

The Church: Kingdom Focused

By: Melissa Lilley and Thomas Crane

WINSTON-SALEM (BSCNC Communications) - Considerable attention seems to be given to the fact that the church today is under attack. Titles such as *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, *Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* and *Quitting Church* populate the bookstores. Research offers church leaders suggestions on how to multiply the church, how to measure a healthy church and how to make disciples in the church. Yet, exploration of multicultural ministry and how to make the church multicultural is not quite so popular. So much time has been invested in fighting for the existence of church and proving the need for church that the question of what the church should actually look like has been largely ignored.

Dr. Danny Akin, President of [Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary](#), during a lecture on the church earlier this year, said, "We can integrate the military, we can integrate athletics and the work place but we can't allow the church on earth to look like what it's going to look like in heaven? I am absolutely convinced that God will not visit us with revival or with a great moving of His Spirit unless we get our hearts right about this particular area."

Multicultural churches don't just happen, as David Anderson points out in *Multicultural Ministry: Finding Your Church's Unique Rhythm*. "Few churches become incidentally or accidentally multicultural due to changing demographics in their community...As our nation swings toward a more ethnically diverse society, unicultural churches will face a major multicultural challenge. Church leaders will have to decide whether they will get into the dance of multicultural ministry or remain wallflowers holding up the tradition of racial separatism."

Rodney Woo, a keynote speaker at the Kingdom-Focused Perspective conference Aug. 14-15 at [Calvary Baptist Church](#), talked about this multicultural challenge during his presentation on creating a Kingdom-focused impact from a Biblical perspective. The conference was all about helping church leaders be intentional in multicultural ministry; which, as Woo and every single conference speaker emphasized, is indeed a biblical mandate. Woo pastors the multicultural congregation of [Wilcrest Baptist Church](#) in Houston, Texas. He walked conference participants through the Scriptures in order to show how the Bible points to a church that looks like heaven, something like "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Rev 7:9-11). "We should aim for heaven here on earth," Woo said.

Woo still has a hard time getting over the fact that evangelical churches in America are more segregated than mainline denominations. "Too many of us are going to have culture shock in heaven," he said. Which is a shame, because all humans are created in the image and likeness of God; "other cultures enrich our walk with and worship of God" and no ethnicity has a corner on the image of God.

Woo, who is half Anglo-American and half Chinese, grew up in a predominately black neighborhood with black friends and attended a predominately black school. He married Sasha, a Latino. With a laugh he told attendees he calls his kids confused - but he wouldn't have it any other way. Growing up Woo spent every day, except Sunday when his family attended an all white church, with his black friends. Once Woo felt God calling him into ministry he determined he would not fall into the same pattern of segregation he experienced as a child. Today, 43 different countries are represented in the Wilcrest congregation. The church really began to grow when the congregation dropped below 50 percent Anglo-American and a majority ethnic group no longer existed. The church has been featured on [PBS](#), [CNN](#) and the *Dallas Morning News*.

Most churches in America look nothing like Wilcrest. In fact, church leaders have probably heard it said that Sunday at 11 a.m. is the most segregated hour in American culture. Churches do not need to, and they cannot, model exactly the Wilcrest multicultural outreach because not every community is as diverse. The question is not how to model a church after another church, but rather, does the membership of a church represent the local community in which God has placed it? Are people from every skin color, tribe, culture and language within a certain community represented in the church's attendance and membership? Ken Tan, Multicultural Ministries Team Leader for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (BSCNC), prays that more churches in North Carolina would effectively emulate the example given in [Acts 16:19-26](#) and the multi-ethnic body of believers in Antioch. The Kingdom-Focused conference was birthed from Tan's desire to educate and equip believers to cultivate biblically founded, multicultural churches.

Josh Davis, a missionary kid from South America and worship leader at Anchor Church in Loganville, Ga., led worship during the conference. The songs combined ancient hymns and modern worship songs. Each song was translated into multiple languages on the PowerPoint with Josh leading the singing in English, Spanish and a chorus or two in Russian and Tagalog (Filipino). Davis is not fluent in each language used during the song set, but he made the effort to learn choruses in different language so that, in the words of [1 Corinthians 9:22-23](#), "I become all

things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel." One simple step toward helping a church become multi-ethnic is making people feel welcome and accepted. Including in a service words to songs, prayers and Scripture reading translated into people's heart language goes a long way in doing just that.

Gus Reyes of the Baptist General Convention of Texas gave conference participants an orientation of first, second and third generation immigrants. In order to effectively reach and minister to immigrants from other cultures Reyes suggested getting to know their culture. First generation immigrants are often still learning English and hold closely to the traditions and customs of their home country. The church seeking to witness and minister to those in the first generation need to learn these customs.

Another speaker, John Houze of Peoples Baptist Church in Kings Mountain, N.C., asked participants to think of the body and bride of Christ as being divided and incomplete when not diverse. People get a mixed message when they hear the church quote the Great Commission and say the gospel is for all people, only to turn around and then segregate the bride of Christ. The light of the church shines brightest and has its greatest evangelistic and missionary element when it is multi-ethnic. Houze said churches going by the "birds of a feather flock together" model have no biblical precedent and actually encourage

segregation, deny the power of the gospel and cultivate a consumer Christianity.

Pastor Samuel Duong, who leads three different Cambodian churches, attended the conference. Each Sunday Duong preaches in Spartanburg, Charlotte and Greensboro. Charlotte has a population of more than 5,000 Cambodians and Greensboro more than 3,000, most of which are first generation immigrants. He knows these churches are not yet multi-ethnic and he came to the conference to try and better understand how to move congregations in that direction.

Larry Phillips, Hispanic Coaching Consultant with the BSCNC and former [International Mission Board \(IMB\)](#) missionary, does not think it makes much sense to send an IMB missionary to evangelize a people group in a foreign country only to have believers in North Carolina ignore immigrants from that same people group who live in cities across the state. Consider that in 2008, 7.4 percent of the population in North Carolina was Hispanic, 21 percent African-American. Every week 3,000 Muslims attend services at a mosque in the Raleigh area and 5,000 Asian Indians attend services at two Hindu temples in the Charlotte area. About 180 language groups are represented in this state. "The goal in the multicultural church is not to make immigrants more like us," Phillips said, "but rather to share the gospel in a context which they can understand it."

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