

racial reconciliation

hospitality plus holiness equals a church dedicated to bridging racial divide



Hinshaw Memorial Church in Greensboro, N.C., may not have the same ethnic makeup as the early church founded at Pentecost, but it's just as diverse--and purposely so.

When asked how this melting pot of ethnicities came to be, the Rev. Bart Milleson, pastor says, We realized hospitality and holiness are the Christian way of life.

Located on what locals dubbed Restaurant Row, the 468-member congregation sits in an economically and ethnically diverse retail area. Public housing, apartments and million-dollar homes dot the area just miles away in different directions. The church also boasts an equally diverse ethnic makeup, with members from Liberia , Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Sudan, Mexico, Bosnia,

Jamaica, Nepal and a host of other nations.

It was precisely this combination of hospitality and holiness that attracted Margaret Burton.

Burton says she was tired of the interstate drive to get to church and looked for a church closer to home. She says she visited other churches, but did not feel welcome. She read an article in the North Carolina Christian Advocate about Hinshaw's efforts at inclusiveness and decided to visit.



Open hearts, open minds, open doors is a reality at Hinshaw, says Burton . Rev. Milleson phoned and scheduled a visit the day after I visited. I was overwhelmed by his kindness.

Burton , a registered nurse, says the people at Hinshaw look like the people with whom she daily works.

I work in an integrated environment, an atmosphere of caring. So I like hearing Rev. Milleson preach about all Christians being responsible for one another. There's genuine love at Hinshaw.

From the gathering to make 1,400 quarts of Brunswick stew to sell for missions, to the praise and worship fellowships on the church's front lawn, to weeklong mission trips, to the walking teams of lay pastors who visit the community, multiethnic events are the norm at Hinshaw.



And that was especially appealing to Shoshanna Brackett and Peter Brackett.
□When I visited Hinshaw, I was amazed at the way I was embraced into a Christian family and faith by people I had never met. I was not a Christian, says Shoshanna.

Shoshanna, who is black and was reared Jewish, and her husband, Peter, who is white, were particularly interested in finding a church with a Pentecostal vision that mirrored their multiethnic family, which includes their biracial children, Jasmine and Joshua.

As I look around the church each Sunday, I see a congregation representative of the Pentecostal vision worshiping together in the name of our Lord, says Shoshanna.

At Hinshaw, it's important that members learn one another's stories. One way they do this is in small groups. Women get to know one another through circles. Home groups that reach across ethnicities continually form. Monday nights are dedicated to Disciple Bible Study with the Korean United Methodist Church . On Wednesdays, people across generations and ethnicities meet for Bible study at an older adult community.

But Milleson admits Hinshaw, and the church in general, has a long way to go toward racial reconciliation.

We tend to assimilate rather than integrate. To get along, we ignore differences and become uneasy when we explore the

histories of cultures represented in our fellowship.

When we talk honestly, we tend to dive straight into issues of racism and classism. Our conversations tend to end without getting to the heart of the issues that have caused pain.

Milleson's efforts at Bible-based racial reconciliation extend beyond the pews and the community and into research. He's studying ways to bring Christians together across ethnicities to reflect on how the means of grace can lead to honest dialogue, which in turn will lead to Christ-like friendships: eating together, praying together, studying the bible together, sharing the truth in love, confessing and reconciling, showing hospitality, embracing holiness and joining ministry endeavors in the community.



The research involves theological reflections on the means of grace, which include baptism, the Eucharist, the Bible, prayer and works of mercy; true stories; and invitations to practices that help churches navigate the stormy waters of race and reconciliation.

God is bringing together groups of Christians across ethnicities who want to present ways to help all churches reclaim God's vision of the truly integrated church.

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