

# Faith Report

## Reconciling: Unity Month By Pastor Stan Long

The other evening, our family experienced a unique worship event with thousands of others at the First Mariner Arena. Israel Houghton and New Breed were on tour with Chris Tomlin in a great concert that profiled the oneness of the body of Christ and the mandate to be salt and light through ministries of justice in the world. (You can find out more at <http://www.onemillioncan.com>). I was blessed, amused, and stirred as Israel briefly shared his testimony of having been a prime candidate for abortion, as the product of the union of a 17 year old single white mother and a black father. He praised God for His life, for the transforming power of the gospel and, though he humorously described himself as a "Halffrican American", reminded us that he finds his ultimate identity in Jesus Christ.

Our world is changing: Halle Berry, Tiger Woods, Alecia Keys and now, most significantly, the election and inauguration of our new president, Barack Obama, are symbols of this change. They all share the experience of wrestling with their cultural heritage and identity in a world that has historically put so much emphasis on labels and categories that now seem to be fading away.

Comedian Steve Harvey in his own humorous way exhorted the audience at the Stellar Gospel Music awards that African Americans need to resist putting all their hopes in a new administration that is promoting change. His message was that real change starts in the hearts and minds of each individual. He reminded them that President Obama is not going to change things such as your poor job performance, your poor academic performance, your rebellious kids, your bad relational choices, your waistline frustrations, etc. He challenged them not to trust in Barack but in "The Rock!"

*"For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ."*

*1 Cor 10:4 (ESV)*

*"<sup>3</sup>For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! <sup>4</sup>The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are just. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he."*

*Deut 32:3-4 (ESV)*

The challenge for the church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was and is to maintain our unity in a world that sees rich and poor, Jew and Gentile. The gospel of Christ reminds us that these categories are not as significant as we often perceive them to be.

*"<sup>11</sup>Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all."*

*Col 3:11 (ESV)*

February is Unity Month at FCF, and this year's activities will focus on maintaining this unity in the midst of our changing world. One of the primary goals of the February Soul Food class series, the "Warriors for Unity" worship profiles, the ethnic potluck meal on February 28, and the movie discussion is to bring us to the point where we more easily understand and embrace one another as brothers and sisters from our diverse backgrounds. Then we will all experience a clearer appreciation for the "glorious riches" that we share in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 3:16) ♦

### Dates For Your Calendar

- Feb. 6** Concert of Prayer
- Feb. 11** Faith Leadership Night
- Feb. 16** Presidents Day;  
church office closed.
- Feb. 28** Pot luck supper and  
movie, "Something the  
Lord Made"
- Mar. 6** Concert of Prayer
- Mar. 8** Discovery Welcome  
Luncheon



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*United that the  
world would  
know*

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Colossians 3:11

## Race, Reconciliation, and the Multiethnic Church

By Maria Garriott

In 1963, when Carol Pfeffer was eight years old, her parents took her to an amusement park. She scurried onto the tilt-o-whirl. When the ride stopped, the police were waiting. Officers interrogated her parents. “Who are you? Where are you from?”

Her father explained that the family had lived in Baltimore all their lives. His explanations didn’t help. Carol and her family were forced to leave the park.

Carol now knows they were ejected because of her. Although the rest of her family is White, Carol is biracial, and in 1963, people of color were not allowed in Gwynn Oak Park.

While Carol’s parents treated her with great affection, she faced racism in segregated Baltimore. African Americans could not sit at lunch counters or try on clothes in department stores. They were banned from swimming pools. Once, a relative snapped, “We never had any Black in our family until you came along.”

As a young believer in the 1970s, Carol joined a college ministry that included both Black and White students. But on Sunday mornings, she had to choose between a White church and a Black church.

According to Michael Emerson and Christian Smith’s *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, Carol’s church experience was typical. Ninety percent of African American Christians attend predominately Black congregations, and more than 95 % of White believers attend predominately White churches. Less than 6% of American churches are multiracial. Rather than leading the way toward healing and unity, churches often unwittingly perpetuate racial separation.

Jesus’ ministry and message were radically inclusive. When he cleansed the temple of moneychangers who were cluttering up the space reserved for Gentiles, he

quoted Isaiah: “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.”

The church was multiethnic and multi-lingual from its earliest days by divine design, and will be so in heaven. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on those “from every nation under heaven”, creating a smorgasbord of believers from Asia, Africa, and Europe. This new faith was so inclusive and radical that a new vocabulary was needed; the term “Christian” was coined in the multiethnic city of Antioch, Syria. In Acts 6, the apostles intentionally included diverse people in the distribution of food and in the selection of the first deacons. Paul tells the Ephesians that in purchasing our redemption and reconciling us to God, Jesus has also broken down “the dividing wall of hostility” between formerly separated people groups. In Galatians, Paul writes that “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Finally, Revelation describes a heavenly city of worshippers from every tribe and nation.

In a multiethnic church, differing perspectives on church culture, theology, or worship styles can take on a racial subtext. “...Racial reconciliation and multicultural congregations often come at a cost and with sacrifice,” write the authors of the follow-up book, *United By Faith*. Nevertheless, they call for a movement toward multiracial congregations. As Billy Graham said, “No other force exists besides the church that can bring people together week after week and deal with their deepest hurts and suspicions.”

In 1994, Carol began attending Faith. “I loved coming because there were people who were like me—biracial kids, interracial couples, Black and White. Now I really feel like I fit in. I think Faith is a glimpse of what God wants us to be.” ♦

*A longer version of this article appeared in BreakPoint magazine.*