

SYNOPSIS: REFLECT THE COMMUNITY

Growing in diversity socio-economically, racially, culturally, and generationally through reconciling relationships.

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.” Ephesians 2:14-16

Reflecting the Community means that Bent Tree continues to extend a welcoming reach to people in North Texas. It means becoming a church of diverse ages, race, socio-economic status, and cultures that is reflected in our congregation, in our various ministries, on our stage in worship gatherings, and in leadership. It means becoming a church where diversity is valued, desired, pursued, and celebrated. It means recognizing our unity is best displayed in diversity.

A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR WELCOMING, PURSUING AND REFLECTING DIVERSITY

The Imago Dei (*Genesis 1:26-28*)

Genesis 1 makes it explicitly clear that *every* human being is made in the image of God and, therefore, has unmatched dignity in all creation. Human ethnicities are part of God’s intention for his image bearers, and it takes every tribe, tongue, and nation to reflect the image of God in his fullness.

The Redemptive Plan of God (*Genesis 12:1-3*)

God’s intention, reflected in the Abrahamic Covenant, is to pursue his rescue mission to *all nations* through Israel with the ultimate hope of creating a new, multi-ethnic community.

The Vocation of Jesus is a Multi-ethnic Vocation (*Luke 2:25-32*)

When Simeon encountered the infant Jesus in the temple, he said, “my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of *all nations*: a light for revelation *to the Gentiles*, and the glory of your people Israel.”

The Great Commission (*Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-47*)

Jesus sent his first disciples out on a mission to “make disciples of *all nations*,” to baptize them into a new, multi-ethnic community of Christ-followers.

The Church Born On the Day of Pentecost (*Acts 2:5-11*)

Luke goes out of his way to name *15 distinct identity markers* of those God-fearing Jews from “*every nation under heaven*” who heard the gospel in their own language. On the day of Pentecost the church was a multi-ethnic community made up of Asians, Africans, and Europeans.

The Gospel Paul Preached and the Churches He Founded Entailed Diversity

(*Ephesians 2:14-16*)

Paul insisted that our reconciliation with God through Christ also entails our reconciliation with one another across ethnic dividing lines. God’s purpose was to create “*one new man*,” a new, multi-ethnic community of faith. For Paul, this was not just about an “invisible unity” but a real, relational one. The churches Paul planted included men and women, rich and poor, old and young, Jews and Gentiles. He declared them all “one in Christ Jesus” (*Galatians 3:26-28*).

The Vision of Heavenly Worship (*Revelation 7:9-10*)

When John gets a glimpse of heaven, what he sees is a beautiful, multi-ethnic community gathered around the throne of God in worship, “a great multitude that no one could count, *from every nation, tribe, people and language*, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

THE DIVERSITY OF OUR SURROUNDING COMMUNITY

The Bent Tree campuses are situated in or near Carrollton. Below is data on diversity from the 2010 census. Imagine the growth in diversity in the last decade as Texas is now the second most diverse state in our nation.

Population Around the Carrollton Campus

Race	2 Miles Out		5 Miles Out	
White	34,209	53%	158,962	56%
Black	11,091	17%	30,935	11%
Latino	11,782	18%	49,397	17%
Asian	5,095	8%	36,275	13%
Multi	2,150	3%	8,413	3%

This data encourages us that (1) *pursuing the community* (intentional evangelism) is vital. Such diversity is an opportunity for us to trust Jesus to develop relationships through us, discover people's stories, and ask the Spirit to discern the next steps. People need Life in Jesus, and Jesus sends us to bring his extraordinary love to them. (2) We need to be open to listen to, learn from, and forge relationships with others who are different than we are, asking the Spirit to reveal and remove any barriers that exist in our own thinking.

SOME INITIAL SUGGESTIONS

Pray, Pray, Pray

Pray that Bent Tree would express and demonstrate God's heart for all people and nations in our practices of ministry, mission, and in our fellowship.

Cultivate Genuine Friendships With People Who Are Different Than You

To grow as a diverse church means to establish and cultivate relationships with people who are different than we are.

Grow In Your Understanding of Others

We look for opportunities to meet people beyond our own specific group so that we can develop relational empathy through listening and loving.

Delight In Our Differences

We are not colorblind and do not need to pretend to be. God intended and delights in the diversity he created. See and celebrate our differences.