

# Emerging Voices

## *A Plea for Unity*



Some of Jesus' last words before His crucifixion express His heartfelt desire for unity in the body of Christ. He told the Father, " 'I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me' " (John 17: 20-21, NKJV).

He could have asked for many things that day, but what lay heaviest on His heart was the unity of His people. If His people were united, the world would sit up and take notice, and God would be glorified.

Yet as we look at the landscape of the American church, what do we see? White church. Black church. Latino church. Korean church. And 11 a.m. on Sunday is still the most segregated hour of the week. Still, considering the potential of the church, we should feel tremendous hope, for the church alone has the power and ability to model the racial unity so needed in America.

I share these thoughts as a biracial, Christian woman whose father grew up in Harlem, New York, and whose mother was reared in a German Pennsylvanian town in the 1940s. I had the pleasure of being raised in a home whose halls were filled one minute with Beethoven and the next with Aretha Franklin. Powerful symphonies and rich R&B sounds stir my heart equally, and the warmth of an ebony grandma has enriched my soul just as has the love of white family and friends.

I know the pain of not being "black enough" or "white enough" for certain people and of looking for, but not finding, a racial identity. I also know the joy of being adopted by the

most high God and finding in Him the only healthy source of identity. Now I am free to enjoy the best of both.

This is my prayer for the American church: to enjoy the best of both, the best of all. I believe this is what we see pictured in Scripture, as every tongue, tribe and nation worship at the throne of the Lamb. This prophetic image represents the crossing of all ethnic lines with the single purpose of worshiping and enjoying God forever, and the side benefit of enjoying one another, too!

I have met many African-Americans who would rather not go to church than attend a white church, and white Christians who would visit a black church for a musical event but would never consider joining. Yet when we look at Scripture, it is very clear that such division is not God's intent.

The corporate world is making tremendous strides crossing color lines. But we in the church are still trying to decide if we want to worship together! The church should lead the way in this, trumpeting forth the era of true unity in Christ.

Often we seek to know the will of God, but some aspects of His will require no searching or analysis. Unity is unity, and God demands it of us.

"But they worship differently than we do!" Unity. "But they're so *emotional*!" Unity. "But their music is dull." Unity. "But their sermons are so *long*!" Unity.

Our personal taste in music, worship, preaching or dress in no way changes the words of John 17. God is not moved by our preferences. We who know Him have, through Him, the ability to expand our hearts to include all of God's family.

We can no longer cluster in cliques surrounded only by those who happen to be like us. God never intended for His church to be divided into color quadrants. A homogeneous church is an incomplete church, and no pastor or people should be satisfied

with it.

Will it be uncomfortable to embrace brothers and sisters of different backgrounds and ethnicities? Absolutely. But since when is the kingdom of God comfortable?

I agree with Mark DeYmaz, pastor of a multiethnic church in Little Rock, Arkansas: “If your church is not diverse in the next 15-20 years in America, it’s going to be largely irrelevant. In an increasingly diverse and cynical society, people are no longer going to buy into the message that God loves all people when it’s preached from segregated pulpits and pews.

---

**Nicole Doyley** is the founder of Ruth’s Company, a ministry that encourages women to pursue God’s best for their lives. She is also a teacher and the author of *ONE: Racial Unity in the Body of Christ* (CS Graphics), from which this column is adapted.