created new ones. So, we say American Christianity is diasporic, meaning we are all scattered people who gather with other scattered people to worship and live on God’s mission here and around the world.



HOW HAVE THE DIASPORA COMMUNITIES PLAYED A STRATEGIC ROLE IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE UNITED STATES?

With the exception of Native Americans, we all are either immigrants or descendent of immigrants. Either we brought our unique strand of Christian faith to this land or embraced Christianity at the witness of Christians in the places of our settlement. As such, migratory displacement is a theologizing experience, and thanks to religious freedom in this country, all religions have been able to flourish and wane over time, though Christianity has gained the most adherents. Immigrants compare and contrast their inherited beliefs with those they encounter in the new places. The geocultural displacements make migrants into exceptional evangelists and missionaries, just as all foreign missionaries could be considered cross-cultural migrants.

WHAT ARE THE GREATEST STRENGTHS OF THE DIASPORA CHURCHES?

Most diaspora churches are made of Christians coming from places where Christianity is growing phenomenally (Asia, Latin America and Africa) and are bringing fresh vitality to the Christian faith in the West. The diaspora churches are globalizing the American church and the more global the American church is, the more globally connected, relevant and needed we will be.

HOW DO DIASPORA CHURCHES THINK ABOUT MULTICULTURALISM IN CHURCHES?

Most new diaspora churches in the West are transplanted “outposts” of cultural Christianity from different parts of the world with distinctive languages, cultures, traditions, spirituality and ecclesial ethos. However, when those language and cultural skills recede, and as spirituality and theological quests shift with subsequent generations, they fuse into the dominant language, culture and spirituality of the new place and time.


Christianity has been a heterogeneous and global faith since its beginning. As the gospel diffused across geographies and cultures throughout its history, Christianity always embraced others due to indigenization and translation principles. Our cultural familiarity, bias and prejudice should not isolate us in our respective silos where we consider our

version of Christianity as the perfect one or superior to others. Homogeneity runs counter to the heterogeneous order that Paul advocated in his writing and that early Christians embraced.

HOW CAN THE NORTH AMERICAN CHURCH ENGAGE WITH DIASPORAS AND THE GLOBAL CHURCH?

The North American church is the most global church on the planet on account of diaspora churches, though we remain isolated and ignorant of each other. We need to connect with those whom God has brought to our shores and neighborhoods in order to leverage those natural networks of relationship to engage the world.

The division of churches along national, racial, linguistic, ethnic and cultural lines has effectively blunted the witness of the Church in the world. We have relied more on the prevailing cultural norms and managerial principles to carry out God’s kingdom agenda here and globally. Our collective Spirit-filled witness is more powerful than our racialized, power, resource and task-oriented approaches. We must realize that North America is both a mission force and a mission field. Immigrant Christians can save us from our narrow, parochial, racialized and nationalized view of our faith.

North American churches must reimagine missions at home with the help of brothers and sisters from around the world who are here. This is vital to the future of Christianity in North America. We must look for and get acquainted with immigrants and learn from them, especially refugees, persecuted Christians and those from regions affected by our foreign policies, economic systems and climate change. We must not forget the cardinal rule in migration theories that ‘they are here because we were there.’ 



Sam George served as the principal author for a new position paper of the Lausanne Movement titled, **“People on the Move.”** Learn more about the diasporic nature of the Christian faith and missional opportunities that arise out of the large-scale human displacements. Read it here: [TinyURL.com/jdesppvv](https://tinyurl.com/jdesppvv).



Missional Hospitality

Jesus was never flustered or forced by circumstances. While his disciples panicked during a furious squall, Jesus was sleeping in the stern of the boat (Mark 4:35–41). When Pilate threatened Jesus with crucifixion, our Lord replied assuredly, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above” (John 19:11).

Jesus was never compelled by circumstances, but he was compelled by his mission. He knew that the Son of Man “must be lifted up” (John 3:14) and that he “must bring in” the other sheep not of the fold (John 10:16). This same verb “must” is translated as “had to” in the introduction of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well: “[Jesus] left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So, he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar” (John 4:3–5).

Why did Jesus feel compelled to pass through Samaria? This route was not a geographical necessity. There were many roads between Judea and Galilee, and others had more favorable terrain than the one through Sychar. Moreover, because of the deep animosity between Jews and Samaritans at that time, it would be compelling to put into your GPS, “avoid Samaria,” to find a theologically and socially acceptable route.

However, Jesus was on a mission. His visit to this well was not an accident, not a matter of convenience, not a detour. It was precisely on point. He was compelled to meet a Samaritan woman with a suspect background. Jesus intentionally and

inconveniently crossed some of the most stubborn historical, social and theological boundaries to offer “a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (4:14).

Jesus was never compelled by circumstances, but he was compelled by his mission.

To follow Jesus means busting boundaries and building bridges as we become the people of God. There are many routes to developing a multicultural church. And there are many reasons why we instinctually want to “avoid paying tolls” in our churches. Our context — historical, cultural, geographical — open some avenues more readily to us and make other paths more challenging. But the multicultural reconciliation between God and humanity, and between peoples has always been God’s mission. **E**



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