

# My Church is for Coloreds Only

by Pastor Dimas Salaberrios

What picture is the church sending to the world when Sunday is the most segregated day of the week? What model are we passing to our youth when we talk harshly about other races? Are we reinforcing segregation while breeding racism or are we tearing down the lines of separation through our gospel centered preaching and living? The Tri-State area is so diverse and our youth are growing up in an ethnic melting pot; it is time for the church to enjoy the new wine instead of using the old bottle. I believe Jesus is coming back and He wants the church to model a picture of heaven. I am not convinced that in heaven there will be ethnic signage sectioning us off because of our styles of singing and dance. I believe that heaven will be a mixture of all races dancing and singing praises to our Mighty King (Revelation 21:24).

Often young people ask me why most churches lack diversity, and they want answers to the question of Sunday segregation. To be totally honest, I don't have the best answer to that question. Different ethnic groups enjoy different styles of music, flow of service and choice of atmosphere. However, I do think that one factor is that most churches do not work hard enough on a consistent basis to change the situation as it stands today.

Who am I to speak on this matter? I am equally sinful about the issue. I visit predominantly white churches all the while waiting eagerly for a black song to come on from Donnie, Kirk, Fred or Yolanda. I get frustrated when Asian or Latino churches attempt to sound like white singers instead of finding their own sound. I judge the very things that perhaps I should applaud. I am quick to play my favorite tune as I oversee worship. It comes natural to us all to exclude others for the benefit of our own pleasure. However, this is the way of the sinful flesh, which loves to dominate us and

lure us into a self-satisfying state of mind. Nonetheless, we must not yield, but fight for the supernatural expression of Jesus. Jesus is holy and unselfish and not dominated by the sinful flesh. He can release me from my biases through His saving power. He loves diversity of the Body because it reflects heaven. Therefore, I need more of His influence in my life so I can take on His pleasures.

How happy is our Savior when we attack each other's differences? Are we really loving when we judge each other like when some African American Christians say that white churches are dead because they don't shout and move; or when some White Christians say that Latino churches are moralistic and legalistic based on their autocratic leadership style; or when some Asian Christians say that Black churches are just emotional and over the top. I think that we show our prejudice when we bash each other's styles based on our preference and not on doctrinally related issues. We all need to present these things to the one who judges rightly and accurately, our Savior Jesus Christ.

We are all flawed by sin and personal preferences (Romans 6:10-12). I am willing to admit that I have to work harder at understanding that diversity will be difficult in practice, but I must still be willing to fight the good fight for a church that looks at least as diverse as the local high school. I have to ask myself all the time, "Would an Asian, White, Black, Latino or Native American feel loved and acknowledged after leaving an Infinity church experience?" Then I need to be brutally honest with myself and make the necessary changes. In Acts 6:1-4, Peter and the apostles started a deaconate ministry to solve diversity issues in order to ensure that the Hellenistic Jews were treated properly. The first century church put measures in place so that no one felt slighted by the church. Paul was forthright in rebuking anyone who disrespected a Gentile in his presence.

I am learning so much about others and myself as we build a diverse church and leadership team in the Bronx. Infinity New York Church developed a loving and serving community of leaders and congregants even before we officially began our Sunday service. Together we make a team of awesome forward thinkers who love Jesus and together try to meet the needs of each other's differences. Of course, at times we may offend each other or misinterpret each other, but we also allow the love of Jesus to overshadow our differences and misunderstandings.

Diversity can be difficult, but I believe that it is the heart of Jesus. We must make every effort to continually unify the Body of Christ and not find reasons to divide. Look honestly at your church body and ask yourself the hard questions. Then go forth and make every effort to make your church the picture of heaven.