

ON EARTH



AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Amy Randall

BY GLEN KINOSHITA

Although the last few decades have seen steady progress in civil rights, as evidenced by the increased diversity of many schools and organizations across America, what remain stubbornly problematic are our faith communities. Despite the values we profess as Christians with respect to equality and justice, the church remains arguably the most segregated body in contemporary American society.

In light of this troubling state of affairs, *PRISM* solicited a conversation with Adam Edgerly and Ken Fong, pastors of churches that uphold racial reconciliation as a core value, and Brad Christerson, a sociologist who co-authored *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations* (New York University Press, 2005). We asked them to share their thoughts as they reflect on their experience and research.

PRISM: Tell us a little about yourselves and what led you to be involved in addressing diversity from a Christian perspective.

Christerson: I grew up in Colorado in a white, middle-class community. It wasn't until I was a junior in college, taking my first sociology course, that my eyes were opened to the reality of the world outside my sheltered, relatively privileged background. As a Christian, I was troubled that the suffering and oppression that exist in the world were never addressed in the church I grew up in. So my career has been oriented around the tension between the world as Christian

theologians describe it and the world as sociological data describes it. As a part of this, I became interested in race and ethnicity and how the systems that produce segregation and inequality in our society make their way into churches and faith-based groups.

Fong: I grew up in a bilingual Chinese/English congregation. When I entered ministry, my focus was on English-speaking Chinese and then eventually included Japanese Americans, whom I saw as an unreached people. Back in the early '90s, I went to the Urbana missions conference, where I was exposed to the biblical teachings of justice. It was there that I started to be transformed, to see we needed to deemphasize homogeneity and to emphasize racial reconciliation and the kingdom of God. At the same time, my own family was growing in diversity: I am Chinese American and my wife Japanese American; one of my brothers married a white woman and another married a Pacific Islander, and they started having biracial kids. One of my brothers and his wife adopted a kid who is half African American and half white. So we have a black person in our family with a Chinese family name. Through all of this I felt that the Lord was reworking my theology, and the result is Evergreen Baptist Church in Los Angeles, an historically ethnic-specific, immigrant church that is now on the cutting edge of building redemptive communities of people from all kinds of backgrounds.

Edgerly: Growing up, I was always in the midst of ethnic and cultural diversity. The neighborhood I lived in and the schools I attended provided me with constant interaction with people who were different from me. I became a Christian while in high school and joined a white church where I was the only African American in attendance. Because this church was in a neighborhood that was one-third African American, one-third white, and one-third Latino, I often wondered why the congregation was so segregated. I later went to a Christian university that was predominately white and had issues with their students of color. These experiences drove me to study historically how the church got this way and to ask if the gospel addresses the topic of diversity. As I studied the Scriptures, I found that bringing people of diverse backgrounds together was at the heart of the gospel, and yet I didn't see diversity as a reality in the local church. I eventually came to a place called Newsong Church in Irvine, which is in Orange County, Calif., because I saw that the lead pastor was passionately trying to bring people of diverse backgrounds together in the church.

PRISM: Dr. Christerson, the research in your book focuses on ethnically diverse faith communities. What prompted you to do this research, and what did you learn from it?

Christerson: Faith organizations are among the most segregated ones in America. We thought we could better understand this segregation by studying communities that were racially integrated—exploring how they became integrated and the difficulties involved in pulling it off. In other words, we thought we could understand the process of segregation better by studying the exceptions to the rule. We also wanted to know if people were experiencing any social and spiritual benefits by being in an integrated setting. Also, because faith communities are more segregated than other types of organizations, we reasoned that there must be unique obstacles to bringing people of different ethnic groups into a faith community. We did six in-depth case studies of faith communities varying in size, ethnic mix, and mission, and conducted approximately 30 in-depth interviews with members of the communities as well as interviews with the leadership and people who had left the communities.

We found a number of interesting common dynamics in these very different communities. Typically there was one dominant ethnic group, and those outside that ethnic group (the

numerical minority group members) had a hard time developing friendships and feeling at home. This makes it hard for faith communities to remain diverse, because finding friendships and community is a central reason for being there. So you have a lot of turnover of non-dominant group members because they feel relationally disconnected.

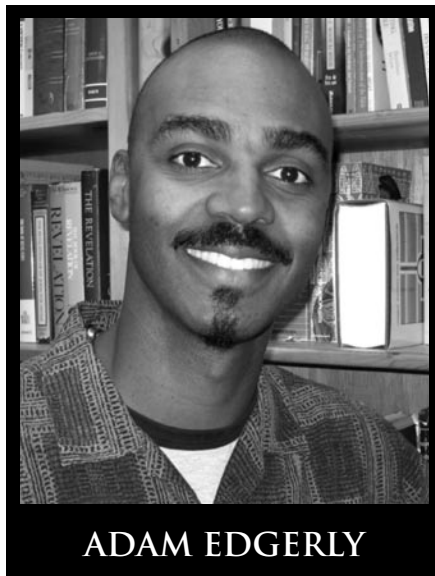
We also found a lot of conflict over ways of doing things (worship, preaching, evangelizing, etc.). What makes these conflicts difficult is that in a faith environment people tend to talk about cultural differences in absolute terms, making compromise difficult. For example, something as minor as how rigidly you time the church service can lead to major conflict. In one church we studied, the white members thought that showing up late to church is disrespecting God, but the African American church members thought that rigidly timing everything squelches the Holy Spirit. In a faith environment cultural differences quickly become conflicts over what is the “godly” or “biblical” way of doing things.

Lastly, we found that the dominance of whites in the larger society had an effect on these congregations. White members were more likely than members of other groups to be in leadership and to demand changes. They were also less likely to be involved in congregations where they weren't the dominant group in numbers and in leadership. We also found that leaders of other ethnic groups were more likely to try to accommodate the preferences of whites than of other ethnic groups.

PRISM: Pastors, was it your intention from the start to be multiethnic? If so, what steps did you take to implement this?

Fong: No, it was not. We originally intentioned to be a cutting edge ministry to English-speaking Chinese and Japanese Americans.

Edgerly: This was indeed our intention and purpose from the start. Originally, Newsong was one large congregation and was 80 percent second-generation Asian American. The second largest group (17 percent) was white, and a mix of other ethnic groups made up the remaining 3 percent. The vision we had was to plant a new congregation in a location that was predominately African American and Latino, since those were the ethnic groups that were in the minority in our church. A team from the Irvine church came to Los Angeles with the intention of planting a new church. We drew from the neighboring parts of L.A. County that were more urban.



ADAM EDGERLY

Because of the demographics we felt it was important to have an African American pastor who could not only relate well to his own people but to a variety of ethnic groups as well. I eventually was chosen to be that person. We went into this with a team of about 15 people: four paid staff (three African Americans and one white) and a volunteer core team that was primarily second-generation Asian American.

PRISM: Different cultural and ethnic groups have different styles of worship, preaching, and ways of doing ministry. What sort of issues arose in your research and experience?

Edgerly: One of the most apparent issues was the style of worship and music we did in this new church plant. Many of the people in our church-planting team preferred the style of worship we had at our site in Irvine, an alternative rock style of music, and hence would push for that. We made it clear that we wanted to use a music style in this new church that was more R&B and hip-hop because we wanted to reach people in the surrounding community who were predominately African American and Latino. Most on the ministry team adjusted; some, who didn't adjust, ended up leaving.

Christerson: We found that multiethnic faith communities that integrated culturally diverse ways of worshiping, preaching, and doing ministry were much more able to manage conflict and retain a diverse constituency. One example was a church that combined gospel, contemporary, salsa, and other musical forms in its Sunday worship. The three pastors (African American, white, and Latino) also rotated preaching week to week. It allowed for each of the three main ethnic groups of the church to worship and hear the Word preached in their "heart language"—a way that they connect to. It also allowed people to benefit from perspectives and ways of doing things that were different from their own ethnic group, which they said expanded their view of God. Organizations that were diverse but had only one dominant way of doing worship, preaching, and ministry had more conflict, more frustration among minority groups, and more turnover.

Fong: In my book, *Pursuing the Pearl* (Judson Press, 1999), I spoke about the epiphany I had about Asian American preaching. Years ago the editors of a nationwide Christian magazine were doing a cover story on ethnic churches in America, and so they had interviewed a group of us who

were ethnic church leaders. One of the deans of a prominent East Coast seminary was complaining to the African American pastors that members of their congregations all seem to go to African American seminaries and not to his seminary even though they were trying to improve diversity. This dean asked what it would take to enroll more African American students.

One pastor asked, "Do you require students to take American church history?" The dean answered, "Sure we do." The pastor then inquired if the African American church experience was included in the curriculum. The dean answered no. The pastor then inquired as to how effective members of his community would be to serve the African American church if all they learn is a Eurocentric curriculum. He then inquired about how preaching is taught in the semi-

nary and if members of his congregation would be adequately equipped to preach in the African American church after graduation? The pastor concluded by saying that he would send students to the dean's seminary when he felt their students would get their money's worth. Hearing this conversation caused me to reflect on my own training: I studied a predominately Eurocentric curriculum and didn't learn about Asian American church history or preaching. It made me feel as if my story doesn't count.

I have been praying and striving for years to bring a more R&B, black Gospel style of worship into an Asian context. We have now been doing it for the past two years. We do experience

some backlash from traditionalists who prefer a more mel-low style, but we wanted to infuse more energy into our worship. We also are bringing more Brazilian jazz and Latin percussion into the worship band.

PRISM: From your perspective, what kind of challenges do we face as we address reconciliation from a theological perspective?

Fong: One of the most obvious is that there are many Christians who, when they hear of diversity in the church, immediately conclude this is all from the Political Correctness movement, or it's the liberal, secular, humanistic agenda creeping into the church. Hence, we have those who immediately assume this is not biblical. I think a large reason for this thinking is that we don't spend nearly enough time establishing how thoroughly biblical it is. It is profoundly biblical.



KEN FONG

Edgerly: It is very clear from Ephesians 2 that God is bringing together people who were previously separate. The “wall of hostility” has been torn down. We look at this as a mandate and not an option. A declaration we have at Newsong is that we embrace a “culture of discomfort.” Being a follower of Christ will mean some discomfort in this world, and if we are not experiencing discomfort then maybe we are not challenging ourselves to be obedient to the Scriptures. The issue with the worship style is an example of dealing with a “culture of discomfort.”

PRISM: What about the role of leadership in faith organizations? How did leadership enhance or hinder bringing peoples of diverse backgrounds together?

Edgerly: The natural tendency is to gravitate to people like us. This makes for a more comfortable church experience. Because of this tendency the leadership needs to be intentional about “swimming upstream” and working for a diverse church, not just allow things to take their course naturally, which would be homogeneity. The Book of Acts is replete with examples of how cultural and ethnic barriers needed to be crossed for the gospel to spread. Unless leaders are intentional and willing to take aggressive action, we will not enhance diversity; we will continue to stay racially separate, and that is an act of disobedience to the gospel. Also, leaders must go beyond intentionality to good strategy. An example would be what the Apostles did in Acts 6 where the Greek-speaking Jews were being neglected in the daily distribution; men from among Greek-speaking Jews were chosen to serve in leadership. We must choose leaders with influence and authority from the community we are seeking to serve. This means that there will be elements that will make people from a particular culture feel welcome and at home. As we bring people together, however, we will have to blend these cultures into a common church reality which then means that everyone at times will feel a little uncomfortable.

Christerson: We found that having an integrated leadership team was key for successfully incorporating multiple cultures in the way they operate and multiple ways in which they reach people in the community. We also found that leaderships committed to dialogue about how racial/ethnic issues impact what is happening in the organization were much more successful in maintaining a diverse constituency.

As a whole, leadership needs to address diversity as a central theological issue rather than a “side” issue; otherwise they will not be able to convince the different members of the congregation to go along with the changes that need to happen to make a diverse congregation work.

Fong: These are some of the very challenges we are going through right now. When an opening for a new staff member appears, the natural tendency is not to say, “Hey, here is an opportunity to exemplify the diversity of the Body of Christ.” We usually think of recommending people we know who are often just like us. These types of experiences in my church helped to give me a glimpse into the white majority and the way they operate. There is usually no malice intended when they hire their own, but what it does is perpetuate a system of white privilege. Hence, we as leaders in the church have to be *determined* to create opportunities to bring greater diversity to the leadership.



BRAD CHRISTERSON

PRISM: The “homogeneous unit principle” asserts that people are generally averse to crossing racial, linguistic, or class boundaries within church. What is your response to this concept?

Edgerly: I think there is an emerging culture in our society that wants to be multicultural, a segment of our society where it’s fashionable. People are recognizing how beneficial and fun it is to be with peoples of diverse backgrounds. The church is lagging behind contemporary society on this, and we are more segregated than the outer society and have not caught on as to how great being with diverse cultures can

be. But when we look at Scripture, we find that we are the ones that actually have a mandate to do it. We need to emphasize that diversity is necessary and to allay fears of differences in people. We also need to prepare people to handle conflict, which is inevitable when people of diverse backgrounds come together.

Newsong defies the homogeneous principle in one sense, in that it is ethnically diverse but growing rapidly. Why are we growing if we are multicultural? Looking at this from another angle, people can have many things in common aside from ethnicity and culture. Music and the arts, for example, can be a common interest. In our church we have found that the people do share similar educational and socioeconomic backgrounds so we may be homogeneous in this sense. We have been criticized for having a church where people are similar in age. Our median age is 27 years old. It will be more

of a challenge when our church becomes more economically diverse, which is the direction we are moving in. In my experience, it is harder to bring people together of different socioeconomic backgrounds than it is to bring together people of different cultures or races.

Fong: When I started working on my doctorate, my focus was all about the homogeneous unit principle; my argument was that since English-speaking Asian Americans were not

being reached they should be made a priority. It's not that others aren't welcome in the church, they just aren't our priority. Even as I was promoting this I grew increasingly uncomfortable with all of it. This was partly due to what was going on in my own family and extended family, which were becoming very ethnically diverse. Obviously, my thinking has changed significantly since then. It is not hard to grasp the fact that, left to our own devices, like attracts like. This

Portrait of a Church (in Full Color)

BY RICK NOWLIN

“Behold, how very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore” (Ps. 133).

The Rev. Rockwell Dillaman, senior pastor since 1984 of Allegheny Center Alliance Church on Pittsburgh's North Side, preached on that passage last May in order to remind the multiracial, multicultural, intergenerational congregation of 3,000 of “one of its core values.” This church is an anomaly in Christendom, let alone the evangelical world. But it wasn't always this way.

What caused the transformation? A change in worship, according to Dillaman: specifically a switch to a blended style that includes traditional Anglo hymns, rousing black gospel, contemporary choruses, and occasional choir anthems sung in Spanish.

“The first goal of worship is honoring God,” explains Dillaman. He thinks Spirit-led worship (which he describes as “a weapon, a tool, and a catalyst”) “prepares the human heart to recognize that appropriate biblical truth. There is a vital connection between worship and racial reconciliation, because worship feeds discernment and discernment feeds worship.”

Founded in 1898 as the North Side Alliance Church and renamed for a mall built across the street, ACAC belongs to the Christian & Missionary Alliance, a small, staunchly conservative, and overtly evangelical Protestant denomination that

began in 1887 as an ecumenical missionary society. To this day the Alliance sends out far more overseas missionaries than most denominations; in fact, roughly 90 percent of its membership is overseas.

Like much of white evangelicalism that had sat out the civil rights movement born in the black church, ACAC found itself far behind the times when it came to race relations.

“In the years prior to my coming, the church was intentionally bigoted,” Dillaman explains, noting that black visitors were either steered toward a predominately black Alliance church in the city's Hill District or simply “frozen out.”

“I had read reports lamenting the ‘wrong kind of people’ moving into the neighborhood,” Dillaman says, recalling the '60s and '70s, when most American urban areas experienced “white flight” and a subsequent general decay. Today, the immediate neighborhood suffers from drugs, prostitution, and, until fairly recently, gang violence.

In addition, the shrinking congregation of 400 was discouraged and considering a move to the suburbs, where much of its membership at the time lived. Thus, job one for “Pastor Rock,” who had previously “rebuilt” an Alliance church in suburban Erie, Pa., became holding the congregation together.

Only after six years at the helm and some modest growth did Dillaman begin to challenge the congregation with issues of racial diversity. That led to “concerts of prayer,” which took place for several years. “The things that sustain classism and racism are not socioeconomic,” asserts Dillaman. “To establish reconciliation where there has been bigotry you have to have the breaking of spiritual strongholds.”

“I came to my position on racial reconciliation through a variety of readings, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Cain Hope Felder, John Perkins, Curtiss DeYoung, and others,” Dillaman says. “Once my eyes were opened I found the theme almost everywhere I looked in Scripture.”

At that time, in order to promote generational reconciliation, the church went to a more contemporary worship style, eliminating the liturgy, hymnals, and later the pipe organ,

is not just across ethnic lines but age, life stages, educational background, etc. On the one hand it may make sense to build a ministry without requiring people to cross these barriers that they would rather not cross. The increasing problem I had with all this was that, while we were giving in to what was natural to us, it conflicted with and even defies what I read in Ephesians 2, where Paul said that Christ has broken down the wall of hostility.

Most Christians would not argue with the picture they read in Revelation 5 where a diverse multitude gathers to worship around the throne of God. The critical question is what is going to happen between now and the day that scene actually occurs. A “static” hermeneutic would say that we basically stay the way we are now, ethnically and culturally separate. As I have been reading Scripture what I see is
Continued on page 37.

while keeping many of the old hymns because of their solid theology. In spite of the changes, very few of the older members left.

Even though ACAC had been ministering to neighborhood children and youth for several years, the arrival in 1994 of the Rev. Kelvin Walker, an African American and the son of a Baptist pastor, to oversee the church’s growing music ministry marked a turning point. Dillaman—who as a teenager aspired to be a jazz musician and today plays first trumpet in ACAC’s orchestra—charged Walker with “making ACAC a place where the worship and musical style indicated that we value and embrace differences.”

Walker more than met the challenge, and for the first time black families came into the church and stayed, because “they felt freer to express themselves in ways they were familiar with.” Today the diversity extends to leadership, with people of all races belonging to the board of elders. (Walker left the church at the end of June to take a position as a chaplain at the Manhattan satellite campus of Nyack College, where he and Dillaman are both alumni. Taking Walker’s place as worship pastor is the Rev. Makhonyola Khoza, whose ethnic roots are in Malawi and Trinidad.)

But because the church focuses not on “diversity” for its own sake but on seeking what it perceives as God’s agenda, it refuses to skimp on what it sees as biblical essentials. “Many people want the truth and recognize when they are receiving it,” Dillaman says. “Ethnicity has nothing to do with that desire. Also, many intuitively recognize the need for reconciliation and want to be part of it where it occurs.”

That’s why, despite perpetual parking problems and its location in an “at-risk” urban neighborhood, attendance has grown nearly 800 percent in a generation, overrunning the facilities and obliging the congregation to sponsor four week-

ly services. This is not to mention all the diaconal and support ministries the congregation sponsors or funds.

When Dillaman preached on Psalm 133, two things he emphasized were the word “behold” (which in this context means “check this out”) and that King David had written it while witnessing pilgrims from formerly warring sides stream toward Jerusalem to worship God together. He sees it as a metaphor for what should happen with the church in general and evidence that God “commands” blessing wherever it occurs. “I still believe that,” Dillaman says.

Rick Nowlin is a freelance writer and ESA member.

Caption???



On Earth As It Is in Heaven

continued from page 13.

a “redemptive” hermeneutic where we are moving toward this reality as a preview of what will it will be like in heaven. We should be actively pursuing this reality now. Jesus taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This is where the church and Christian organizations need to challenge our sinful tendencies. I tell my congregation now, “I used to think my job was to make you all as comfortable in this life as possible so you wouldn’t be uncomfortable in eternity, but I think I got it backwards. I now think my job is to make us all uncomfortable so we can be comfortable together forever.” We need to start rehearsing our future. I also don’t think that you can promote this message if you still need everyone to like you. I am now looking to stand before the Lord in heaven with his approval, as opposed to the approval of my deacons.

Christerson: My response to the homogeneous unit principle is that the sociology is right but the theology is wrong. It’s absolutely true that it’s much easier to grow a church with one ethnic group or even one subculture within one ethnic group. There is less conflict and people are more likely to feel comfortable and enjoy people who are like themselves. The problem is that it leads to division and a skewed understanding of God. When there is only one culture present, the gospel message tends to become culturally captive—only those aspects of the gospel that fit well within the monoculture get emphasized and the other parts get neglected or ignored. It also reinforces divisions in our society rather than breaking them down as each group sees itself as more “pure” in its practice of the faith. For example, many white evangelical churches in America emphasize a personal relationship with God and the individual’s ability to interpret the Bible correctly, while in many African American churches the emphasis is more on building a community of love and pursuing social justice. Both emphases are consistent with the Christian faith historically, but they each leave out important things without realizing it. We need each other to correct our cultural biases. Sometimes cultural preferences get confused with spiritual truth, such as the tendency in white churches to assume that voting Republican is the “biblical” or “moral” way to vote.

PRISM: What are some necessary components for a culturally diverse congregation or organization to succeed?

Fong: What I am starting to address more is what I call a “theology of desperation.” When God created humankind in his image, he said it was good. With the Fall this mirror of his image shattered into pieces and now each shard of the

mirror contains a segment of God’s image. As I grow in my yearning for God, I become more desperate to find the pieces of his image that can only be found in people who are different from me. This goes beyond just culture and ethnicity. For instance, I am more convinced that Christians from a lower socio-economic status yearn for God more than those who are financially secure and wealthy. Until we have a theology of desperation whatever we do to diversify will come across as patronizing. We will do it to be nice to diverse people but we really don’t feel we have to. If we feel our world is complete, then the contribution of those who are different is not really necessary. In the long run, the difference in our motivation—whether we are desperate or patronizing—will be obvious. We need to make biblical reconciliation a church-wide, expensive priority. We are seeking to take the value of biblical reconciliation and to make it the DNA of every facet of our church and not just a special interest group.

Ederly: One way is to make it a celebrative environment. We are not always suffering when we come together from different backgrounds—it is energizing and fun. Of course there are challenges. We need to be able to talk about the tough issues. I mentioned socioeconomic challenges before; we found that as we moved into a more urban and lower-income part of Los Angeles many of the second-generation Asian Americans, who were not familiar with this culture, felt uncomfortable. We acknowledged their feelings but tried to engage in a dialogue as to why they felt uncomfortable. We need to discuss the difficult topics openly and honestly. Another significant factor is to have a guide who is able to walk folks through the differences and help them adjust. I think the so-called “third-culture people” can come alongside those who are struggling and through friendship facilitate their adjustment. The term “third culture” was originally used by anthropologist Ruth Hill Useem to describe the children of diplomats and missionaries. Third-culture people are people who have been shaped by two or more cultures and have developed the ability to adjust. I think this is what God did through Paul in the New Testament when he was bringing Jews and Gentiles together. As a Pharisee and a Roman citizen, Paul was a third-culture person who could relate to many cultures. It is no accident that Paul was used by God to help Jews relate to Gentiles.

Christerson: We found that a key component of the congregations that were successful was an integrated leadership team. This allows for a representation of the cultures of the group in worship, preaching, and organizational styles. We also found that the communities that intentionally put structures in place to include numerical minority groups—such as special events, ministries, or activities that appealed to the minority groups—were more effective in retain-

ing those members and giving them a sense of belonging. We also found that emphasizing the theological grounds for embracing cultural difference was important. When issues of culture and ethnicity were not addressed from the pulpit, there was a tendency for the majority group to squelch dialog over difficult issues, calling them “divisive” or “distractions.”

PRISM: What would you say to those who have never considered the importance of an ethnically and culturally diverse church experience?

Edgerly: There’s a lot of talk about the biblical mandate to value diversity but there is an evangelistic aspect to this as well. We live in a world that is divided, and wars often result from ethnic differences. If the church brings people of diverse backgrounds together and lives purposefully, especially if it addresses the issues of racial injustice, the world will look at that and say, “That is righteous.” When Jesus said to “let your light shine before men,” he was talking about acts of justice that the world recognizes as righteous. It will draw them to Jesus. Many people come to our church simply because we are multicultural, even though they don’t know Christ. A Muslim came into our midst to ask if he could help pass out flyers inviting people to the church because he saw the diversity and thought it was beautiful. Churches need to consider the evangelistic aspect of being a diverse church. I have met so many people that have been turned off to the gospel due to racism and segregation in the Christian church. Many of these folks have turned to groups like the Nation of Islam as a reaction to racial injustice in the church. Much of the movement toward Islam within the African American community has its roots in a lack of sensitivity toward justice and righteousness in the church today. Racial justice in the midst of an ethnically diverse church can attract people to the gospel. It’s evangelistic.

On the flip side, neglecting diversity and justice turns people off to the gospel. For those of us who value evangelism we need to come to terms with the fact that not only are a multiethnic congregation and doing social justice tools for drawing people to Christ, but also when the church neglects justice as a Christian virtue it is turning people away from Christ.

Fong: Those of you who have never experienced a diverse church or fellowship don’t know how much you are missing. As uncomfortable as it will make anyone to become more diverse, especially if you are in the majority, down the road God is going to give us an experience that outweighs anything we are uncomfortable with. God is building a house for himself where he is comfortable. We have a tendency to think this is our house and it should make us comfortable. Think about it: Where you or I am 100 percent comfortable, God is not comfortable. The first question is, “Whose house is this?” It is not ours, but God’s. Second, “Who is building this house?” It is not us, but God. A lot of the arguments that we have over what makes us uncomfortable, such as the worship or the leadership style, are irrelevant when we put things in the right perspective. Christ has broken down the walls that divided us, and just as God is on the throne in heaven now with a diverse multitude, he is creating some of heaven here on earth now. Let’s be a part of letting God build his house.

Christerson: My advice would be to commit to either a diverse congregation or one where your ethnic group is in the minority for at least a year. You can’t really understand the richness of other cultures and their unique understandings of God in a short-term experience. Most people who do this are incredibly blessed by the experience and decide they don’t want to go back to an ethnically homogeneous worship environment. ■

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Ron Sider

continued from page 40.

are committed to using the nonviolent teachings of Gandhi and King in unjust violent settings around the world. It would only take a few tens of millions of dollars. (Annual income of Christians is over 15 trillion dollars, so money is not the problem!)

If top global Christian leaders (hopefully joined by Muslims) led a thousand

trained, praying, nonviolent peacemakers into the West Bank, the eyes of the world would be on them. Hundreds of millions of Christians would be praying for peace and justice for both Israelis and Palestinians. Media coverage would be phenomenal. Their very presence throughout the West Bank would discourage violence. Both sides would feel pressure to negotiate. Who knows what the Prince of Peace, who is also King of kings, might do in the hearts of hardened politicians?

If Christians mean what they have been saying for centuries about war and peace, then they have no choice. Without much planning and training, nonviolence has worked. It’s time to invest \$50 million in serious training and deployment. We cannot know ahead of time what will happen. But we already know that unless we do this, our rhetoric about just wars and pacifism has been hypocritical and dishonest.

It’s time to live what we preach. ■