

Bridging the Black and Brown Divide

Last year, while working with a colleague who serves as an educator in Broward County Florida public schools, I asked her, “Why are you so passionate about the needs of at-risk students in urban communities?”

Her response was simple: “These children are our future.” She added, “If we are able to reach these children and help them turn their lives around through education we will be able to decrease crime, poverty and unemployment in communities across the country. Seven thousand children drop out of school every day and we cannot stand on the sidelines doing nothing.”

As a minister of the gospel called to serve God’s people, I began to think about how the national dropout crisis should be responded to by the church. Some scholars and researchers contend that 50 percent or more of African-American and Hispanic students are dropping out of school. Most of these students tend to be male. As the church I believe we must ask and answer the question, “What is God calling us to do that will keep these children in school, have measurable impact on decreasing the dropout rate, and improve student performance?”

There is no doubt that churches across the country are currently engaged in answering that question, making sure children succeed academically. Some churches have established schools, while others host successful after-school programs and alternative learning opportunities. Although much is happening in some congregations, the number of dropouts in black and brown communities is not declining. As individual congregations we might have an impact on the students in our immediate context, but we must work together to impact the entire country and change the current academic landscape for all of our children. As the body of Christ this is our call.

The National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC) and Faith for Change are answering the call. We are working together to bridge black and brown communities to decrease the national African-American and Hispanic dropout rate by joining forces in the area of dropout prevention. Faith For Change has designed a Graduation Ministry Toolkit and has started scheduling trainings with churches on how to build the infrastructure needed for sustainable Graduation Ministries that make each church a “No Dropout Zone.” Faith for Change, along with the NHCLC, is committed to reaching congregations across the country to connect them with high needs schools in order to decrease the dropout rate.

Why should we, black and brown communities, join together? So that we can meet the academic needs of all of God’s children and families, regardless of race and ethnicity. Oftentimes, pastors speak of the body of Christ as a message directed toward the individual congregation. However, we know that the body is both the members of our respective congregations as well as all who call on the name of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. To that end we are called to work together in ministry, support one another, and strengthen God’s church just as we seek to grow and strengthen our individual churches.

Much like Pentecost, when the **Holy Spirit** comes, the anointing rests on all people breaking barriers of language and ethnicity; God’s love transcends race. When we allow God to work through us as we work together we are able to meet the spiritual and social needs of children and families in ways that transform lives. As a result we must find ways to bridge the divide that separates us so that as one body we are able to experience the fullness of God’s power at work through the church. This is why it is imperative for Hispanic and African-American Christians to come together.

Our Graduation Ministry partnership with NHCLC allows us to minister to the whole person by bridging the eschatological

tension between the already and the not yet. Our goal is to show our children that God is concerned about their present and their future, their salvation and their education. In as much as we desire for young people to be whole spiritually we need them to be whole academically so that they are empowered to use their gift and talents to the building of God's kingdom.

It would be tragic for us to preach anointing, gifting, calling and being destined to do great things, only to find out that our churches mirror the broader society and ignore the 50 percent of God's children who are dropping out of school. We welcome all of those who call on the name of Jesus as Lord to join us in the work of equipping congregations across the country to make their churches no dropout zones and showing our children that He truly is the God of a second chance.

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