

JOSSEY-BASS

BUILDING A HEALTHY MULTI-ETHNIC CHURCH

*Mandate, Commitments, and Practices
of a Diverse Congregation*

Mark DeYmaz

○

Foreword by
George Yancey

A LEADERSHIP ✕ NETWORK PUBLICATION



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More Praise for *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*

“The twenty-first century will be increasingly characterized by local churches that reflect the ethnic and economic diversity of the Body of Christ, just as they did in the first century. Mark’s book makes a profound contribution toward the development of these churches, the kind of churches Christ most surely desires on earth as it is in heaven.”

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—Rodney Woo, senior pastor, Wilcrest Baptist Church, Houston,
Texas

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ABOUT LEADERSHIP NETWORK

SINCE 1984, Leadership Network has fostered church innovation and growth by diligently pursuing its far-reaching mission statement: to identify, connect, and help high-capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact.

Although Leadership Network's techniques adapt and change as the church faces new opportunities and challenges, the organization's work follows a consistent and proven pattern: Leadership Network brings together entrepreneurial leaders who are focused on similar ministry initiatives. The ensuing collaboration—often across denominational lines—creates a strong base from which individual leaders can better analyze and refine their own strategies. Peer-to-peer interaction, dialogue, and sharing inevitably accelerate participants' innovation and ideas. Leadership Network further enhances this process through developing and distributing highly targeted ministry tools and resources, including audio and video programs, special reports, e-publications, and online downloads.

With Leadership Network's assistance, today's Christian leaders are energized, equipped, inspired, and better able to multiply their own dynamic Kingdom-building initiatives.

Launched in 1996 in conjunction with Jossey-Bass (a Wiley imprint), Leadership Network Publications present thoroughly researched and innovative concepts from leading thinkers, practitioners, and pioneering churches. The series collectively draws from a range of disciplines, with individual titles offering perspective on one or more of five primary areas:

1. Enabling effective leadership
2. Encouraging life-changing service
3. Building authentic community
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FOREWORD

RACIAL SEGREGATION, both formal and informal, has been the norm for the United States throughout much of its history. But in these days, our country is becoming a multiracial society. In light of this, old models of church that focus on reaching a single racial group are not going to be as effective as they have been in the past. So if the Body of Christ is to adjust to our new racial future, we will have to make bold, biblical steps toward the development of churches situated to meet the needs of people of different races and cultures. The ability of contemporary and future Christians to provide a relevant witness to a multiracial, multicultural society is at stake. If our God is not big enough to provide us the spiritual strength to overcome racial barriers in our society, then how can we ask a hurting world to trust such a feeble deity?

That is why this new work by Mark DeYmaz is so exciting. I have known Mark for many years. I know that he has a mighty big heart for reaching all people for Christ. This includes people who do not come from the same culture he does and those not of his race. Mark simply desires to see people come to Christ. In this book he recognizes that to fulfill the Great Commission we cannot sit on past accomplishments, but we have to create churches that address the concerns of a new generation of Americans who are not impressed with our megachurches—churches largely made up of people of the same race and culture. We are going to have to go outside our comfort zones and be with people from other races and cultures. We will have to make a biblical commitment to minister to and with them in ways that may seem foreign to us. Only then will we be able to fulfill the Great Commission in our multiracial society.

I have had the privilege of working with Mark and others who desire to reach people from different racial groups and cultures in an effort to create what I call “multiracial” churches. As a Christian academic, I can assess these churches and learn why they succeed and fail. This is very valuable in helping to discover the practical steps necessary for making our churches places where people of all races can feel welcome. I am so grateful for the role God has allowed me to play in the movement of Christian churches toward racial inclusiveness.

But a sterile academic approach to the issue of multiracial churches does not inspire us to undertake the task of creating them. If we are to ask our fellow Christians to join us in a reformatory movement to bring the different races together on Sunday morning, we need to find scriptural support. What Mark brings that I am not equipped to provide is an understanding of the biblical mandate for having racially inclusive churches, as well as a scriptural perspective on why multiracial churches are important in contemporary United States. His contribution to the emerging movement to establish multiracial local churches throughout America and beyond is just as important, if not more so, than the role academics like myself can play, because he can go to the ultimate source of knowledge—our Bible—for the theological support this movement needs.

There are two powerful, compelling reasons we can look toward Mark's work to help us deal with the issue of multiracial ministry. First, Mark has the authority to speak on such a subject from his own personal experience leading the highly successful Mosaic Church of Little Rock. I have visited this wonderful church. Truly, it represents all of the rich diversity of the Little Rock area. This is a church that reflects its pastor's heart to reach out to those of all tribes, tongues, nations, and cultures. When Mark challenges other pastors to move out of their comfort zone, he does so with authority, because he has dared to move out into new cultural territory with his own church plant.

Second, Mark brings to this subject vital information from his theological training. Mark has written and spoken previously on the subject of multiracial ministry; and he set up much of his graduate training in the examination of this subject. Therefore, when he speaks, he does so with the confidence of one who has read the Scriptures and examined all sides of the argument. In the future when people ask me for a biblical justification for multiracial churches, this is the book I am going to recommend.

We do serve a God that is big enough to overcome the racial barriers in our society. The problem is often that we lack the faith to fully live out the power he offers to us. Mark's work reminds us of God's power, as well as our own shortcomings. Mark challenges us to move beyond the limited racial and cultural boxes we have become accustomed to and live more fully the Great Commission that has been given to us. If we are willing to take the risks necessary and to rely on the Power that is always sufficient, then the Body of Christ in the United States can be a witness of a better society and a source of racial healing that is so badly needed in our contemporary society.

August 2007

Dr. George Yancey
*Associate Professor, Department of Sociology
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PREFACE

AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS, we are to be Christ-like. The New Testament is filled with teaching and examples urging us to live in a way that pleases God. Fundamental to this teaching is the call to be united as one in Christ (John 17:21–23) and, as such, instruments of peace (Matthew 5:9). Unfortunately, many Christians living in the United States today overlook this part of the mission. Yet the breaking down of ethnic, social, and cultural barriers is one of the strongest themes in Christ's ministry, and I believe Christ's Church should reflect both his character and his passion for all people.

I grew up in the South, more specifically, in Little Rock, Arkansas. During the 1970s, my father served as Arkansas' governor; for a time I attended Little Rock's Central High School—the same Central High that shook the world in 1957, when nine Black children attempted to integrate the all-White high school. Following *Brown v. Board of Education*, the integration of Little Rock's Central High endures as a major milestone of the civil rights movement, and it is fitting that this book, written by my friend Mark DeYmaz, is being released in the fall of 2007, the very season in which the nation will mark the fiftieth anniversary of that historic event.

From my days in Little Rock, as well as in representing the state of Arkansas in the U.S. Senate, I have seen the results and ongoing challenges of racism in our country. As a follower of Christ, however, I have often wondered what a difference believers could make if, somehow, we were able to put aside our racial preferences on Sunday mornings and attend worship services together. This I believe would lead to improved relationships among the races, in living and working side-by-side throughout the week, resulting in the strengthening of our communities and our nation as a whole. More than that, I am certain it would please the heart of God.

Although it is true that we have made a lot of progress in recent years, race is still a divisive force in our culture. In addition, social status, income levels, and educational achievement are all factors that influence our preference, more often than not, to attend a church with people most like

ourselves. This aspect of our human nature, however, is rooted in sin and limits the ways in which we allow ourselves to pursue and to serve God.

I used to think things would never change and believed that cultural barriers were too strong a force to overcome in this regard. Now, however, I am convinced they are not. The Church can change and, in fact, is already changing!

There is a church in Little Rock that is breaking down these barriers and changing our city's culture. It is the Mosaic Church of Central Arkansas—a God-centered, Bible-based, evangelical community of believers that is multi-ethnic and economically diverse. God is using this body to change lives and to reach the lost. It is an amazing thing to see and even more amazing to experience. While many other churches are doing good things in Little Rock, Mosaic is influencing a systemic rethinking of things and setting an example that few churches to date have been willing to address.

With this in mind, I commend to you this work and pray that God will speak to you through it.

August 2007

Mark L. Pryor
United States Senator (AR)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

EACH OF MY CHILDREN HAS, in one way or another, helped bring Mosaic to life. Zack and Emily have been especially supportive, loyal, and involved. They have greatly lightened my load through their positive attitude and self-sacrifice. Will and Kate, too, have been wholeheartedly engaged and flexible. I will forever be grateful for children who have consistently asked, “Can I go (early) with you to church?” Daddy loves you! My mother, Dorothy, is also greatly loved and appreciated. She has always encouraged my dreams and sacrificed to help make them reality.

For more than twenty years, my friend Miles McPherson has helped me to consider the unique plight of African Americans. More recently, Greg Kappas inspired my vision for the multi-ethnic church, taught me the Word, and coached me in planting Mosaic. Ken Hutcherson further enlightened me and led Antioch Bible Church in Kirkland, Washington, to embrace our cause in the beginning. Linda Stanley at Leadership Network has also been a very consistent encourager and was the first to suggest that I write this book. My good friends, George Yancey and Jim Spoons, are co-laborers in the Multi-Ethnic Church Movement and have partnered with me to establish the Mosaic Global Network, through which a growing number of like-minded pastors, educators, and ministry leaders are now connecting. Thanks especially to Rodney Woo and to Kim Greenwood for their work in writing Chapters Twelve and Thirteen, respectively, and to Jonathan Seda and my partner Harry Li for their contributions in other chapters as well.

I have greatly appreciated the encouragement and support of Greg Ligon, Mark Sweeney, and Stephanie Plagens at Leadership Network. And at Jossey-Bass, Sheryl Fullerton and Catherine Craddock have made this a very easy and enjoyable experience. Alison Clinton and Larry Tarpley of Mosaic were also very helpful in providing additional ministry and administrative support.

Finally, I want to thank my fellow elders, Bill Head, Eric Higgins, Lloyd Hodges, Tom Holmes, and Harry Li, as well as my staff and all the people at Mosaic who are today building a healthy multi-ethnic church. Together we intend it as a gift to God, to the city of Little Rock, and to the people of Central Arkansas: a symbol of how far we have come and a strategy to address how far we have yet to go.

To Linda, who has faithfully, sacrificially, and courageously accompanied me down roads less traveled for more than twenty years: thank you for your commitment to God, to prayer, and to his Word—a commitment that has stretched, challenged, and encouraged me to become the man I am, and the man I am still becoming, today. I love you dearly.

INTRODUCTION

*A ship in a safe harbor is safe, but that is not
what a ship is built for.*

—William Shedd

IT WAS THE SPRING OF 1993, and I had two options. After ten years of full-time ministry as a youth pastor, two dynamic churches had each invited me to join their staff teams to oversee student ministries.

Antioch Bible Church was a growing and diverse congregation led by former NFL linebacker, Ken Hutcherson. I had heard of Ken's ministry for years and was honored by his enthusiastic invitation. Located in Seattle, Washington, the ministry was just two hours south of my wife, Linda's, hometown of Bellingham, and accepting the job would keep us in the western part of the United States. In addition, I had friends on staff and knew there would be great freedom to design a ministry "as the Spirit leads." Quite simply, there was nothing not to like.

Fellowship Bible Church, on the other hand, was located in Little Rock, Arkansas. *Arkansas?* I'm not kidding—Linda and I had to get out a map just to find the state! Robert Lewis, the pastor of this "equipping-oriented" church, was like Ken, an inspiring leader, and the people we met on our first visit epitomized Southern charm and hospitality. Yet visions of *Hee Haw* danced in my head:

"Won't ya' whisper me something sweet, Jimmy Bob?"

"Sho' will, Effie Mae. Nice tooth!"

I pictured the Hatfields and McCoys "feudin' in them th'ar hills" and ticks and chiggers just waiting to embed themselves in my body; I imagined eating grits in the morning and chitlins at the church potluck and cheering for a university whose mascot's a pig. *I don't know, man. I'm from Phoenix!*

Ironically, my mother, Dorothy, was born and raised in Arkansas but had somehow managed, as I once heard someone say, to “survive and make it out of there.” Some fifty years later, was God now leading me back to “her people”?

Now at that time, I was nowhere near where I am today in terms of understanding the biblical mandate for the multi-ethnic church. Indeed, I was largely unaware of Christ’s vision for unity and diversity within the local church, unity’s intended purpose, the pattern of the New Testament Church, the prescriptions of Paul, or the commitments to oneness that can lead the local church back to a place of prominent influence in the community. The fact is, I had no earthly idea that a diverse church was anything more than flat-out “cool.” I only knew that Antioch was integrated and Fellowship was not; somehow, that bothered me.

During the interview process, I asked Robert if he would ever hire an African American to serve alongside him. He told me that he would be open to doing so but not because of the color of the man’s skin. Rather, he would hire such a man only if the potential candidate was qualified and if, of course, there was a need. In other words, he would do so only if the applicant was, in fact, “the best man for the job.” I remember thinking, *Good answer*, though honestly, I couldn’t say why.

One day as we neared our decision, Linda was in the next room and I was thinking out loud: “I don’t know, Linda. I like the fact that Antioch is a diverse church in a large city out West. I mean, after all, Little Rock is so much smaller than Seattle, and it’s in the South—a long way from our families. Think about it! It’s a city infamously associated with racism. In 1957, Central High School was forcibly integrated,¹ and the schools are still controlled by the federal courts. Is this really where we want to raise our kids?”

In response, Linda leaned her head around the corner and said, “But who knows, Mark? Maybe God will use you to change things.”

“Yeah, right,” I flippantly replied. “I’m not even from the South—an outsider—and I’m going to change several hundred years of racial prejudice and segregation?”

Well that was it; we never discussed the issue again. Soon after, though, Linda and I did sense a strange but certain call to Arkansas, and in the summer of 1993, I accepted the job at Fellowship. So we moved our young family to Little Rock, home of the Hogs² and to (then) President Bill Clinton³—a place of terribly humid summers and an exciting new challenge of turning a youth group into a student ministry. It would be many years, however, before either one of us would begin to realize just how profound Linda’s words that day really were.

Branching Out

By the spring of 1997, our family had been in Little Rock nearly four years. Fellowship Student Ministries was growing healthy and strong, and with the addition of staff, I had more time to be involved with other youth leaders throughout the city. Together, we had established a local network of youth pastors who, by this time, were meeting monthly and enjoying genuine relationships of friendship and trust.

There was just one nagging reality: virtually the entire group was White.

My initial inquiries concerning the lack of African American involvement in the network yielded somewhat resigned and stereotypical answers. I remember hearing that student ministry was “not as much a priority in the ‘Black church’ as it is in the ‘White church,’” and that “the ‘Black church’ just doesn’t view youth ministry the way *we* do.” Economics, too, were cited as a contributing factor. Someone said, “Since ‘Black churches’ don’t pay their youth pastors, volunteer leaders might not be able to meet with us during the day.”

No matter the cause, I was becoming increasingly troubled with the status quo. So in April of that year, I decided to do something about it. I invited eight youth workers, with whom I had become acquainted through the years, to gather for a morning of prayer and discussion. Significantly, four of them were White and the other four were Black. My sole motive for meeting was to determine the cause for the lack of African American involvement in our network and, hopefully then, to resolve the situation.

Sponsored by Bank of the Ozarks’ president, George Gleason, and hosted by Greg Murtha, one of the bank’s employees, the meeting was both enjoyable and productive. In the quiet seclusion of a warmly decorated log cabin at the Oasis Retreat Center, the guys who came that day shared honestly and from the heart. For instance, I learned that the many African American youth leaders in the city at the time were, in fact, bivocational, and this did make it difficult for them to participate in network meetings held during the day. However, it was not at all true that Black churches didn’t pay their youth pastors or that youth ministry was somehow less of a priority in the African American churches. “How wrong it is to assume such things,” one of the African Americans said, “simply because we don’t necessarily approach it the way that you do.”

Toward the end of our time, we all agreed it was important to pursue greater understanding and cooperation. We then asked ourselves what might be done to get more African American youth workers involved in the local network.

First, someone suggested that we invite former pastor and the (then) current governor of Arkansas, Mike Huckabee, to a kick-off meeting in the fall and to address the importance of our network. We reasoned that such an event, attended by the governor, would surely draw a crowd.

Someone else brought up the fact that in just five months, the city (and, indeed, the nation) would honor the fortieth anniversary of the integration of Little Rock's Central High School. The president of the United States, the "Little Rock Nine," and many other dignitaries would likely be in town for events that week. We were brainstorming, when another person suggested that a rally of youth groups and leaders could be planned on the capitol steps that would not only bring us together but also would provide a platform to declare, *Racism is, ultimately, a spiritual problem.*

Next, we likened the passing of the forty years since the crisis at Central High to Israel's wanderings in the wilderness. Through such an event, we could stand together in declaring the dawn of a new day. Oh yeah, baby, we were on a roll!

Finally, Greg mentioned that he had a connection with the manager of DC Talk, a band that, at the time, was one of the most successful groups in Christian music. DC Talk was diverse⁴ and quite naturally had a personal interest in such matters.⁵ Perhaps, we wondered, the band could come to the city around this time and in some way be involved with us in making such a statement. Greg said that he would draft a letter and ask the governor to personally extend the invitation.

In leaving that day, we all shared the feeling that great progress had been made. Indeed, we looked forward to building a stronger, more diverse network in the future and to an event in September that might address even broader issues. Yet by the end of June, none of us had spoken again to anyone else about it.

Nevertheless, we met again on July 2nd at a local restaurant to see just what, if anything, was possible. As the smell of Petit Jean Mountain ham permeated the air of the breakfast hotspot, we gathered together, not expecting much. No news since April probably meant bad news in terms of any significant advance of the ball.

But God knew better.

Greg was the last one to arrive that day, bounding in with incredible news. He told us that he had just heard from his connection. DC Talk had not only received the governor's letter but, in fact, desired to come! "And not only that," Greg said, "but he told me that they want 'to bring some friends' with them."

"What friends?" someone asked.