

A Vision for Racial Harmony & Integration*

Scripture teaches that the church is comprised of those the Lamb ransomed with His blood, a group consisting of every tribe and language and people and nation. (Revelation 5:9)

Within the body of Christ God has indeed redeemed His church from among each and every socio-economic status, language, people group, race, and ethnicity.

Those who are born again to believe in Christ are redeemed and are all equally children of God and equal in Christ, for they are all heirs. (John 1:12-13; Galatians 3:26-29)

ETHNIC DIVERSITY: A CHURCH VALUE

Since God is concerned about building a church comprised of all people groups ...

- those in His churches should also be concerned about all people groups.
- local churches should be a microcosm of the church universal in reflecting God's concern for all people groups.
- local churches should strive for heterogeneity, at least to the extent of the community's demographics.

A DEFINITION OF CONGREGATIONAL RACIAL HARMONY

The harmonious intermingling of all types of peoples in a community of redeemed, baptized Christians who live to follow Christ by loving God and other people, thereby impacting lives to the glory of God. However, such a church does not compromise doctrinal fidelity, God's standards of holiness for the believer, or its commitment to the great commission of making disciples of all nations nor does it presume to be able to love God or His people apart from divine assistance.

A CHURCH RESOLUTION FOR RACIAL HARMONY

“Contrary to the history of the American church and contrary to the contemporary mindset of many churches in our land, we will follow God's leading in demonstrating love across racial boundaries by striving for a congregation that better reflects the demographic make up of our community as a testimony to God's love for all people and as a testimony to the world of the transforming power of God's love to unite across racial boundaries so that, ultimately, God will be glorified.”

* Inspired by the sentiment of Bethlehem Baptist Church of Minneapolis, Minnesota, in its Vision for Racial Harmony. Adopted by the congregation of Providence Church on recommendation of the elders on April 29, 2007.

- ***“Contrary to the history of the American church ...”***

We repent of past wrongs committed in the name of Christianity in our country whereby some people groups were mistreated because of the color of their skin. We repent of anything in the history of our church and/or denomination that might have contributed in any way to such sin. We lament the fact that the non-Christian world has been more concerned about racial reconciliation than the church and that the church has been dragging its feet rather than leading the way in showing the non-Christian world the transforming power of God’s grace to bring together people of all races. We will keep our eyes open to social injustices in our land and declare them sin, being counter-cultural in our Christian witness when necessary.

- ***“and contrary to the contemporary mindset of many churches in our land”***

Far too many churches are not concerned about racial reconciliation or even concerned about those people God has placed in their geographic proximity. This is seen in lack of outreach and/or fleeing the inner city areas to the suburbs. Other churches are particularly striving for homogeneity by actually targeting only certain types of people for their congregations.

- ***“we will follow God’s leading in demonstrating love across racial boundaries ...”***

God has demonstrated love throughout the pages of human history and in the pages of sacred Scripture, but most clearly in His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus’ love transcended educational levels, classes, and ethnic backgrounds. As our example, our commitment should be to mirror that love that transcends culture and ethnicity.

- ***“by striving for a congregation that better reflects the demographic make up of our community ...”***

Just as the early church was comprised of both Jew and Gentile, so should our church reflect the different groups represented in our community. Just as there were challenges in the days of the early church, so should we anticipate difficulties, but only those that can be overcome through our bond in Christ which transcends other identifying factors (e.g., ethnicity, gender, educational level, and income).

- ***“as a testimony to God’s love for all people ...”***

Ironically, Christianity is at times viewed as a “white man’s religion.” Although God is concerned about and loves all types of people, His love is more easily seen when congregations in Christ’s church are visibly constructed of different types of people.

- ***“and as a testimony to the world of the transforming power of God’s love to unite across racial boundaries ...”***

Sadly, the watching world sees the church as apathetic, at best, and hostile, at worst, regarding racial harmony. Government, educational systems, sports, and employment agencies have led the way in equity among the races, demonstrating a greater concern for all races. To our shame, churches are among the last bastions of segregation. But only God’s love has the real power for lasting transformation across racial boundaries and His people need to show that to the world.

- “so that, ultimately, God will be glorified ...”

As a church and people of God, we strive not for our glory, but for God’s alone. As we embrace the notion of *Soli Deo Gloria*, we realize that this goal will be furthered when the world and God’s people see God’s transforming grace glorified in the harmonious congregations of those redeemed from every ethnic group, worshiping and growing together in community.

PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARD REALIZATION OF OUR VISION

Organizationally:

1. Embrace such a vision officially.
2. Examine with vigor the church and its practices to determine if there is anything that is, intentionally or unintentionally, unappealing and/or repelling to those of other ethnicities.
3. Strive to show Christ’s love to our community by concerted outreach strategies to see people come to Christ and come to join our congregation.
4. Strive to help those underprivileged financially who may also be different than us ethnically.
5. Remind the congregation of our value on racially representing our community.
6. Pray for God to show us where we have been wrong in this area so we may repent and change where necessary, by His grace.
7. Pray for God to build His church in a diverse fashion.
8. Pray for God’s grace to assist us in loving those that we do not find as easy to love.

Individually:

1. Become a student of other cultures, particularly those in geographical proximity, to assist in developing a real love for people of other cultures.
2. Recognize that the tendency of human nature is to gravitate to people like us (e.g., age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, etc.) and contend to develop relationships with those unlike you, especially racially.
3. Pray for an ethnically diverse congregation that glorifies God’s transforming grace and educates the world as to the only true and lasting basis of racial reconciliation.
4. Ask God to show you any sinful behaviors or prejudices that you might repent of them, also asking for the grace to change.
5. Ask God to show you just how pervasive racism is in our culture so that you might fight against it.
6. Ask Christians of other ethnicities, especially in our congregation, how you might be more sensitive in your efforts to love them.
7. Love your neighbor as yourself.