

THE INFLUENCE OF RACIAL DIVERSITY ON CHURCH GROWTH: A CASE STUDY



Research Question

In what ways has racial diversity influenced the growth of Buffalo Suburban Seventh-day Adventist Church (BSSDA), Lancaster, New York?

Methodology

Instrumental Case Study- to explore the influence of racial diversity on the growth of BSSDA, a multiracial church

Data Collection- through focus groups of church leaders and members, and a review of church membership records

Findings

The perceived elements that contributed to the growth of BSSDA as a multiracial congregation/Four Major Themes:

- **Church Leaders:** Open-mindedness of pastor, inclusivity of lay leaders
- **Worship:** Transition in style, diversity in music and language
- **Commitment to People:** Resources, welcoming, relationships, location
- **Openness to Change:** Language inclusion, acceptance of racial diversity, adapting to cultural differences

The perceived ways this multiracial reality contributed to the growth of BSSDA/Two Major Themes:

- **Attracted by Diversity:** Return of former members, welcomed, accepted
- **Benefits of Diversity:** Inclusion, racism undermined, spiritual growth

Conclusions

- **Intentionality:** The intentional stance towards racial inclusiveness and diversity
- **Culture Appreciation:** Allowing cultural expression in services
- **Investing:** In BSSDA, investing resources in people
- **Welcoming:** An intentional welcoming environment
- **Access:** Location easily accessible
- **Willingness to Adapt:** A deliberate acceptance of diversity and willingness to adapt to differences along with an intentional position of non-tolerance for racial discrimination

Implications

- **Local Pastors:** Important to be culturally competent and understand and embrace the dynamics of a multiracial church
- **Lay Leadership Teams of Local Churches:** Important to be accepting of and incorporate diversity; must not tolerate racial discrimination
- **Conference Leaders:** Capitalize on the positional leadership of the pastor-hire and train pastors toward multiracial ministry
- **Leaders Responsible for Pastoral Continuing Education:** Develop resources in multiracial church ministry

Link to dissertation

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