

# 1

---

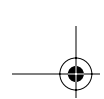
## INTRODUCTION

---

Soon after accepting my present academic position, my wife and I began searching for a church. We had just moved to Fort Worth, and finding a church in a place where you have never lived before is often difficult. Being married complicates the task, as you must combine the interests and needs of two individuals instead of one. We found a church relatively close to our home. That church had many fine qualities that we both wanted: friendly individuals, a dynamic pastor, and solid theology. But I was uncomfortable because almost no individuals of color attended the church. I had joined predominantly white churches before, but I am at a point in my life where I want to be in a church containing a reasonable number of racial minorities.

My wife started attending a women's Bible study. Many of the church leaders attended this Bible study. She relayed my concerns—that the church was practically all white—to some of the women in that study. The reaction of the women was quite predictable. They maintained that they were not prejudiced and that their church was quite open to people of all races. They stated that anyone was welcome, including people of other races. They simply could not understand why racial minorities did not come to their church.





I had met many of these women. They were right when they said that they welcomed me, an African American. I sensed no racial bigotry in any of the members of that church. Yet I also knew that African Americans were not, in large numbers, going to join this church at any point in the near future. The reason why this church was going to remain predominantly white for the conceivable future was not because the church leadership intentionally barred racial minorities. Rather, it was due to the inability of this church, like most American churches, to create multiracial Christian environments.

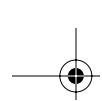
It is a common belief that Sunday morning is the most segregated time of the week. Unfortunately, this is still the case in America. Whereas we have seen the number of integrated schools and workplaces increase,<sup>1</sup> it is unclear whether there has been any increase of integrated churches. If multiracial churches are desirable, then we clearly have not done a good job in creating integrated religious institutions. Yet many Christians who desire to create multiracial churches are at a loss for how to go about doing so. They are not unlike my wife's friends who wonder why people of other groups do not attend their church even though they are very willing to accept people of other races as new church members.

The question of my wife's friends continues to haunt our churches in America. How do we guide those who truly want to racially diversify their congregations? The main focus of this book is to provide principles that will enable a church to become multiracial or to help a multiracial church maintain its racial diversity. Each church has unique factors that can either inhibit or encourage mixtures of races. For this reason I have chosen to present general principles that can be adjusted for a particular church rather than try to offer specific advice for all potential and actual multiracial churches.

## DEFINING MULTIRACIAL CONGREGATIONS

Before I discuss the creation and maintenance of multiracial churches it is first important to define the term "multiracial church." Clearly a

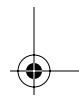
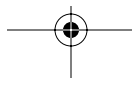


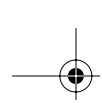


church of one thousand whites with an Asian American does not have the same type of racial mixture as one that has three hundred Asian Americans. In defining a multiracial church it is important to assess the percentage of people who are a different race than the majority racial group in the church. However, there are also issues of culture and ethnicity that must be taken into account in the definition as well. It is important for me to address these issues as I explore what a multiracial church is.

For the purpose of this book I will define a multiracial church as a church in which no one racial group makes up more than 80 percent of the attendees of at least one of the major worship services. If we define multiracial churches in this way, then only 8 percent of all American churches are multiracial.<sup>2</sup> This standard means that a church can be multiracial even if four out of every five individuals in that church are of the same race. If we demand a more rigorous definition of racial diversity, then even this 8 percent estimate of multiracial churches is too high. While there are scholarly reasons to believe that even this small percentage of members from different races is enough to change the racial atmosphere of the church,<sup>3</sup> it can also be argued that churches with such a high percentage of members of the same race are not multiracial. Yet, for the purpose of this book, I will define multiracial churches with this 80 percent criterion, even if some may disagree with this definition, since there is sociological evidence that such churches differ from monoracial churches.<sup>4</sup>

Even though only 8 percent of all churches have a worship service in which no more than 80 percent of the attendees are of a given race, in a higher percentage of churches the actual membership of the church is racially diverse. This occurs because missions or outreach programs bring in members of different racial groups (e.g., outreaches to immigrant groups or inner city ministries), but those individuals worship at a different time or place than the main body of the church. These churches have a main worship service made up of members of a given race and separate worship services for other races. For example, in graduate



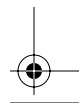
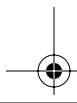


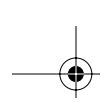
school I was a member of a predominantly white church that had a mission outreach to an African population in our city and a mission outreach to Hispanic Americans in the neighborhood. Yet these two groups did not regularly worship with the main body of the church.

In one sense this may be considered a multiracial church, as distinct racial groups learn how to work together in the same building. However, there is little social interaction between the different racial groups. This church had few functions where all three of the racial populations of the church were encouraged to attend—and those events were considered novelties, not opportunities to develop long-lasting friendships. Such a church simply does not experience many of the benefits and challenges of multiracial ministry. I believe that the difficult task faced by Christian leaders today is to create real multiracial fellowship, rather than merely learning how to share a church building with members of another racial group. So for the purpose of this book, I will also define multiracial churches as those where members of different racial groups attend the same worship service.

While ethnicity is a concept that is similar to race, there are important distinctions that have to be acknowledged. Generally, ethnicity refers to groups that have cultural distinctions, while race is used to denote groups that are perceived to be physically different from each other. When we talk about those with contrasting ethnicities we are looking at the distinctions between Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, Germans and Swedish, Japanese and Chinese. Most Americans, for example, do not perceive the two groups in each of the previous pairs to be physically different from each other, but rather to have distinct cultures from each other. On the other hand, racial differences are based on the perception that groups have physical differences. When we talk about blacks and whites, we are talking about groups that most Americans perceive as physically different from each other.<sup>5</sup>

Ethnicity can be a very important factor in examining social divisions. It might be argued that multiethnic is a better term to use than multira-

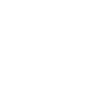
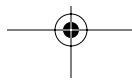


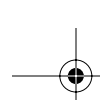


cial. Multiethnicity also has a sounder scriptural basis since different ethnic, but not racial, groups are discussed in the Bible. The concept of race and racism itself is relatively new in human history, and so multiracial congregations are not discussed in the Scriptures, although there are examples of multiethnic ones (e.g., Jews and Gentiles worshiping together). Multiethnic congregations of that time likely engendered the same types of difficulties as multiracial congregations face today. Thus, by concentrating on the idea of multiracial congregations, a concept that is not in the Scriptures, I am touching upon the same issues that must have come up with the multiethnic churches that are discussed in the Scriptures.

In this book I will concentrate on multiracial churches instead of multiethnic ones. With one exception, the churches I have studied were not merely multiethnic, but also contained different racial combinations. I argue that in our society racial differences carry more social significance than ethnic differences. While ethnicity can be a barrier to understanding between members of diverse groups, especially if we are dealing with first-generation immigrants, usually racial distinctions create the most problems in our society. Thus, a German-Swedish church generally has far fewer problems to contend with than a black-white church. To examine how Christians can overcome the most intense social barriers, we must look towards multiracial, rather than just multiethnic, churches. While there are tremendous challenges for attracting first-generation immigrants, who are most likely to focus on ethnic differences rather than racial distinctions, my contention is that the greater problem lies in overcoming racial barriers in the United States, and that there has been lax motivation to inspire congregations to resolve racial alienation. My prayer is that this resource will open our hearts to facilitate racial healing for Jesus' sake.

I also want to make clear that I will not be using the term *multicultural* when I describe these churches. It is true that most of the churches in the Lilly study can be correctly described as multicultural since contrasting racial groups tend to bring distinct cultures into the congregation.





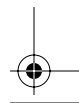
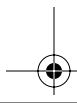
But the term *multicultural* has been used to enunciate dimensions such as gender, age, sexual preference, and regional differences. Given the comprehensive way that the concept of multiculturalism is commonly used, I believe that it is too vague a term to use for describing the type of churches I explored. Therefore, *multicultural* is not as accurate as is the term *multiracial* when describing these churches.

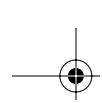
Finally, when I discuss multiracial congregations I am not limiting my discussion to just black-white churches. Many people think about race relations as just a black and white issue, but multiracial churches can include any combination of different racial groups in our society. The multiracial churches I have studied contain some combination of whites, blacks, Latinos or Asians.<sup>6</sup> In fact the multiracial churches were more likely to be white and either Latino or Asian than to be white and black.

### THE LILLY STUDY OF MULTIRACIAL CHURCHES

I learned much about multiracial churches through my travels over the past two years. As a co-researcher of a major sociological project<sup>7</sup> I was blessed with an opportunity to learn about multiracial churches first-hand. Our multiracial congregational project was sponsored by a grant by the Lilly Endowment. Dr. Michael Emerson and Dr. Karen Chai were co-researchers in the project. They are both committed Christians who are devoted to both conducting solid research and serving Christ. Michael Emerson, the principal researcher, is writing an academic book that is based on this data. The task I have chosen for myself is to present a more accessible, practical book on the principles of multiracial church growth for Christian leaders who are interested in maintaining or starting a multiracial ministry.

As researchers, we wanted to explore the social scientific questions that surround multiracial churches. As Christians, we wanted to know if multiracial Christianity was truly possible in an America where racial alienation is commonplace. The answer is yes—but only with hard



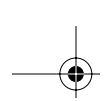


work. Again and again I saw successful multiracial churches. These churches did not happen by accident. In the following pages I hope to document examples of some of the hard work that created these multiracial ministries and to provide tools for those who wish to engage in such labor. By doing so I hope to create a book for pastors and church leaders who want insight into creating or sustaining racially integrated congregations. This book will give some valuable principles that they can adapt to their own particular settings.

To accomplish this purpose I use the results of the Lilly research project and my own personal experience in interacting with multiracial ministries to investigate these principles. There were four major steps to this research. First, we conducted a national telephone survey that targeted individuals who went to multiracial churches as potential respondents. Second, we sent out a questionnaire that was completed by the leaders of multiracial churches. Third, we went to several cities in the United States and interviewed pastors and attendees of multiracial congregations. During each of these three steps, we also included individuals who attend monoracial churches, and monoracial churches themselves, so that we would have a group of individuals or churches to compare to our multiracial attendees or churches. Fourth, I sent a short follow-up questionnaire to churches that had been previously identified as multiracial. This questionnaire basically asked about the characteristics of multiracial churches. More information about the methodology of this study is contained in appendix A.

Finally, I want to note that this is not an academic book. I have intentionally avoided the academic jargon and theory that so often makes it difficult for social scientists to communicate with those who could otherwise benefit from our work. To help me enunciate answers for Christians who wish to engage in multiracial ministry, a purely academic treatment of this topic is not the best way to present the material. I chose to use a less technical writing style that reaches a broader audience. However, I have used the endnotes to document some of the statistical





findings that I gathered in the data and that substantiate many of the claims I make in the book.<sup>8</sup> If you are not interested in exploring some of the methodological ways I developed my conclusions and are only interested in a practical presentation of these findings, then feel free to ignore those notes.

Chapter two will explore the past and present reality of multiracial churches in our society. In chapter three I will examine the question of whether multiracial churches are desirable in America. In chapter four I will explore the different types of multiracial churches that exist. Chapter five contains a brief summary of the general principles that help to determine the level of success that multiracial churches enjoy. Chapters six through twelve explore these principles and demonstrate examples I discovered in the multiracial churches that we have researched over the past two years. In the last chapter I will conclude with a few final important issues and with special attention given to the topic of attracting African Americans into multiracial congregations.

