

Fall 2019

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE: THE ROLE OF INTENT IN CREATING A RACIALLY INTEGRATED CHURCH

Shannon Marie Wolf  
*Southeastern University - Lakeland*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://firescholars.seu.edu/honors>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wolf, Shannon Marie, "THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE: THE ROLE OF INTENT IN CREATING A RACIALLY INTEGRATED CHURCH" (2019). *Selected Honors Theses*. 100.  
<https://firescholars.seu.edu/honors/100>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by FireScholars. It has been accepted for inclusion in Selected Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of FireScholars. For more information, please contact [firescholars@seu.edu](mailto:firescholars@seu.edu).

Running Head: THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE: THE ROLE OF INTENT IN CREATING A  
RACIALLY INTEGRATED CHURCH

by

Shannon Marie Wolf

Submitted to the School of Honors Committee

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for University Honors Scholars

Southeastern University

2019

THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

Copyright by Shannon Marie Wolf

2019

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

### **Acknowledgements**

I want to thank my advisors, Dr. Harris and Dr. Weaver, for their guidance and support throughout this project.

I also want to thank my parents, who encouraged me and prayed for me every step of the way. Finally, I want to thank the friends who proofread my drafts and who never failed to build me up when I felt discouraged.

Without each of you, this thesis would not exist. My gratitude goes beyond expression.

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

### **Abstract**

This thesis reviews the role of intent in creating a racially integrated church congregation in the United States. It considers a brief history of the American church's relationship to race, surveying church involvement in slavery, segregation, and Civil Rights. It reviews the current state of race relations in the church through modern research on church responses to race and integration efforts, and it presents novel research on the factor of church mission in building racial integration in individual congregations. Research consisted of interviewing members of leadership at a successfully integrated church in the northeastern United States. Findings indicate that intent to be racially diverse must be followed by specific actions in various structural aspects of an individual church to be successful.

**KEY WORDS:** racism and Christianity, congregational diversity, racial integration, multiracial church

# THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction.....	1
	a. Definition of terms.....	2
	b. Research questions.....	3
II.	Literature Review.....	5
	a. A Brief History.....	5
	i. Ideologies and the origin of the slaves.....	5
	ii. Evangelizing the slaves.....	7
	iii. Native Americans.....	8
	iv. Jim Crow.....	9
	v. Segregation and Civil Rights.....	11
	b. The Modern American Church.....	15
	c. The Argument for a Racially Integrated Church.....	18
	d. Current Integration Influences and Methods.....	20
	e. Conclusion.....	23
III.	Methodology.....	25
IV.	Analysis of Data .....	27
	a. Congregation Demographics.....	27
	b. Participant Demographics.....	28
	c. Participant Definition of Intent.....	29
	d. Active Intent.....	30
	i. Leadership.....	31
	ii. Church events.....	33

# THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

iii.    The website.....	35
iv.    Quotas and tokenism.....	36
f.    Conclusions.....	37
V.    Conclusion.....	40
References.....	43
Appendix A: Interview Questions.....	47
Appendix B: Recruitment Email and Oral Consent Statement.....	48
Appendix C: Chart of Congregation Racial Demographics.....	50

# THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

## Chapter One: Introduction

It has been said that the most segregated hour in America is eleven o'clock on a Sunday morning (Buswell, 1964). This is, of course, referring to the service times of many American church congregations. Although racial segregation was abolished in 1964 with the Civil Rights Act, many of today's scholars have noted that churches remain racially segregated and struggle to integrate (Barron, 2016; Bracey & Moore, 2017; Cobb, Perry, & Dougherty, 2015). This assertion seems out of place in a religion such as Christianity, which emphasizes unity in Christ.

The church is not without hope, however. Dougherty and Emerson's 2018 study of data from the National Congregations Society reported that the percentage of American multiracial congregations increased from 6.4% in 1998 to 12% in 2012 (Dougherty & Emerson, 2018). Multiracial congregations are defined as those in which no more than 80% of members are of one race (Dougherty & Emerson, 2018; Emerson & Kim, 2003; Wadsworth, 2010). Although the number of these congregations is small, the data does show an upward shift in the trend of racial integration in the church.

While there has been an increasing desire for racial unity in churches, the subjects of race and racism are not often addressed. There is a widespread silence of the American church on these subjects, as though they are past issues with no influence on the modern church. Even the history of the issue of race as it relates to the development of Christianity in America has often been ignored, separating historic issues of race from Christian history (Hatch, 1978). This silence, both past and present, has caused many African Americans to leave their congregations, disillusioned that their diverse churches did not address the racism that they continued to experience (Robertson, 2018).

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

The silence of the American church on the subject of race is what inspired this thesis. It aims to contribute to the current conversation of race relations in America and to examine the role of the church in addressing racism throughout history and in modern society.

### **Definition of Terms**

Before reviewing the literature that exists concerning the American church and race relations, it is necessary to define four key terms: race, racism, a multiracial church, and a successfully integrated church.

Heschel (2015) has noted that most modern scholars would agree that the concept of race is a social construct, meaning that there is little scientific evidence to support the idea that distinct races exist. Barndt (2007) agrees, noting that the concept of race developed as a way to create a hierarchy of categories, at the top of which was the white race. Although the scientific support for race has faded, the concept continues to remain influential in American society and in the church. Throughout this thesis, the term *race* is used to refer to the social perception of the identity of a person or group of people based on external features, the most common of which being skin color.

The term *racism* has been used in a variety of ways, but a common definition of what racism is has been difficult to determine. In response to the lack of a common understanding of racism, Barndt (2007) proposes the following definition: “racism is the collective power to enforce prejudice” (p. 60). He contends that racism is not the same as racial prejudice or bigotry, since these do not operate on the factor of power. The same concept is applied in this thesis to racial bias and stereotyping. Everyone has racial bias, but not all bias is supported by systems with power (Barndt, 2007). Throughout this thesis, whenever the term *racism* is used, it is referring to this concept of power-enforced prejudice. It is important to note that, despite the

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

difference between racism and racial prejudice, bigotry, bias, and stereotyping, all are harmful in the pursuit of improved race relations, and none should have a place in the church.

Scholars have defined multiracial congregations as those in which no more than 80% of the congregation is of one race (Dougherty & Emerson, 2018; Emerson & Kim, 2003; Wadsworth, 2010). This percentage is accepted because, when 20% of a group is comprised of members of those racial groups that are not the majority in that group, interaction between the majority group and non-majority group members is unavoidable and the group begins to be influenced by the non-majority members (Dougherty & Emerson, 2018; Emerson & Kim, 2003). For the purpose of this thesis, this definition of a multiracial church is considered to be the minimum requirement for measuring whether a church qualifies as being racially diverse.

A church may go beyond this minimum requirement for being multiracial. For this thesis, for a church to be considered successfully racially integrated, significantly less than 80% of the congregation should be of one race. A guiding principle for determining whether a church is successfully integrated may be as follows: the smaller the percentage of the racial majority, the more successfully integrated the congregation. This definition focuses on the amount of racial non-majority members present in the congregation and emphasizes balance between racial groups.

Now that these definitions have been set up, the research questions and a brief overview of the following chapters are presented.

### **Research Questions**

The research conducted for this thesis was built upon the following three questions:

- How has the American church responded to the concept of race?
- How are contemporary churches responding to the concept of race now?

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

- What efforts are contemporary churches making to become racially integrated?

The second chapter, the Literature Review, focuses on the first two questions, sifting through historical information and contemporary research to understand the relationship of the American church to the concept of race. Chapter three, the Methodology, introduces a study conducted by the researcher, which is described in chapter four, the Analysis of Data. Both of these chapters consider the second and third research questions by examining a model of a successfully integrated congregation.

Having examined these research questions and the definitions set forth in this Introduction, the most salient literature regarding race relations and the American church is reviewed.

# THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Introduction

In order to understand the importance of the study at hand, a review of existing literature on the subject of race relations and the American church is necessary. First, a brief history of the relationship that the American church has had with race and racism, both negative and positive, will be reviewed. Second, an overview of modern perspectives of responses to race in the American church will be provided. Lastly, a selection of contemporary research on approaches to racial integration within church congregations will be summarized.

### A Brief History

Throughout its history, the American church has had many an encounter with racist ideologies. In every encounter, it has both challenged such ideologies and consented to them. Following is an overview of such consents and challenges.

#### **Ideologies and the origin of the slaves.**

Whitford (2010) examines the racial views of Puritans in colonial America regarding African slaves. He focuses on the “Curse of Ham” as a pervading guide of theological thought in the Early Modern Era between 1600-1775. The Scriptural basis for the “Curse of Ham” is found in Genesis 9, when Abraham curses Canaan into slavery after his son Ham looks at his father’s nakedness (Genesis 9:25, NIV). According to many proslavery arguments, the African race was descended from Ham, whose name meant “black” as a reference to both his skin color and his deteriorated morality (Buswell, 1964). Slave owners frequently defended slavery and its foundational racist ideology with what Whitford calls the “Curse of Ham matrix.” The Matrix was composed of three elements: 1) God’s curse on the African people, evidenced by their dark

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

skin; 2) the hypersexual nature of Africans; and 3) the benefit of slavery as an avenue of exposing the African people to the Gospel (Whitford, 2010).

Similar to the “Curse of Ham” concept was the idea that the Africans were descended from Cain, the son of Adam and Eve who murdered his brother and left for the land of Nod. It was argued that God had “put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him,” (Genesis 4:15, ESV). A number of ideas developed from this, one being that Cain’s mark from God was black skin. Others stated that Cain married an ape in the land of Nod, creating a lineage for the Africans that was steeped in depravity. This marriage was sometimes referred to as a Second Fall, which differentiated Africans from the rest of humanity that had fallen under Adam and Eve’s first sin (Kelsey, 1965). Still others asserted that Ham was born with black skin and other notoriously African features, and that Ham married a descendant of Cain and thus inherited his punishment (Buswell, 1964). Church leaders, such as Cotton Mather of the Puritans and Samuel Purchas of the Anglicans, often wrote derogatorily of the Africans during the Early Modern Era, referencing the supposed immoral sexuality and satanic religions of the people as proof of their inherent wickedness (Whitford, 2010), which had been inherited from Cain and Ham.

Due to the supposed depravity and corrupt lineage of the African people, slavery was promoted as a benefit to slaves. This third element of the “Curse of Ham matrix” was reflected across the beliefs of those who favored slavery. George Whitfield, an influential Evangelical leader during the Great Awakening, wrote that he would consider himself “highly favored” to own slaves so that he could better their lives and petitioned that Georgia become a slave state (Buswell, 1964; Emerson & Smith, 2000). His and other leaders’ writings and ideologies reveal how the American church has often reflected the prejudices of its environment.

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

### **Evangelizing the slaves.**

In response to the wickedness of the slaves, many Christians believed it was their duty to evangelize the African people. Opponents argued that Christianity was not meant for the “inferior races,” yet many masters and missionaries took it upon themselves to teach their slaves the Gospel. Revivals took place among the slaves, and church membership in the Methodist church sprang from 1,890 in 1786 to 11,682 in 1790 (Buswell, 1964). This growth in church participation presented an interesting question: would the conversion and baptism of the slaves demand their emancipation (Buswell, 1964)? Many leaders in the American church answered that there was nothing in Scripture that prevented people from owning slaves, so conversion and baptism did not mandate the release of enslaved peoples (Buswell, 1964; Whitford, 2010). So evangelism among the slaves was encouraged, both as a Christian responsibility and as a way of increasing slaves’ obedience (Emerson & Smith, 2000; Whitford, 2010). Thus the church continued to evangelize the slaves without challenging the system that required slavery (Brown, 2019).

Evangelism and missionary work experienced a shift, however, as a rising movement against the education of slaves took shape. In spite of Christian defenses of slavery, Buswell (1964) notes that many recognized the Christian faith’s emphasis on human equality and considered it a threat. Should the slaves be aware of concepts like human equality and Christian unity, they might object to their status as slaves (Buswell, 1964). Thus, the education of slaves began to be suppressed because the Christian teaching of equality posed no threat to the institution of slavery if the slaves were not educated. As early as 1790, laws were passed that penalized those who educated their slaves (Buswell, 1964). In states such as Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, slaves were prohibited from working positions that required

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

reading and writing, and masters were threatened with fines and imprisonment of up to one year (Buswell, 1964). The Quakers, a Christian group that was outspoken in its opposition of slavery, were prevented from bringing slaves to their meetings and were even barred from the profession of teaching (Buswell, 1964). Other abolitionist attempts to educate and free slaves were met with the same strong opposition and, due to a disorganized structure, such attempts largely failed (Buswell, 1964).

As the climate against the education of slaves became more hostile, Christian evangelization methods began to change. Slave owners thought that religious instruction and Sunday church attendance took too much time away from labor, and it presented the danger of teaching slaves racial equality (Buswell, 1964). Because of this, missionaries shifted to an oral method of instruction that did not require the slaves to read (Buswell, 1964), and slaves were told that they would be rewarded in heaven if they submitted to slavery (Emerson & Smith, 2000). The Africans continued to be oppressed, and the American church adapted its methods of evangelization so as not to challenge the oppression.

### **Native Americans.**

The ideologies of the Early Modern Era also influenced how the European settlers treated Native Americans, who were often viewed as “savages” and “heathens” (Kennedy, 1959). As with the Africans, the church had a desire to evangelize the indigenous people of North America (DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey, & Kim, 2003). “Praying towns” were established for Native Americans who had become Christians, but such towns were usually forced on them (DeYoung et al., 2003). As the Europeans sought to obtain more land, Kennedy (1959) wrote of an early pilgrim who thanked God that a Native American tribe had been decimated by a pestilence. In one case, blankets that had been used by victims of smallpox were given to native tribes in the

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

hope of reducing their presence (Kennedy, 1959). When counting population for determining how many representatives a state received under the Constitution, African slaves were counted as three-fifths of a person while Native Americans were not counted at all (Kennedy, 1959).

Kennedy also wrote:

This attitude, coupled with an avowed desire to convey the blessings of Christianity and European civilization on the “benighted barbarians”, salved the consciences of those who went about the profitable business of divesting the Indians of life, liberty, and property. (1959, p. 9)

Native Americans continued to be rejected, moved off of their land, and killed, and by 1923, the Native American population had been reduced to less than 25% of what it originally was (Kennedy, 1959; DeYoung et al., 2003).

### **Jim Crow.**

One of the most influential events in America’s history with regard to race relations is the Civil War, a major result of which was the emancipation of slaves by President Abraham Lincoln. During the time of Reconstruction that followed the Civil War, the newly freed people began mixing with whites in society. They went to school and held governmental positions alongside whites, including positions of authority such as secretary of state, state treasurer, and lieutenant governor (Emerson & Smith, 2000). This was not met with approval among northern and southern whites. To most, “the former slaves were not properly Christianized nor educated to be holding elected offices and running the nation” (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 39). The response to the wave of blacks in society was Jim Crow, a series of laws that kept the races separate and unequal.

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

Under Jim Crow, several restrictions were placed on nonwhite citizens in areas such as marriage and locations for living. In 1959, it was illegal in 29 states for a person of one race to have sexual intercourse with, marry, or have children with someone of a different race (Kennedy, 1959). This was not limited to relationships between whites and blacks but included Native Americans, Malays, and Mongolians, and any interracial marriage was deemed illegitimate (Kennedy, 1959). The law reached far beyond the South to states such as Delaware, South Dakota, and Idaho. In Indiana and Mississippi, it was illegal to advocate for interracial marriage, for which one could be punished with up to \$500 in fines or six months of imprisonment (Kennedy, 1959).

Land ownership and living expenses were also a point of inequality. Before 1894, all American citizens had the same right to own, purchase, and sell land as any white citizen, but in 1894, that law was repealed (Kennedy, 1959). The Native American practice of communal land ownership was met with a law in 1952 that prohibited them from giving land to their tribes and required the land to be sold for full market price (Kennedy, 1959).

Under these laws, church congregations and denominations began to separate by race. Several denominations that had been founded as multiracial broke off into segregated congregations, including the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church and the Church of God in Christ (DeYoung et al., 2003). In 1914, white ministers of the Church of God in Christ left to form the Assemblies of God denomination, and, during the 1920s, Hispanic church congregations left the Assemblies of God to create the *Asamblea de Iglesias Cristianas* (DeYoung et al., 2003). Between 1924 and 1937, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World became mostly black as white ministers and members left (DeYoung et al., 2003). African Americans also began leaving White Evangelical churches to establish their own, largely due to not having been treated equally

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

(Emerson & Smith, 2000). White Evangelicals referenced this exodus as evidence that the races were better off separated, and that separation was what all races desired (Emerson & Smith, 2000). Jim Crow was further justified as being not discriminatory against blacks, since its laws gave blacks rights such as specific seats in trolley cars and sections in railway cars, comparable to other spaces for whites and often shared with whites (as cited in Emerson & Smith, 2000). Without Jim Crow, the rights granted to blacks would be challenged (as cited in Emerson & Smith, 2000). These beliefs would influence a host of anti-integration arguments that would follow during the Civil Rights Movement.

### **Segregation and Civil Rights.**

The result of Jim Crow was segregation, seen by many in the South as “a system of safeguarding created and cultural differences and preserving them” (Ingram et al., 1960, p.14). With the Civil Rights Movement taking shape, when many church leaders took action against segregation, other leaders expressed their belief in the rightness of the system. Henry Egger (Ingram et al., 1960) contended that blacks had certain “behavioral differences” that made integration harmful. The “behavioral differences” named were the supposed greater immorality and lesser intelligence that blacks had in comparison to whites (Ingram et al., 1960). Should the races integrate, the moral and intellectual quality of all races involved would decrease (Ingram et al., 1960). Egger referenced the higher rates of illegitimate births in integrated high schools and the lower test scores of black students but made no mention of the suppression of education that had been in place for generations. Others asserted that the races preferred to be separated, and that whites had a natural aversion to blacks and vice versa (Kelsey, 1965). Still other church leaders criticized the Supreme Court decision to integrate schools, expressing a hopeless attitude toward federal law’s ability to create social change (Ingram et al., 1960). Any attempts to bring

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

unity from outside the work of Christ—such as the legal mandate for integration—was in direct opposition to God’s grace (Ingram et al., 1960) and was identified by Ingram (1960) as the spirit of the anti-Christ.

Several authors mentioned a concept called the “breakdown of racial integrity” (Ingram et al., 1960) in their defenses of segregation. This concept was based on the assumption that racial integration meant intermarriage, of which the inevitable result was amalgamation into one race that replaced all others. The “racial integrity” of each race was to be preserved, as one government representative stated, “In the South, we have pure blood lines and we intend to keep it that way” (Kennedy, 1959, p. 61). Christian advocates for racial integrity cited the will of God, Who created the races to be separate in order to maintain their uniqueness. To integrate was to rebel against divine ordinance and to destroy the identity of the races, with the white race overtaking the black race, erasing blackness and reducing the quality of whiteness (Ingram et al., 1960; Kelsey, 1965). However, this argument displayed a misunderstanding of the desires of integrationists. The fight against segregation was not a fight for one, unified super-race in which there existed no racial difference; rather, it was a fight for equality, freedom, and the end of the oppression that was allowed to exist under the law (Emerson & Smith, 2000).

Buswell (1964) observes that the arguments for racial segregation had many of the hallmarks of those that had previously been used to defend slavery. Brydon (Ingram et al., 1960) wrote that the majority of people in white churches in the state of Virginia “believed implicitly that schools geared according to the needs and genius of each race were in full accordance with the teachings of the Christian Faith” (p. 79). His phrase “the needs and genius of each race” reinforces the idea that the races are inherently different, and that some are inherently inferior to others. Before justice, the races were equal; in every other way, they were unequal, with whites

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

being the superior race (Ingram et al., 1960). The intrinsic inferiority and superiority of races was fundamental in the defense of slavery, as was the belief that God had created the races to be separate (Buswell, 1960).

Similar ideology was at work during World War II, when Christianity spoke in favor of the oppression of Jews in Nazi Germany (Heschel, 2015). Heschel (2015) details the racialization of Christianity during World War II, observing that, as the concept of race became increasingly important in society, the German church began to address it in its theology (Heschel, 2015). Scripture was used to promote the idea of a racial hierarchy, and Jews, like the Africans in the Early Modern Era, were seen as inferior people and even as a threat to the church (Buswell, 1964; Whitford, 2010; Heschel, 2015).

While arguments against segregation were being made, other divisions of the church moved toward integration and social justice. In 1921, the Federal Council of Churches formed the Commission on Race Relations (Emerson & Smith, 2000). They established Race Relations Sunday, when white and black ministers traded pulpits (Emerson & Smith, 2000). It was mainly liberal Christians who engaged in these actions, with less participation from conservative Protestants (Emerson & Smith, 2000), but the Council's existence demonstrates that the American church did engage in the movement for racial justice.

As the Civil Rights Movement developed, the American church began to be more involved. The message of the biblical prophets, who urged ancient Israel to live justly, was proclaimed (Heschel, 2015), with black Christians leading the charge. They were accompanied by non-Christian whites as well as those of liberal Christian denominations, Catholic churches, and the Jewish faith (Emerson & Smith, 2003), while "most Evangelicals in the North did not think it their duty to oppose segregation; it was enough to treat the blacks they knew with

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

courtesy and fairness” (as cited in Emerson & Smith, p. 46). Despite the unequal levels of participation, the Civil Rights Movement showcased the ability of Christianity and the American church to bring about social change.

Following the Civil Rights Movement, various denominations made efforts toward racial integration. Garces-Foley (2008) reviews past shifts in thought and response toward racial diversity, comparing the Roman Catholic and Evangelical movements. Both movements made their shifts shortly after the Civil Rights Movement, when both immigration to the United States and acceptance of integration among whites were increasing (Garces-Foley, 2008). The shifts of each movement differed in several ways, even if their goals were the same. The American Roman Catholic church turned from an emphasis on Cultural Pluralism, which allowed racial groups to function separately from others with their own cultures and languages, to Multiculturalism, which called for racial groups to bring their cultures together (Garces-Foley, 2008). The Evangelical church traded an emphasis on the Homogenous Unit Principle, which advocated for separating the races as a means of church growth, to Racial Reconciliation, which advocated for integrating the races on the basis of a common identity in Christ (Garces-Foley, 2008).

As demonstrated above, the American church has not always completely supported the racist tendencies of its environment, but it has often neglected to challenge them. This creates a mixed history for the church that cannot be generalized as either good or bad but must appreciate the complexity that is present. This overview of history, however, may seem to focus on the negative aspects of the relationship between the American church and race. This is for two reasons: first, the history provided is brief and does not consider the full spectrum of the American church’s history. Among those components not considered in depth are the abolitionist

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

movements in pre-Civil War America, the impact of anti-slavery literature and efforts, and the influence of the church in the Civil Rights Movement. Second, there is a tendency among Christians to view the church in terms of its positive features when, in reality, the American church has had moments of both shining victory and stunning failure. A review of the church's mistakes gives one a more complete perspective on contemporary race relations. Therefore, this survey of history provides a basic understanding of the events that underlie the current state of race relations in the American church and allows one to approach the subsequent content with humility.

### **The Modern American Church**

The history of American church's interactions with racism provides a backdrop for understanding the issues and conflicts that exist both in the modern church and in secular society. Since concepts such as race and racism are constantly changing, current scholarship about the opinions and responses of the modern American church are reviewed. Three main responses are identified—the Rejecting/reducing Response, the Limiting Response, and the Accepting Response—and explained below.

The Rejecting/reducing Response has been described by several modern studies that have sought to understand the racial segregation of the modern church. This type of response may be defined as microaggressions against people of a particular race upon one's first encounter with a person of that race. These microaggressions take several forms, including lower quality communication with racial non-majority groups and specifically excluding members of racial non-majority groups. Wright and his colleagues (2015), in their study of over three thousand congregations and twelve denominations, found that white congregations tended to communicate less quickly with and provide less information to emails written by potential members with

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

names that sounded either black, Hispanic, or Asian. When non-majority groups members attempted to attend traditionally white churches, Bracey and Moore (2017) noted that they were met with what they termed “race tests”, or passive-aggressive methods of exclusion. These “race tests” were aimed at evoking negative emotions that would cause non-majority members to leave the congregation, taking the form of refusal to greet newcomers, interrupting comments made by newcomers, and racial slurs (Bracey & Moore, 2017).

The concept of color-blind theology sums up the reducing aspect of the Rejecting/reducing Response. Color-blind theology chooses to ignore the racial identities of people, seeing them instead as not possessing race (Hearn, 2009) and is based on the idea that, in order for racism to be eradicated, the reality of race must be ignored (Yancey, 2006). Yancey (2006) observes that color-blindness has the potential to reduce racial issues and to hold those accountable who “search for racism where it does not exist” (p. 32). Hearn (2009) asserts that, regardless of such hopes, color-blindness in the church “otherizes” people of color in a subtle way and allows subliminal racism to remain in the church by preventing a person’s experience of racial inequality from being seen. Yancey (2006) agrees, noting that color-blindness is often blind to the reality that racism is at work in modern American society. It assumes that everyone has the same opportunity and advantage but minimizes the role of discrimination in a person’s life, making any inequality between the races seem rational and permissible (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) and any advantages given to historically oppressed racial group members seem unfair (Yancey, 2006).

The presence and influence of color-blind theology is evidenced in the explanations that churchgoers give for the socioeconomic inequality between whites and blacks. Cobb and his colleagues write that members of racially diverse congregations where White culture is dominant

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

are more likely to attribute inequality to individual inadequacy, such as lack of motivation, among Blacks (Cobb, Perry, & Dougherty, 2015; Taylor & Merino, 2011). Bonilla-Silva (2003) agrees and observes that “most whites insist that minorities (especially blacks) are the ones responsible for whatever ‘race problem’ we have in this country” (p. 1). Emerson and Smith (2000) find this same sentiment among Evangelicals whose social circles are less racially diverse. When such explanations for inequality are affirmed in the church, Christians minimize not only a person’s racial identity but also the experience of that person as a result of his or her race.

Following the Rejecting/reducing Response is the Limiting Response, which seeks to control or limit the influence of people of color in congregations where white is the main race. These congregations desire to appear racially diverse for the sake of being called “diverse” without representing nonwhite cultures in church structure (Barron, 2016). They may place nonwhite members in public positions, such as a worship leader or congregation greeters, but give these members little power in the structure of the congregation (Barron, 2016; Bracey & Moore, 2017). Racial minority members sense the “token diversity” of such congregations and subsequently leave, as was the case in Barron’s (2016) study of an urban church in downtown Chicago, which experienced fluctuating diversity levels.

In direct contrast to both of the above responses, the Accepting Response involves explicitly accepting racial non-majority members. It is based on the need for people to feel a sense of personal belonging and connection in a church congregation in order to continue attendance at that congregation (Christerson & Dougherty, 2013; Martí, 2009). Acceptance of non-majority members is influenced by several factors and is applied through various means. These means will be expounded upon after an overview of the need for a multiracial church.

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

### **The Argument for a Racially Integrated Church**

Many believe that racial separation is easier, that people do not want to reach across racial lines when attending church. While the Homogenous Unit Principle has been applied to the structuring of ministry, causing churches to target specific niches of people (Garces-Foley, 2008), researchers DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey, and Kim (2003) contend that a racially integrated church presents benefits to the American church that cannot be passed by.

A number of arguments against congregational integration exist, and DeYoung and his companions recognize the validity of each. The history of racial oppression causes people of color to feel averse to experiencing white Christianity, feeling safer in uniracial Christian congregations (DeYoung et al., 2003). For those who have experienced the dehumanizing effects of racism, separate congregations provide a place for their humanity to be affirmed (DeYoung et al., 2003). Uniracial congregations allow immigrants and non-English-speaking groups to engage the Christian faith in their own language and to connect with others who are making the same transition from one country to another (DeYoung et al., 2003). Separate congregations present an opportunity for members of one race to band together to fight racism (DeYoung et al., 2003). Even so, DeYoung et al. detail the benefits of racial integration that the American church ought to embrace, including forming relationships, combatting stereotypes, pursuing reconciliation, and building theology.

The first of these benefits is the forming of relationships with members of different racial groups. Emerson and Smith (2000) report that having an interracial network, as opposed to having only a few interracial friendships, have a better impact on personal views of other races. A multiracial congregation presents Christians with the opportunity to relate to people who are different from themselves and would give believers the means to create a diverse network

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

(DeYoung et al., 2003). The relationships formed between racial groups would allow people to relate to other races as human beings instead of the “impersonal other” and would affirm the humanity of non-racial majority members, which is one of the benefits presented by a uniraical congregation (DeYoung et al., 2003).

Once relationships have been formed, a second benefit of racially integrated churches is found: the combatting of stereotypes. Everyone stereotypes, regardless of racial identity, and these stereotypes must be overcome. Without interracial contact and a diverse social network, stereotypes and assumptions remain unchallenged and therefore unchanged. A multiraical church would put members of different racial groups in direct contact with one another, providing the opportunity for stereotypes to be broken (DeYoung et al., 2003).

As stereotypes are challenged, the pathway to reconciliation emerges. Multiraical congregations have the ability to pursue reform in society, a desire expressed in the arguments for uniraical congregations, and “authentic multiraical congregations address racism in society and within the church” (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 137). The relationships formed within the congregation allow for the transparency and grace required for the healing of past offences and a history of racism, and mutual accountability between the races to pursue equality and unity would be developed (DeYoung et al., 2003).

A fourth benefit of racially integrated congregations is the formation of new theology. Each racial group experiences God differently and places emphasis on different things. For example, Native Americans emphasize sacred places while Latino Catholics emphasize the concept of *mestizaje*, in which groups of people come together to worship and care for each other (DeYoung et al., 2003). The uniqueness of each culture would not be lost within the congregation, as one would not overtake the others. Instead, new theologies and experiences of

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

God would be created as the perspectives of multiple races came together (DeYoung et al., 2003).

Now that an argument for a racially integrated church has been presented, this thesis will consider churches that are currently attempting to increase the racial diversity of their congregations. Both factors that influence congregational diversity and methods that churches are employing are reviewed.

### **Current Integration Influences and Methods**

Studies have identified several influences on the diversity of Christian congregations, which may be divided into two categories: Practical Constructions and Identity Emphases. These categories are discussed below.

Practical Construction methods may be defined as those that concern the organizational structure of a church congregation, including diversity of leadership, worship style, formation of small groups, and location. These structural aspects have been found influential on the creation and maintenance of multiracial congregations. A diverse leadership has been found to make a strong statement about the views of race that are present in the church and influence the character of the church (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008). Since leaders establish the priorities of a congregation, having a diverse leadership is a visual representation of the intent of a church to be racially integrated and may attract a more diverse membership (Dougherty & Emerson, 2018). Additionally, given the homophily principle, which states that people tend to prefer to be with people who are like themselves (Wright, et al., 2015), people of non-majority racial groups may feel a greater connection with a leadership team with members of their own race.

Worship style and the presence of small groups have also been found to influence congregational diversity. Dougherty and Huyser's (2008) study identified a positive correlation

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

between expressive styles of worship and racial integration. Dougherty and Emerson's (2018) study echoes this point, citing a more upbeat, participatory worship style as a main factor of diversity. Small groups are also influential, as they may serve as spaces either for same-race interactions within the larger congregation or for the development of unity among diverse members within the groups (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008).

The location of a church also influences the congregation's racial composition. Regional location is salient, as churches in the Western and Midwestern United States have lower amounts of segregation (Dougherty & Emerson, 2018; Dougherty & Huyser, 2008). This is compared with churches in the Southern United States, where segregation tends to be higher due to the deep roots of racial segregation (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008). On a smaller scale, location in a highly diverse neighborhood may have an affect on the diversity of the congregation. In neighborhoods that are more racially diverse, the rate of congregational diversity is higher, due to more positive perceptions of integration among the population (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008). However, a diverse environment does not guarantee a diverse church congregation, and Dougherty and Emerson (2018) observe that typical American congregations are four times less diverse than the neighborhood in which they are located.

Since people choose to stay involved in a church because of a sense of personal belonging and connection (Christerson & Dougherty, 2013; Martí, 2009), congregations seek to encourage these feelings among non-majority group members through implementing the aforementioned structural elements. Beyond Practical Constructions, the underlying attitude of a congregation has great influence on the reception of racial minority group members. As a result, churches may promote certain ideologies to shape congregational attitudes, which have been called Identity Emphases. These may be defined as those that impact the mentality of a

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

congregation, Ethnic Transcendence, Ethnic Reinforcement, theological orientation, and church mission.

Ethnic Transcendence is defined as ethnic groups absorbing their differing ethnic identities into a shared religious identity, downplaying racial differences in favor of commonalities (Lloyd, 2014; Martí, 2009; 2010). Churches also emphasize Ethnic Reinforcement, which is the acknowledging, highlighting, and affirming the racial identities of others (Martí, 2010). Too much attention to either of these Identity Emphases can result in a lack of racial integration. If a congregation stresses Ethnic Transcendence, it risks applying color-blind theology and alienating members of nonwhite racial groups. Conversely, if a congregation stresses Ethnic Reinforcement, it risks the formation of segregated groups with little interaction, as the American Catholic Church experienced in its orientation toward Cultural Pluralism before 1965 (Garces-Foley, 2008). To avoid these risks, Martí (2009; 2010) suggests applying a combination of these emphases that gradually moves members from focusing on their individual racial identity to focusing on their common identity with others in Christ. Martí's (2010) study of Oasis Christian Center showcases a balanced application of these emphases. This congregation stressed the need to recognize racial issues and the need for believers to accept their common spiritual identity while encouraging members connect with each other beyond their race. As a result, church members viewed Oasis' diversification efforts in a positive way and felt a stronger connection to the church (Martí, 2010).

Theological orientation includes both church denomination and tendency toward either conservative or liberal theology. With respect to denomination, Catholic congregations have possessed higher rates of diversity than both mainline and evangelical Protestant congregations (Dougherty & Emerson, 2018). This may be due to the more public stance against segregation

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

made by the Catholic Church. With respect to conservative and liberal theologies, Dougherty and Emerson report that influence of these theologies on creating congregational diversity increased between 1998 and 2012 (Dougherty & Emerson, 2018). Not much else has been studied with regard to the influence of conservative and liberal theologies, but the tie deserves consideration. Researchers have also discovered ties between church mission and congregational diversity (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008; Emerson & Kim, 2003). Integration does not happen by accident, and those churches that have included diversity in their mission statement are more likely to sustain a multiracial congregation (Emerson & Kim, 2003).

In sum, there are many factors that influence the success of multiracial congregations, and modern churches utilize a variety of methods to increase their congregational diversity.

### **Conclusion**

Since the inception of the United States, racism has permeated society. It has prolonged the enslavement and oppression of people groups, allowed some to view other groups as inferior to their own, and divided people based on skin color. It has motivated institutions such as slavery, Jim Crow, and Segregation. Throughout history, the American church has had the opportunity to challenge the racism at work. At times, it has taken advantage of this opportunity; at other times, the church has squandered it. The modern issue of race again presents the American church with an opportunity to practice the call of Christ to unity, and several churches are taking action to pursue this goal.

One Identity Emphasis that previous research has mentioned is what Emerson and Kim call “an impetus for becoming multiracial” (2003, p. 218), meaning an individual church’s intent to be racially diverse. This factor has been listed by many as influential in building congregational diversity, but not much has been written about its direct impact on racial

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

integration in the church. This factor will be the subject of the following study, which considers the role of intentional action in creating a multiracial church.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The present study aims to explore the effects of a church's goal to be racially diverse on the operation of that church and on the racial makeup of the congregation. It adds to the current understanding of how racial integration in churches occurs and provides information about how churches may be successful in their efforts to increase racial diversity.

The methodology consisted of a Mixed-methods research design, which involves both qualitative and quantitative data. This study involves one-on-one interviews and quantitative demographic data, with an emphasis on qualitative data obtained from the interviews. A Mixed-methods approach allows the researcher to have a better understanding of the quantitative data through qualitative research (Creswell, 2014).

The interviews were conducted to understand how members of leadership in a successfully integrated church perceive their role in creating congregational diversity, how they act toward that goal, and how they perceive the role of race within church congregations. Interviews were conducted with members of the leadership and pastoral team at a successfully integrated church in the northeastern United States.

All of the participants were contacted via email. Participant email addresses were received through an initial contact from the church's leadership, who compiled a list of leadership team members who expressed interest in the study. The final sample consisted of four leaders and pastors. These participants will be referred to as Participant #1, Participant #2, Participant #3, and Participant #4. All of the interviews were set up and confirmed via email after the first introductory email to participants.

The interview questions were formed based on the information found in existing literature on the history of race relations and the American church and on the modern American

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

church's efforts toward racial integration. An overview of this information was presented in the Literature Review chapter of this thesis. The questions were formed to answer two of the research questions posed in the Introduction, *How are contemporary churches responding to the concept of race now?* and *What efforts are contemporary churches making to become racially integrated?* Each interview question was aimed at understanding how the participants viewed racial integration in the church and the mission to be integrated. A copy of the interview questions is included in the appendices (Appendix A).

Interviews were conducted via phone call and were recorded. Participants were informed in the introductory email that the interviews would be recorded and were informed again at the beginning of each interview. Consent was given by responding to the introductory email and by verbally consenting at the beginning of the interview. All of the participants consented to the interviews and to their recording. Interviews were transcribed afterward to ensure accurate collection and interpretation of their responses. Responses are analyzed in the following chapter. A copy of the introductory email and verbal consent statement are included in the appendices (Appendix B).

## **Chapter Four: Analysis of Data**

Previous research has named several factors that positively influence the racial diversity of church congregations, one of which is the intent to be diverse (Dougherty & Huyser, 2008; Emerson & Kim, 2003). Although this factor was identified, little has been done to explore the effects of an intent to be diverse on the structures and demographics of individual churches. The present study aimed to identify how members of leadership at a successfully integrated church in the northeastern United States viewed the intent to be racially diverse and the effects of such intent on the structure and operation of their church. In order to maintain confidentiality, the church examined by this study will be referred to with the pseudonym First Multicultural Church throughout this thesis.

Four leadership members at First Multicultural Church were interviewed, and their responses are analyzed and interpreted in this chapter. First, the racial demographics of the congregation will be discussed, followed by the demographics of participants. Second, participant responses will be grouped by theme into sections that outline the participants' definition of intent and the strategies employed by the church that result from that intent. Finally, four conclusions will be made based on this analysis.

### **Congregation Demographics**

The congregation of First Multicultural Church is comprised of a variety of races. The church tracks its internal diversity through diversity audits, which are taken at various times and in various departments. The most recent data concerning the racial demographics of the congregation was obtained with permission from the church and is presented in Appendix C. This data demonstrates that First Multicultural Church fits the definition of a successfully racially integrated church that was set forth in the Introduction of this thesis. Because the church

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

meets the definition, which requires that significantly less than 80% of the congregation be of one race, the following qualitative data can be viewed as a model for how racial integration may be built in churches within the United States.

### **Participant Demographics**

Five questions were asked to determine the demographics of participants with regard to self-identified race, age, religious background, position at the church, and tenure in that position. These demographics are described in the following material.

Of the four participants, 25% self-identified as white, 25% self-identified as African American, and 50% self-identified as multicultural. Participant #1, who self-identified as multicultural, explained, “I would classify myself as other...I have a little bit of everything in me.” Participant #2 mentioned being Hispanic but maintained that he was multicultural.

Seventy-five percent of participants were over 50 years old, while 25% were between the ages of 40 and 50.

All participants identified as being of Christian background. Fifty percent did not mention a specific denomination while 25% named a Protestant/non-denominational affiliation and 25% named a Baptist upbringing. Participant #3 expounded on his religious background, specifically mentioning that he had grown up in a Baptist background and accepted Christ at a young age. He detailed a later salvation experience as a teenager and described his pursuit of youth ministry before arriving to serve at First Multicultural Church.

Seventy-five percent of participants served in pastoral positions, with 25% identifying as associate pastor, 25% as campus pastor, and 25% as worship pastor. Twenty-five percent identified as a ministry director. Fifty percent had tenure of under ten years, with 25% having served six years and 25% having served 9 years. Fifty percent of participants had tenure of over

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

ten years, with 25% having served 12 years and 25% having served 17 years. Of the participants, 50% mentioned a recent change in their position. Participant #3 had transitioned from a volunteer-based position to a full-time pastoral position, and Participant #4 had transitioned from a full-time pastoral position to a volunteer-based minister position. The leadership positions listed included responsibilities such as providing holistic care to the congregation, selecting members of ministry teams and leadership, giving vision in accordance with vision from the church's senior pastor, and elements of preaching and teaching.

The subsequent questions were aimed at exploring the perspectives of the participants regarding congregational diversity and the role of an intent to be racially integrated. The following material will summarize the responses to these questions and interpret them. First, a definition of intent will be presented based on the responses of participants. Then, the concept of active intent will be discussed.

### **Participant Definition of Intent**

When asked about which specific actions of First Multicultural Church had been the most effective in building the diversity of the congregation, 50% of the participants specifically and immediately named intent. Fifty percent named strategic actions, which will be discussed in a later section. Intent was described both as a public statement and as the root for all actions the church took in its efforts to increase congregational diversity.

First Multicultural Church's public mission statement included a commitment to being a multicultural church. Participant #3 referenced this mission statement in his response, saying, "It's in our statement...statements are important." This follows Emerson and Kim's (2003) finding that churches that specifically name diversity in their mission statement are more likely to sustain a multiracial congregation. Another aspect of the church's public statement was the

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

concept of *unracism*. This concept goes by a different name at the church, but, in order to protect confidentiality, the name has been changed to the pseudonym *unracism* when referenced in this thesis. *Unracism* was a commitment that the First Multicultural Church made to address racism through the lens of the Gospel, and 25% of participants named it as a founding concept.

Participant #1 reflected, “That was the initial intent of the church...that’s just our DNA.” The church’s mission statement publicly reflected this identity, making it clear that this church was aimed at being diverse.

All of the participants noted that talking about wanting diversity was not enough to create an environment where that diversity would be supported. Statements must be paired with action, as Participant #4 stated, “No matter what people put together, if you tell them, ‘Yeah, we have a heart for diversity,’ which doesn’t mean a whole lot if there’s no action.” Participants described a number of actions that followed First Multicultural Church’s mission of diversity, and this pairing of action with intent has been termed active intent. This concept is discussed in the following section.

### **Active Intent**

Throughout the responses of the participants, one common theme was identified. This was the concept of active intent, which may be defined as the ways in which an intent to be diverse expresses itself through specific actions. The main idea of active intent is that diversity must be sought after rather than expected to occur on its own. A defining feature of active intent is a constant thinking about race. When asked how often participants thought about race when carrying out the responsibilities of their positions, 100% responded that they thought about it all the time. This thinking about race was driven by the nature of intent within First Multicultural Church, as Participant #1 noted, “Being at our church, at a multicultural church, it’s probably

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

always in the back of my mind.” Participant #3 expounded, “I think about the value of multicultural ministry, which entails thinking about diversity, which entails thinking about race.” For these participants, the nature of the diverse, multicultural ministry that their church was engaged in made thinking about race a natural part of their responsibilities. As Participant #4 described, “It is not an add-on; it is the filter through which I see everything.” This view of intent inspired a variety of actions taken by both participants and the church itself to build the racially diverse ministry that was pursued. These actions included specifically structuring leadership, specifically structuring event guests and volunteer teams, and making changes to the church’s website.

### **Leadership.**

When asked about what goes into choosing an individual to serve in a position of leadership, participants mentioned factors such as desire, availability, commitment to Christ, alignment with the mission of First Multicultural Church, and skill in the particular role.

Fifty percent of participants mentioned a “vetting process” through which leaders were prepared and selected for a position of leadership. The initial step of this vetting process involved a person either expressing interest in a position, responding to an announcement that a position needed filled, or existing leaders approaching an individual about serving in a particular role. Once an individual was identified as potentially filling a role, that person underwent a process of interviews and classes to prepare them for the position. These classes covered subjects such as discipleship and the vision of the church. Specialized courses that focus on the church mission of multicultural ministry and racial diversity were also required, both for leadership and church membership, and were offered to anyone in the congregation who was interested in the course.

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

When the individual applying for leadership was adequately prepared, he or she was placed in a position.

One aspect of this vetting process included seeking out individuals who perhaps had not expressed the desire to hold a position but clearly had the capability and passion necessary. Fifty percent of participants spoke of this seeking out when building teams for ministry leadership. Participant #4 noted the influence of race on this process, stating, “My goal as a leader in an intentionally diverse church...was to make sure that we could be as representative as possible of the diversity of the body of Christ.” When reflecting on the process of finding racially diverse leadership, Participant #1 spoke of searching for leaders who were not in the demographic of those who typically responded to a need to fill a position. For example, when an announcement was made that a leader was needed for the church’s women’s ministry, the automatic response consisted mainly of African American women. Because the leadership team of the ministry had many African American female members already, Participant #1 noted, “I have to go. The leaders I’ve gotten that are not in that demographic I’ve had to seek out.” Participant #4 also described this process, stating,

Who’s going to come on their own?...And then who are we going to have to go get?... Most of the leaders that I talk to sometimes say, ‘Well, you know, we can’t be diverse because this is just who God brought us,’ kind of a mentality. Which is very passive. But the idea of being active to say, ‘Who do we want? Who do we need? Who’s missing in our ministries to represent?’ And then find them, include them—a much more active way to do ministry.

In order to build a racially diverse leadership team, members of different races needed to be found and approached in accordance with the principle of active intent.

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

This intentional diversification of leadership was seen as essential to creating a racially diverse church, as Participant #4 noted, “Depending on what the leadership looks like at a church, you tend to draw who you are.” This diversity of leadership was identified by Doughery and Huyser (2008) as having a positive impact on the racial diversity of a congregation, a principle reflected in the leadership process of First Multicultural Church. Participant #2 commented,

“It is no mistake that our elder board is diverse because one of the biggest mistakes we think many churches make is they say they want diversity, but there’s no one that is diverse in their leadership...One of the ways that we...continue to attract diversity is because, when you come to [church name], you see someone like you at all times.”

Racially diverse leadership served as a non-verbal confirmation of the public statement that the church was committed to diversity.

### **Church events.**

In addition to diverse leadership teams, church events were shaped by the intent to be diverse. Participants recounted two main ways in which this took place. The first of these was a strategic selection of people either to be on stage at events and Sunday services or who was a part of a team for community events outside of First Multicultural Church. The second involved what kinds of events the church hosted.

When choosing people to serve on stage at an event or a Sunday service, Participant #1 noted, “We’re very intentional about what you see.” She followed with an example, “Our senior pastor, who’s African American, when he’s speaking, will make sure that whoever’s doing the welcome is not African American.” This specific staging of people during Sunday services was echoed by Participant #3, who responded, “We pay close attention to what we’re communicating

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

on stage. And so sometimes we will add people to the mix of people on stage to make sure that we have diversity.”

Beyond Sunday morning services, speakers at events were also specifically invited in order to display diversity. Participant #1 told of a recent event: “I was very intentional about who I asked so that it’s not primarily African American or it wasn’t primarily Caucasian.” Speakers were invited who were Latino and Asian so that no one race received more representation than another. The same strategy was described by Participant #3 when speaking of a recent comedy event held by First Multicultural Church. This participant noted that a specific line-up of guest speakers was invited that included a variety of races, saying, “We could have just had Steve Harvey or Michael Jr. come, but we didn’t. No, we were strategic in how we looked at the outreach and who we invited.”

Community events taking place outside of the church were also heavily shaped by the intent to be diverse. Attention to diversity influenced the team of volunteers and staff who were present at these events, a strategy mentioned by Participant #3, who stated that, when putting together teams for outreaches, “We pay close attention to making sure that we’re a diverse team of people.” This strategic structuring of event teams was used in combination with awareness of the demographic that the event would impact, as Participant #2 commented, “We think about, ‘What possible encounters are we going to have that are based on either race or culture?’” This participant went on to speak of a community outreach event where race was a main concern for how volunteers were recruited. This outreach consisted of giving boxes with ingredients for Thanksgiving dinner to members of the community who were unable to afford them. Since many of the recipients of these boxes were immigrants who spoke only Spanish, the church specifically planned to have a volunteer base that could speak Spanish so as to better serve the community.

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

In addition to who was seen during events, an attention to diversity shaped the types of events that the First Multicultural Church created. Participant #3 reflected that the church tended to avoid hosting events that aimed too heavily at one particular race. This participant gave an example of an African worship night, which would attract mainly African American people. This was not seen as negative, but Participant #3 noted that events aiming at one race were held sparingly so that more than one race would be attracted, creating diversity.

### **The website.**

When asked how First Multicultural Church's website had changed with regard to the content concerning *unracism*, 50% of participants did not report having noticed a change while 50% did note change. Their responses are compared below.

Participant #1, who did not see any change on the website regarding *unracism*, attributed the lack of change to the concept of *unracism* being the original intent of the church. This participant commented, "That's just our DNA. That was the intention of our senior pastor from the very beginning...I don't know that I would say it's changed at all because it's who we are."

Participant #4, who also did not note any changes, did describe a change in how the concept of *unracism* was communicated by the senior pastor and received by the congregation. She noted, "I think once our pastor got more comfortable sharing the content with the congregation that it started to get into the language of the congregation a bit more." This process was a gradual one that required a shift in thinking for many congregation members. Participant #4 described the difficulty of such a shift with regard to the congregation in which African American was the majority, saying, "When you're looking at a group of brown people—particularly African Americans—and you tell them, 'You have to make room for the non-black people,' that's a hard shift in the head. But it's exactly what needs to happen." Because the

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

concept of *unracism* was so new to many people, it would take more time to embrace, especially for people groups who have been historically oppressed. While the process of embracing *unracism* was a slow one, Participant #4 did notice how the congregation was beginning to receive it.

In contrast to these two participants, Participants #2 and #3 described the changes they had seen on First Multicultural Church's website. When Participant #2 first arrived at the church, the concept of *unracism* did not exist, although creating racial diversity was a value of the church. He described the change on the website as reflecting the change that the church itself had undergone: "The website really reflects the process of growth and maturation that we have gone through as a community." Participant #3 also spoke of the website becoming more reflective of the identity of First Multicultural Church, specifically with regard to newcomers. He mentioned videos and photos that showed the diversity present in the church, "We don't use stock photos...those are all real people...I think it depicts who we really are." Both of these participants linked the change within the church of embracing *unracism* with the changes on the website.

### **Quotas and tokenism.**

A common theme among participant responses was the idea of displaying diversity through leadership and those who served on stage. This display of diversity may seem to mirror the principle of tokenism, which, according to Baron (2016) only desires to give the appearance of being racially diverse without embracing the influence of non-majority racial groups. As stated in the Literature Review of this thesis, tokenism is a Limiting Response and often causes non-majority members to leave a congregation. However, tokenism and intent differ in their

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

underlying goals and perspectives. Participant #4 addressed the difference between the two when discussing the actions of First Multicultural Church in building racial diversity.

The goal of tokenism, according to Participant #4, was encompassed in the question, “How do we get more of ‘them’ here? Fill in the blank whatever ‘them’ is.” The goal of intent was encompassed in the question: “How can we be as representative as possible—the beautiful diversity that Jesus has made?” These goals reveal the contrasting perspectives of tokenism and intent. While tokenism views diversity as an advantage to use and display, intent views diversity as being created by the Lord. Intent understands that racial diversity allows for a richer experience of God, as Participant #4 stated, “We need to hear from people because we’re just better when the conversation’s diverse.” Her assessment of the two contrasting ideas can be summed up in her statement, “Racism is keeping people out because of who they are and how they’re created...we are better when we are more diverse...if anything is monocultural, we don’t get the best of what it could be.”

### **Conclusions**

The participants interviewed provided thoughtful responses that revealed their perspectives on racial integration and the role of intent in building congregational diversity. Their perspectives may be summarized in the following four ways.

1. Intent is foundational to racially integrated ministry and should be publicly stated. First Multicultural Church took an Accepting Approach to race, defined in the Literature Review as explicitly accepting racial non-majority members. The concept of accepting and embracing all races was reflected across participant responses to several of the questions and was viewed as the “DNA” of the church. Intent to be racially diverse was vital for creating a diverse congregation and, without that intent, diversity would not exist. One of the ways in which intent was made

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

known was through public statements of commitment, including the church mission statement and the concept of *unracism*.

2. Intent must be acted on in order to be valid, a concept termed in this thesis as active intent. A lack of action would invalidate a church's intent to be diverse, as Participant #4 noted, "You say you have a heart for something, but then when people come in and they experience something else and they don't see representation, they may not even get to what you want to actually tell them verbally." The active pursuit of diversity was seen as inseparable from the intent to be diverse.

3. Active intent expresses itself in a variety of ways, including church leadership, events, and online emphasis. The factor of race was constantly being considered by participants as it related to their position at First Multicultural Church and inspired a number of strategies for actively building diversity. Church leadership, event speakers, and event volunteers were racially diverse so that a variety of races could be represented. The influence of race on the process of leadership, public speakers, and volunteers was not the same as tokenism, since tokenism only seeks to give the appearance of diversity without embracing it, as the First Multicultural Church examined sought to do on every level of ministry. Church events and community outreaches operated based on the different races that might be impacted by the event. These events and outreaches were shaped by the racial identity of the community so as to better meet their needs and to create an environment within the church where many races felt welcome.

4. Racial integration takes time. The concepts that motivated First Multicultural Church's pursuit of diversity did not immediately take root in every congregation member, as the responses of Participant #4 reflected. Therefore, the actions that follow intent must be allowed

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

the time necessary to affect the demographics and perspectives of churches. Although racial integration is a difficult and long process, the participants deemed it worth the wait.

Now that participant responses have been analyzed and interpreted, formal conclusions may be made, including implications of research, limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research. These conclusions are presented in the following chapter.

### **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

Throughout the previous four chapters, this thesis has considered the role of the American church in American race relations. The Literature Review examined the church's relationship to race throughout history, concluding that the church has had a complex relationship with race and racism, at times challenging racism and at other times justifying it. A review of the often negative aspects of the American church's dealings with race allows one to understand the current atmosphere of contemporary race relations and to approach this atmosphere with humility and compassion. The Literature Review then considered modern scholarship regarding how the church views and responds to the concept of race in contemporary society.

After the Literature Review, this thesis presented novel research that examined one successfully integrated church congregation. Information gained from interviews was analyzed and interpreted in the Analysis of Data to determine what effects a church's intent to be racially diverse have on the operation of that church. Four conclusions were made about the nature of intent and the influence it has on church structure in leadership, events, and website content.

The information gained from both the Literature Review and the study make two important implications regarding the role of the American church in race relations. First, it is possible for churches to integrate racially. This process takes considerable time and effort, but the benefits far outweigh the costs. A successfully integrated congregation provides a space where believers can experience the Lord in new ways, overcome personal biases and prejudices, and challenge racism in American society. Second, the intent to be racially integrated must be matched by specific actions that demonstrate the church's commitment to unity to the

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

surrounding community. The American church fulfills its role in race relations through how it acts, and a clear commitment to racial diversity can only be complete if it is followed by action.

The limitations of this study stem from its small sample. Because interviews were conducted with members of leadership at a single church in one region of the United States, the data received cannot be generalized so as to speak for all racially integrated congregations throughout the country.

Despite the small sample, the qualitative data gained from interviews allowed research to be deeper and richer than a broader sample. The data revealed the perspectives and principles of leaders in an already successfully integrated church. The perspectives and principles may be applied to any congregation in a variety of ways that would allow congregations seeking to build racial diversity to do so.

It is the hope of this thesis to inspire churches to create environments that can support racial diversity and to provide a model for churches to follow in their endeavors to do so. It also hopes to inspire additional research on the impact of intent on church structure to deepen the current understanding of intent. Future research should consider congregations in regions other than the northeastern United States to discover the perspectives of other regions and to consider the impact of regional location on the presence and expression of active intent. It should also examine how a church's efforts to build diversity are received by members of the congregation to further understand the efficacy of such efforts.

The American church possesses the potential to create change in modern society by challenging the racism and bias at work in the culture. As the church continues to address these issues by making a public commitment to do so and by following through on that commitment, it

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

will begin to see its congregations transform and fulfill its potential within the surrounding culture.

**References**

- Barndt, J. (2007). *Understanding and dismantling racism: The twenty-first century challenge to white America*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Barron, J. M. (2016). Managed diversity: Race, place, and an urban church. *Sociology of Religion*, 77(1), 18–36. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srv074>
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2003). *Racism without racists*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bracey, G. E., & Moore, W. L. (2017). “Race tests”: Racial boundary maintenance in white Evangelical churches. *Sociological Inquiry*, 87(2), 282–302. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12174>
- Brown, A. W. (2019). Racism and the Christian Church in America: Caught between the Knowledge of Good and Evil. *Social Work in Public Health*, 34(1), 134–144. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19371918.2019.1566111>
- Buswell, J. (1964). *Slavery, segregation, and scripture*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Christerson, B., & Emerson, M. O. (2003). The costs of diversity in religious organizations: An in-depth case study. *Sociology of Religion*, 64(2), 163–181. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3712369>
- Cobb, R. J., Perry, S. L., & Dougherty, K. D. (2015). United by faith? Race/ethnicity, congregational diversity, and explanations of racial inequality. *Sociology of Religion*, 76(2), 177–198. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sru067>
- Creswell, J. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

- DeYoung, C. P., Emerson, M. O., Yancey, G., & Kim, K. C. (2003). *United by faith: The multiracial church as an answer to the problem of race*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Dougherty, K. D., & Emerson, M. O. (2018). The changing complexion of American congregations. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion; Hoboken*, 57(1), 24–38. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12495>
- Dougherty, K. D., & Huyser, K. R. (2008). Racially diverse congregations: Organizational identity and the accommodation of differences. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 47(1), 23–44. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2008.00390.x>
- Emerson, M. O., & Kim, K. C. (2003). Multiracial congregations: An analysis of their development and a typology. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 42(2), 217–227. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5906.00174>
- Emerson, M. O., & Smith, C. (2000). *Divided by faith: Evangelical religion and the problem of race in America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Garces-Foley, K. (2008). Comparing Catholic and Evangelical integration efforts. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 47(1), 17–22. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2008.00389.x>
- Hatch, R. D. (1978). Integrating the issue of race into the history of Christianity in America. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 46(4), 545–569. Retrieved from <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000770850&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Hearn, M. (2009). Color-blind racism, color-blind theology, and church practices. *Religious Education*, 104(3), 272–288. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344080902881298>

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

- Heschel, S. (2015). The slippery yet tenacious nature of racism: New developments in critical race theory and their implications for the study of religion and ethics. *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 35(1), 3–27. Retrieved from <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAn3799587&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Ingram, T. R. (Ed.). (1960). *Essays on segregation*. Houston: St. Thomas Press.
- Kelsey, G. (1965). *Racism and the Christian understanding of man*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Kennedy, S. (1959). *Jim Crow guide: The way it was*. Boca Raton, FL: Florida Atlantic University Press.
- Lloyd, V. W. (2014). Organizing race: Taking race seriously in faith-based community organizing. *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 42(4), 640–660. Retrieved from <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001997598&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Marti, G. (2009). Affinity, identity, and transcendence: The experience of religious racial integration in diverse congregations. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 48(1), 53–68. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2009.01429.x>
- Marti, G. (2010). The religious racial integration of African Americans into diverse churches. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 49(2), 201–217. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2010.01503.x>
- Robertson, C. (2018, March 9). A quiet exodus in white Evangelical churches: Black worshipers say too few pastors are addressing racism. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com>

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

- Taylor, M. C., & Merino, S. M. (2011). Assessing the racial views of white conservative protestants. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 75(4), 761–778. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfr038>
- Wadsworth, N. (2010). Bridging racial change: Political orientations in the United States Evangelical multiracial church movement. *Politics and Religion*, 3(03), 439–468. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048310000131>
- Whitford, D. (2010). A calvinist heritage to the “Curse of Ham”: Assessing the accuracy of a claim about racial subordination. *Church History and Religious Culture*, 90(1), 25–45. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/187124110X506509>
- Wright, B., Wallace, M. E., Wisnesky, A. S., Donnelly, C. M., Missari, S., & Zozula, C. (2015). Religion, race, and discrimination: A field experiment of how American churches welcome newcomers. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 54(2), 185–204. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12193>
- Yancey, G. (n.d.). *Beyond racial gridlock*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

### Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What is your race?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your religious background?
4. What is your position at [church name]? What does that entail?
5. How long have you served in your position?
6. What goes into choosing an individual to be on the team of elders? On the council of women? On the executive team? On the team of ministers and pastors? On the staff?
7. How often do you think about race when carrying out the responsibilities of your position?
8. What specific actions of the church have been the most effective in increasing the diversity of your congregation?
9. What kinds of things do you consider when creating a community outreach or event? Has the subject of race influenced any of the outreaches and events that you have done as a church?
10. When you were in the process of creating the first version of the church's website, how did you decide what to highlight? How has the content concerning race and "*unracism*" changed since that first version?

**Appendix B: Recruitment Email and Oral Consent Statement**

**Recruitment Email**

Hello, My name is Shannon Wolf, and I am a student with the School of Honors at Southeastern University. Would you consider giving a few minutes of your time to take part in a one-on-one interview concerning the racial diversity of [church name]? The purpose of the interview is to collect information for a research project conducted by myself as part of my thesis under the School of Honors. The primary investigator at Southeastern University is Dr. Richard Harris, Associate Professor in the College of Arts and Media. Dr. Kevin Weaver, Associate Professor in the College of Education, is also an investigator on this project.

The purpose of this study is to identify the role of intent in creating a multiracial church congregation.

Participation in the interview is completely voluntary. Refusal to participate or the choice to withdraw from the study will not affect the individual in a negative manner.

The 10-question interview should take about 30-60 minutes of your time and will further the understanding of the effects of a church's mission to be racially diverse on the church itself. Please respond truthfully to every question. Responses of individuals during the interviews will be completely confidential and will only be used for reporting the collective results in the thesis. Interviews will be audio recorded to ensure accurate collection and interpretation of your responses. There are no anticipated risks associated with this study.

If you have any questions related to this study, please contact Shannon Wolf at [smwolf@seu.edu](mailto:smwolf@seu.edu) and/or Dr. Harris at [rcharris@seu.edu](mailto:rcharris@seu.edu). You may also contact Dr. Weaver at [kweaver@seu.edu](mailto:kweaver@seu.edu). The Institutional Review Board may be contacted at [irb@seu.edu](mailto:irb@seu.edu) with any questions or concerns related to the interview.

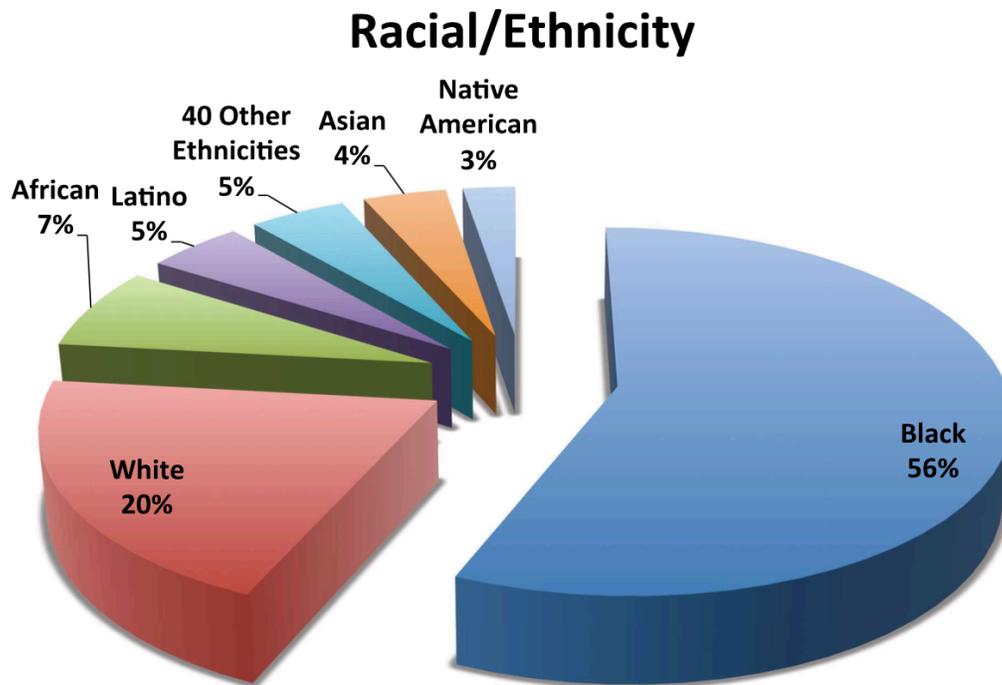
## THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND RACE

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would appreciate your experience and knowledge to assist me in the completion of my thesis.

### **Oral Consent Statement**

By participating in this interview, you certify that you are 18 years of age or older, that you consent to participate, and that you consent to the use of audio recording to collect and interpret your responses.

Appendix C: Chart of Congregation Racial Demographics



Data retrieved from the Chief Financial Officer, November 6, 2019.