



5 WAYS TO IMPROVE CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Resources for a Multicultural Perspective



Last week I had a pretty incredible conversation with some ministry leaders. We all serve in different contexts in the US: Colorado, Tennessee, Massachusetts and North Carolina.

Our churches vary in size and context from large multisite (5000+) to small single location (500+).

Our skin colors vary from white to light skin to brown skin.

We got together to talk about a topic that is gaining momentum with every news cycle.

The realities of racism in our culture.

Later this week you'll get to see that video conversation and hear the words of some incredibly graceful, intelligent and powerful leaders who experience the realities of racism every day. And we get the gift of learning from them.

But through the course of that conversation I felt a deep sense of conviction.

Each leader described their experiences growing up in environments where they looked different than those around them. Navigating questions and assumptions about their race and culture. As I listened, I wondered how implicit I've been in perpetuating the racial discord in my own community. I can say with integrity that I would never do anything deliberately racist, but is my lack of intentionality part of the problem?

My lack of learning what every kid, student and parent needs to feel safe at my church. My lack of studying, researching, and reading to shape my thinking. To sharpen my filter through which I can examine how well my ministry reaches **all** families. Not just the white, middle class, suburban families that mimic my own.

Do you find yourself in a similar situation? Are you looking for ways to make your ministry environments safe for all families? My friends and fellow leaders helped me shape some thoughts that can help. Take a look at five ways to improve cultural sensitivity in your ministry.

Look at your Volunteer Team

When you consider the kids and students that come to your church, does your volunteer team on stage reflect the varying ethnicities in your audience? In other words, when a dark skinned first-grader participates in your elementary service, will she see someone that looks like her teaching the bible story? Will the boy with asian features see a leader that looks like him leading a small group? Will the fifth grader who's bff is wheelchair bound see that his church is a place where his friend can belong?

If the adults and students that comprise your volunteer team do not reflect the audience they're reaching, are there changes you can make?

I love this thought,

“Your team should reflect both genders, as many races as possible, and people of different abilities. This is important even if these kids are not currently in your ministry. This lets the children in your ministry know that your church values all people, whether they are in the room or not.”

Consider How You Communicate

What words do you use when communicating with kids, students or parents? Is your language inclusive or exclusive? Does your messaging assume two parents living under one roof? Or do you consider the single parent home, the foster parent home, the minority home? Does your storytelling or sermon consider the varied living contexts or economic status of your audience? Or does it assume only one?

When talking to kids and students, check your posture. Are you eye level? Or looking down at them? Are your arms folded? Or hands open reflecting an open mind and heart? There's a power dynamic at play. Ignore it and you run the risk of making a kid/student feel unsafe.

Whether it's the lobby, hallway or worship environment, everywhere a kid, student or parent walks conversations are happening. How can you create sensitivity within your ministry so they feel safe?

Let Them Volunteer to Participate

We are all in different phases in our faith journey and abilities. And we have no idea what a kid or student has experienced outside the walls of our church. Forcing participation can be an unintentional trigger that easily makes them feel unsafe. So, continue to invite participation



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without forcing it. Forced activity isn't fun. And forced faith isn't faith at all. It's just religious practice. Respect the process and give them space to participate in their time.

Intentionally Shape Your Perspective

What shapes your perspective today? What books are you reading? What podcasts are you listening to? What resources are you digging into to expand your understanding of diversity and the varying contexts in your audience?

We can only lead others as far as we've taken ourselves. So, what steps can you take this week to shape the way you think?

Here's a Bonus: Download the Be For Them resource guide for a quick start.

Widen Your Circle

If someone checked your phone today, what story does it tell? Does it reflect calls, texts and video chats with a homogenous group of people? Or does it reflect the level of diversity you wish to reach in your community?

A big part of breaking down the walls of racial divide has more to do with bringing people into your inner circle that look and think very different from you. People whose life experience can shape your perspective. People whose opinions and ideologies can sharpen yours.

I'm not an expert in racial reconciliation. I'm just another leader like you that wants to make an impact on every kid, student and parent that engages with my church. And doing that requires that I grow, learn and love. To see people the way Jesus sees people. Their hearts. Their faith. Their world. Not their appearance.

Before we can make a difference, we have to make a change.