



Why is March Multi-Cultural Month?

When we consider that we are specifically instructed to make disciples of all nations, we all must be obedient. This year, I join the efforts of Outreach North America and name March as Multi-cultural Emphasis Month. Below are devotions for every day in March to help our denomination turn our focus toward prayer for our friends from other cultures.

"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31)

By God's Grace,
Phil Williams, Synod Moderator

March 1 Rev. Alan Avera Leviticus 19:33-34

When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

Not only were the Old Testament people of God to love the stranger, the high standard for measuring that love was this: love the stranger as yourself.

The motivation was because they had been strangers in Egypt. While they were still strangers, God had delivered them from bondage in Egypt and would deliver

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them into the Promised Land. Once in the Promised Land, they were to treat strangers like the native born.

What about the N.T. Church? While we have not been delivered from Egypt like Israel was, yet we, too, were once strangers:

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Ephesians 2:12)

But now, through the blood of Jesus Christ, we who were once strangers have been made family. God has shown us his hospitality, welcoming us into his household.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. (Ephesians 2:19)

Those from different cultures may be strangers to you. Remember what it feels like to be a stranger and remember God's welcoming grace to you. As God loved you, so love the stranger among you.

March 2

Alex Pettett, World Witness Director

Acts 2:42

And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

The group of believers mentioned above were from 16 different nations spanning thousands of miles. In a sense, they were the first multi-cultural followers of Jesus. It is likely they would have had trouble with language barriers, clucked tongues over cultural clothing, and argued over safe driving speeds of a camel. So, how could they share food without the cooks fighting it out over the best way to put a pocket in a pita? Because they shared a common vision in a Messiah that was distinctly supra-cultural.

For several years in Israel, I led a staff consisting of an Indian, an Arab Palestinian, an Israeli Jew, a Canadian Jew, and a Korean. At times communication was tough and tempers ran high when knowingly or unknowingly we were callus to cultural differences. What held us together? The most obvious glue was a shared love for Jesus, but beyond this, each of us believed deeply in the ministry in which we served. Our ministry was to bring children from Gaza and Iraq to Tel Aviv for heart surgeries and to share the gospel with them and their parents. Life, death, heaven and hell were daily realities. We didn't have time to argue about the best way to shear a sheep. Christ and vision allowed a

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supra-cultural community to exist that lived for something far beyond its own preservation.

As the Church, can we have a love for Christ and vision for ministry that creates a supra-cultural community? God willing.

March 3 **Ali Mitchell** **John 4:7**

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

I typically think of John 4 being about "the woman at the well." However, I am prompted to ask, "Why not Jesus at the well?" The New Testament is filled with many challenging references to evangelism and church life that are cross-cultural and multiethnic. You have to love Jesus' powerful way of winning over a lost woman of a despised ethnic group in a male-dominated world though! After all, like so many of us, Jesus and His disciples were traveling on a route through an "inconvenient" and ethnically different area. Why not just stay focused on the task: getting back to Galilee? Never mind that it was "Galilee of the Gentiles." But, before there was Pentecost, Peter and Cornelius, Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, the multiethnic church at Antioch, Paul's diverse companions and supporters, and John's window into the diversity in heaven in Revelation 5 and 7, there was "Jesus at the Well."

John 4 recounts how Jesus' way of using His time at the well opened up a whole new, unthinkable world of freedom and salvation for the Samaritan town of Sychar. I find this exciting! Instead of responding to the increasing diversity in our society with weariness and withdrawal, why not heed the invitation to follow Jesus' example with the Samaritan woman and her entire town, some whom we will no doubt meet in the global Church in heaven? I wonder what true connection with Jesus in ministry looks like. As part of a downtown Columbia, SC church with a new vision to reach our city's many different cultural groups, I think I'll find out soon enough! I hope we'll all be like Jesus at the well.

March 4 **Brandon Terry** **Acts 10:34-36, 43**

So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is

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acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ, you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea...To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Peter declares the word of the Lord that was once restricted to Israel but now available to the world. This word is good news, news of peace and forgiveness. This word saved Cornelius and his household. Furthermore, this declaration to the Gentiles is the beginning of the revelation of the reality that the dividing wall of hostility has been torn down in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and this hostility has been put to death. (Ephesians 2:16)

This gospel reconciles us to God through Christ and therefore is essential to multi-cultural (ethnic) ministry, especially in the context of the deep south and cities that are populated with minorities. Why? Because of the racial and cultural hostility that exist.

Conversely, multi-ethnic ministry is essential to gospel living. Especially in light of events, past and more recently, used by Satan to divide racially and culturally. When we pursue, love on, spend quality time with, have honest dialogue with, disagree with, share meals with, pick up the kids from school with, pursue justice with, worship Yahweh with, forgive and are forgiven by men and women who not only look different from us, but don't talk like us, dress like us, live like us, or worship like us, that speaks volumes to this gospel in which we live and this God whom we worship. When we live this way, we understand that we have peace with the one with whom peace is most needed, along with forgiveness. Moreover, we have this peace because of the humility of the one in whom hostility with God died, namely Jesus.

Best of all, when we live this way, guess what? The world will know that we are His disciples and give glory the Father who is in heaven. (John 13:35; Matt 5:16)

March 5
Rev. Brent Turner
1 Samuel 16:7

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

Youth today see the world differently than the way many of us who are older see it. I grew up in a very southern culture where you were either black or white, Christian or non-Christian, Republican or Democrat. The lines were drawn by the culture and we as youth were to abide in it. I sat in the high school cafeteria and

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can remember blacks on one side of the room and whites on the other. I remember sitting in youth group with all white youth. But the older I became, the more I began to see from God's Word how God looks at a person's heart.

Why was the world telling me to be so judgmental? Why could I not look at a person's heart as God does? When God first led me into youth ministry, I can remember telling our leaders that God wants us to reach out to the youth in our community no matter what their color or nationality. I thought about the song I had learned as a child:

"Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white they are precious in His sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world."

Things in our youth ministry did not change overnight, but things did begin to change. As our youth ministry began to grow we began to see a much diverse group come through the doors of the church. I wish I could tell you that they were all welcomed warmly but many were snubbed because of the color, nationality or even their backgrounds. But God was at work, and we began to see Him change the hearts of our youth and draw them to Himself. Our youth group changed! We were now a very diverse group whom God had saved and our goal was to draw close to Him and grow in Him.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people. (1 Timothy 2:1)

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of **all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:18-19)*

Our youth group learned what it meant to be a group passionate about God's people around the world. We went on mission's trips, and we learned there as well to see as God sees. What an amazing thing when our youth began to be outward focused. Our youth group now consisted of all different colors and nationalities. Why? Because we desired to love as Christ loves.

March 6 **Christian May** **Ephesians 4:2-5**

With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

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Paul outlines 3 major ideas in the way that all believers should relate to one another. He begins with the posture that we should take with one another. That posture has 3 goals: humility and gentleness (without exception), dealing with one another in love, and with an eagerness to maintain unity in the Church as a whole. Sadly, we as the church have lost sight of this posture –not just interracially- but also inter-denominationally and cross-culturally.

While all of these goals are extremely difficult to begin to achieve, they are even more necessary to maintain. We are then reminded of the way and reason that we should seek to maintain this unity. That way is through the cross of Jesus Christ, where we were reconciled unto God. Through this reconciliation, God has produced a necessary unity in his Church. Believers shall not defile the Church by dividing it or closing it off to those who seek it.

Paul leaves us with one grand point. All believers have ONE hope; the hope that we serve a Lord who not only came to walk with us, but has told us that he will come again to bring us to a place where we can fully fulfill out one true calling “to glorify and enjoy him forever.” Our unity as one Church is summed up in the fact that we have one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. This denotes that we should be able and willing to worship together as one body.

All of these goals are easy to achieve when we are within the walls our individual churches with those who look like we do, act like we do, and have backgrounds similar to ours. But, the gospel and its calling exceeds and challenges all of the cultural elements that we find in our personal churches that make us so comfortable, calling us into the unified body of Christ.

March 7 **Rev. Curt Young** **Psalm 67: 1-3**

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!

The Church of Jesus Christ began as a radical departure from Old Testament Israel. The people of God now consist of all the peoples of the earth, Jew and Gentile, worshipping God together. Christ is recreating humanity in his image. We have a new identity that is stronger, richer and truer than identity defined by race or national heritage. Old walls of enmity that defined the borders of nations come down because of Christ, and bridges of peace for shared life replace them.

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This is Christ's purpose and vision for his people, and who would question its beauty?

The rub comes in crucifying that prejudiced old man inside of us. It's a personal war, and an ugly one. Ingrained assumptions about others that underlie our offensive thoughts, cold feelings, and defensive silences deserve the most scathing denunciation. The denunciation that matters - that can change us - is the one we preach to ourselves. And how do we reach that point of breaking with generational sin but through the heartrending realization that it secretly makes us enemies of Christ? Ah, but once the break is made with the old man because we so desire to be free for Christ, the freedom and joy of new obedience come flooding in.

Our church has changed simply because we have changed. A new dynamic has entered our fellowship. It is that richer, fuller love of Christ for the nations that remakes our congregations at home as well as sends its members around the world.