



REVELATION

7:9

EVERY NATION, TRIBE, PEOPLE





*Afterward I looked
and there was a great multitude
that no one could count,
from every nation, from all tribes
and peoples and languages,
standing before the throne
and before the lamb.*

Revelation 7:9





REVELATION 7:9

Task Force Interim Report 2021



EPC

A Global Movement of Evangelical Presbyterian Churches

Introduction

The Purpose of the Revelation 7:9 Task Force

Afterward I looked and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the lamb. Revelation 7:9

The purpose of the Revelation 7:9 Task Force is to motivate and equip EPC churches to emulate the worshipping church described in Revelation 7:9. That is to live out the Great Commission + the Great Commandment within each EPC Church's 1-3-5 mile ministry radius. As we do so, we wish to live out the message of reconciliation in the midst of polarization, hate, evil and racial injustice.

We don't have to convince you that our country needs grace. We don't have to convince you that our country needs God's love. We don't have to convince you that our country needs the reconciliation between groups of people that the Kingdom of God offers.

Reason to Hope

"Nearly two-thirds of practicing Christians (64%) and 44 percent of the general population of all U.S. adults believe churches have a major role to play in improving race relations. Practicing Christians tell us they are both already listening to religious leaders and hoping to see them step up more in this area."

BEYOND DIVERSITY, A 2021 Barna Report, page 13

"Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." • Acts 17:11

You watch the news. You know the tensions. You know the conflicts. You know the grief and sorrow that wash around us. You are in the middle of the battle.

We also know that this is a day when America has not only become more ethnically, racially, socio-economically and age diverse, but also more gospel adverse.

You know. We know that God's kingdom offers reconciliation between us and God, and the kingdom offers reconciliation between individuals, and between different groups.

Recent studies may confirm your instincts. A 2021 report from the Barna organization gives us reason to hope, reason for concern and reason to act for the health of relationships in our churches the country. You will see information from that Barna Report throughout this document.

But setting aside both cultural statistics and how you may feel in this moment, the eternal kingdom of God gives us hope. Hope, as we see the picture in Revelation 7:9 of "a multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing and worshipping before the throne and before the Lamb."

This picture of different ethnic groups, age groups, racial groups, economic groups coming together under the banner of the Lamb is not a politically correct thing. It is a kingdom correct thing.

When the Christian community comes together across barriers which divide us from one another, the principalities and powers know that Jesus Christ is Lord. As long as we are divided, whether black and white, male and female, rich and poor or whatever, the principalities and powers smile and say, "We are still in charge here!" N. T. Wright

Let's pray that through the Holy Spirit we will supplant the rule of the evil one in our lives and churches. Until the day the kingdom of this world becomes the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ...we cry "Maranatha!"



The Task Force is aware that there is no one mold, no one model for a church that wants to be more like Revelation 7:9. Not every EPC church is interested or ready to become multi-ethnic. Pastors, sessions and congregations in some EPC churches hold different internal attitudes toward broadening its demographics. Not every EPC church is situated in an ethnically or social-economically diverse community.

Nevertheless, we encourage every church to look at the outreach philosophy (see below) and the seven expressions of a local church that would like to become more like Revelation 7:9 (see below) to see if there are one or two steps that they could take to strengthen their own ministry. Every church can make some movement in the direction of becoming more like the worshipping community in the new heaven and the new earth.

When we refer to becoming a “Revelation 7:9 church,” or “becoming like Revelation 7:9,” we have no intention to create two classes of churches. After all, there is only one church of Jesus Christ.

However, Revelation 7:9 is intended to express an aspiration primarily to bridge the ethnic and cultural gaps that clearly exist in the Church of Jesus Christ in general and the EPC in particular. Secondly, Revelation 7:9 seeks to bridge the generational and economic gaps that also exist.

The first-century Jewish Christians, led by their allegiance to Christ alone, “leaned into” the difficult quest of Gentile Inclusion (Ephesians 2:11-21). So in our broken world, we view our Revelation 7:9 mission as an imperfect attempt to renew this quest to reach all ethnicities, cultures and ages within our 1-3-5 mile radius.

Theological Perspective

At a pivotal point in the Bible, God promises that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham. Significantly, we read this immediately after the table of nations in Genesis 10 and the episode at Babel. While sin scatters the peoples, God’s blessing unites those who are different in culture, language, and ethnicity.

The history of Israel shows that it was torn

Reason for Concern

“Many Christians are not moving toward progress on racial justice. From 2019 to 2020, after the racial reckoning that occurred in the summer of 2020, the proportion of practicing Christians who are unmotivated to address racial justice increased by 13 percentage points.”

BEYOND DIVERSITY, A 2021 Barna Report, page 6.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” • Romans 12:15

between the impulse to be holy and separate, on the one hand, and to reach out in blessing, on the other. Often it failed to succeed in either task. We rejoice that this promise and calling to bless all the nations is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He tangibly showed love to those he encountered in spiritual, physical, and emotional ways, and by challenging how Roman and Jewish leaders oppressed people with their hypocritical practices and harsh laws.

As his disciples, we aim to follow in his footsteps. At the birth of the church, at Pentecost, the church through the ages was given a paradigm for reversing the curse of Babel, bringing those of many backgrounds and ethnicities into the body of Christ. The aim of the Revelation 7:9 Task Force is to assist the churches of the EPC to be more faithful followers of Christ in offering full-orbed blessings to their neighbors of every variety.



The Revelation 7:9 Outreach Philosophy

This past year the Revelation 7:9 Task Force moved from a listening stance to implementation. To reach people from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages in your neighborhood is to reach people who are different than we are.

We want our churches to be a reflection of the rich diversity of our neighborhoods. To do this means to build trusting relationships which are less paternal with active listening and to share leadership.

This requires majority-culture churches, particularly suburban churches, to adopt local outreach philosophies which may differ from their traditional approach. Traditional local outreach has historically

been described by recipients as overly paternal, with an unintentional tone of condescension, of doing the poor a favor.

The Revelation 7:9 outreach philosophy requires us to mitigate condescension by developing personal relationships with leaders of minority churches, non-profits or community organizations and to ask about their needs.

As we cultivate multi-ethnic relationships throughout the neighborhood, the goal is to experience candid, Christian, civil conversations, shared leadership and power, and inclusive and intentional planning.

Seven Expressions of a Local Church Aspiring to be Like Revelation 7:9

The description of the completed church in Revelation 7:9 is not detailed. To the right you will find seven expressions, any of which would describe a Revelation 7:9 Church. The expressions which follow are intended to be representative, not exhaustive, in their expression of a Revelation 7:9 church.

1 A Revelation 7:9 Church will be guided by a local outreach philosophy as described above.

2 A Revelation 7:9 Church could be one that shares facilities between a majority and a minority congregation, as long as the relationship stretches beyond a transactional landlord-tenant contract. Facility-sharing would also include frequent joint events and partnering on joint outreach endeavors as equal partners.

3 A Revelation 7:9 Church could be a mono-ethnic church that decides to transform into a multi-ethnic, intergenerational, and/or sociologically and economically diverse congregation.

4 A Revelation 7:9 Church could be a mono-ethnic church or a cluster of churches that plant a multi-ethnic, intergenerational, economically diverse congregation in an area where the demographics make sense.

5 A Revelation 7:9 Church could plant a campus extension differing in age or ethnicity from the mother church.

6 A Revelation 7:9 Church could plant a mono-ethnic church in an under-resourced zip code, which will usually be among people of color. This plant will very likely look and feel different from the mother-church.

7 A Revelation 7:9 Church could plant a church in an under-served zip code. An underserved zip code is distinct from an under-resourced community. It is defined as a local church plant designed to evangelize a demographic dominated by “Nones” or “Dones,” the religiously unaffiliated (formerly called the “unchurched” or “de-churched”) in their 1-3-5 mile radius.

A Revelation 7:9 Church will grow over time in its expression of the church's progress toward reconciliation, relationship, justice and mercy.



Conversations with Churches Throughout the Denomination

As of the date of filing of this report, three to four churches have made commitments to enter the Revelation 7:9 process. Four to six additional Churches are in serious conversations about doing so and 2-3 more churches have just begun the conversation.

The Task Force has set the goal to identify and assist 12-15 churches who aspire to pattern themselves after Revelation 7:9 by September 2021. Our Revelation 7:9 Task Force is grateful that we have different kinds of churches from around the country entering the Revelation 7:9 movement.

Reason to Act

“The work our teams have done on race and the Church over the last three years leads us to believe the following questions are essential for leaders:

- How am I stewarding the trust people have placed in me to lead on issues of race?
- What incorrect attitudes remain unchallenged in my personal life and in my church or ministry that hinder biblical justice and mercy?
- What pain around racial issues in my own congregation or community have I remained unaware or dismissive of?
- For better or worse, how is the church's reputation affected by my own ability to responsibly address and work toward racial justice?
- How can the church contribute to creating systems of racial justice rather than inequality?”

BEYOND DIVERSITY, A 2021 Barna Report, page 13.

“Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” • I Timothy 4:15-16



Revelation 7:9 Church Stories

Here are how three churches tell their stories of making progress toward becoming a Revelation 7:9 church.

Reynolda Church, Winston-Salem, NC

Reynolda Church has a goal that “all people are welcome, celebrated and encouraged to belong!” The church cannot ask the culture to do that which it is not willing to do. We believe and pray that through the power of the Holy Spirit, Reynolda Church will become a multi-ethnic, intergenerational church that looks not only like the communities we serve but also like the great throne room where we will one day all worship and praise God together.

The question then is how do we get there? We adopted the phrase “One Image at a Time,” because we are created in the image of God to do the good works he has prepared for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10). Our role then, as we participate with God on His mission, is to begin to shift the one-hundred-year history of Reynolda Church towards this mission!

As our first practical step, we formed a Revelation 7:9 committee in the Fall of 2020. We began with the book study, Be the Bridge and formed Be the Bridge small groups. Next, we began to build on a platform we call the Multiethnic Intergenerational Maturity Model, by which we seek to move the family of Reynolda to the basic biblical goal “to consider others as better than ourselves.”

We partner with community organizations and other churches to get to know and serve the community. We seek to remove barriers by affirming all persons.

Practically, we work this out through giving our time, talent, and treasure. Here are a few examples:

- **Partnering with Mineral Springs Elementary, an elementary school in our community with a significant student base struggling to close the achievement gap, to provide for practical needs as well as celebrate and encourage their teachers and families.**
- **Partnering with Carolina Christian College to make seminary education possible for ministry leaders and to make college education accessible to undergraduate students in our city with exceptional financial needs.**
- **Offering Reynolda Church Español, a weekly Spanish-speaking worship service held at our Village Campus.**
- **Partnering in prayer with St. Peter's World Outreach, a predominantly African-American ministry.**
- **Partnering with other local churches to hold multi-ethnic worship nights.**
- **Making our worship services more welcoming, and free of language and other barriers.**

We know that we have just begun and it is with joy that we continue our labor of love and passion to bring a foretaste of heaven to earth.



First Presbyterian Church, Aurora, IL

First Presbyterian was planted 163 years ago in what has transitioned into a Latinx neighborhood. We, as a church community, have taken seriously our purpose in this neighborhood and reached out to it for years in three primary ways:

Kingdom Kids Club, our after-school ministry during the school year which includes tutoring time as well as bible lessons, games, dinner and a lot of fun.

Summer Day Camp which runs 4 weeks in June. This is an extended VBS that we run daily from 8-3 in our family center, with a team of paid counselors. Some of those counselors are young adults who have come up through our ministry. What joy to see them serving their community.

Both of these ministries are directed by Brenda Bustamante, a Mexican American on our church staff who helps us communicate with and better understand the needs of our community.

Further, both ministries are places where children and families both inside and outside our church family can meet, interact and develop friendships. It's difficult, yet beautiful work that requires commitment, intentionality and, most of all, grace.

Mission Aurora is a week set aside each year for the purpose of folks from First Pres to go out in the community to serve and show Christ's love in practical ways. During that week they do such things as work at mobile food pantries, lead backyard kids' clubs, or serve at local ministries such as Hesed House (a local homeless shelter), Wayside Cross (a transformational recovery program for men), Lifespring (a safe place to recover for women and women with children), or Urban Youth Ministry doing such things as help with baseball camps.

Then just before COVID-19 we found people of other ethnic groups starting to come to worship.



We hadn't planned this, but it happened. Pastor Jeff Moore said, "I don't know what God is doing but he is certainly at work. We want to learn more about how we can more effectively join in what God is already doing." We are excited to become a Revelation 7:9 Church.

Reason to Hope

"One of the important positive findings from this study is this: People want the Church to take a place of leadership on these critical topics!"

Overall, practicing Christians believe churches can help improve race relations by welcoming people of all races into their congregations (80%). This remains the top option for change, regardless of respondents' racial category."

BEYOND DIVERSITY, A 2021 Barna Report, page 13

*"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?*

*To act justly and to love mercy and to walk
humbly with your God." • Micah 6:8*



Central Presbyterian Church, St Louis, MO

Even before the EPC established the Revelation 7:9 Task Force, Central Presbyterian had been working through the meaning of Revelation 7:9.

Clay Smith, the senior pastor, grew up in Mississippi, and was familiar with the problems of race in the South from an early age. Later, as Clay and his wife adopted a son and a daughter of color, he began to reflect on the challenges of forming a healthy multi-racial family.

Ministering at Rivermont EPC in Lynchburg, Virginia, Clay began to see the beauty of ministry across racial lines. His church partnered with two African-American churches to serve the city of Lynchburg. The leaders of all three churches were committed to ongoing relationship and service. The ministry continues and has significantly grown, even five years after Clay has moved to St. Louis.

When Clay moved to serve as pastor at Central,

he was presented with the opportunity to forge another partner relationship, this time with Friendly Temple, a thriving, predominantly African-American congregation in north St. Louis. Central and Friendly Temple had an on-again off-again relationship for some years, and the relationship needed re-invigoration. This has happened.

In Clay's view, the success of the partnership revolves around the leadership of the churches. It is important both that the relationship is gospel-driven and that the parties actively express humility, so that they can mutually learn from and follow each other. The picture of the church in Revelation 7:9 requires that each person protect the dignity and honor of those different from ourselves.

The partnership has grown through conversations involving members of both churches. Groups comprised of people from both churches—couples, Millennials and men's groups—have begun what are called "Courageous Conversations." They are learning to talk honestly and not be threatened. Learning each other's hearts is the secret sauce that brings change.

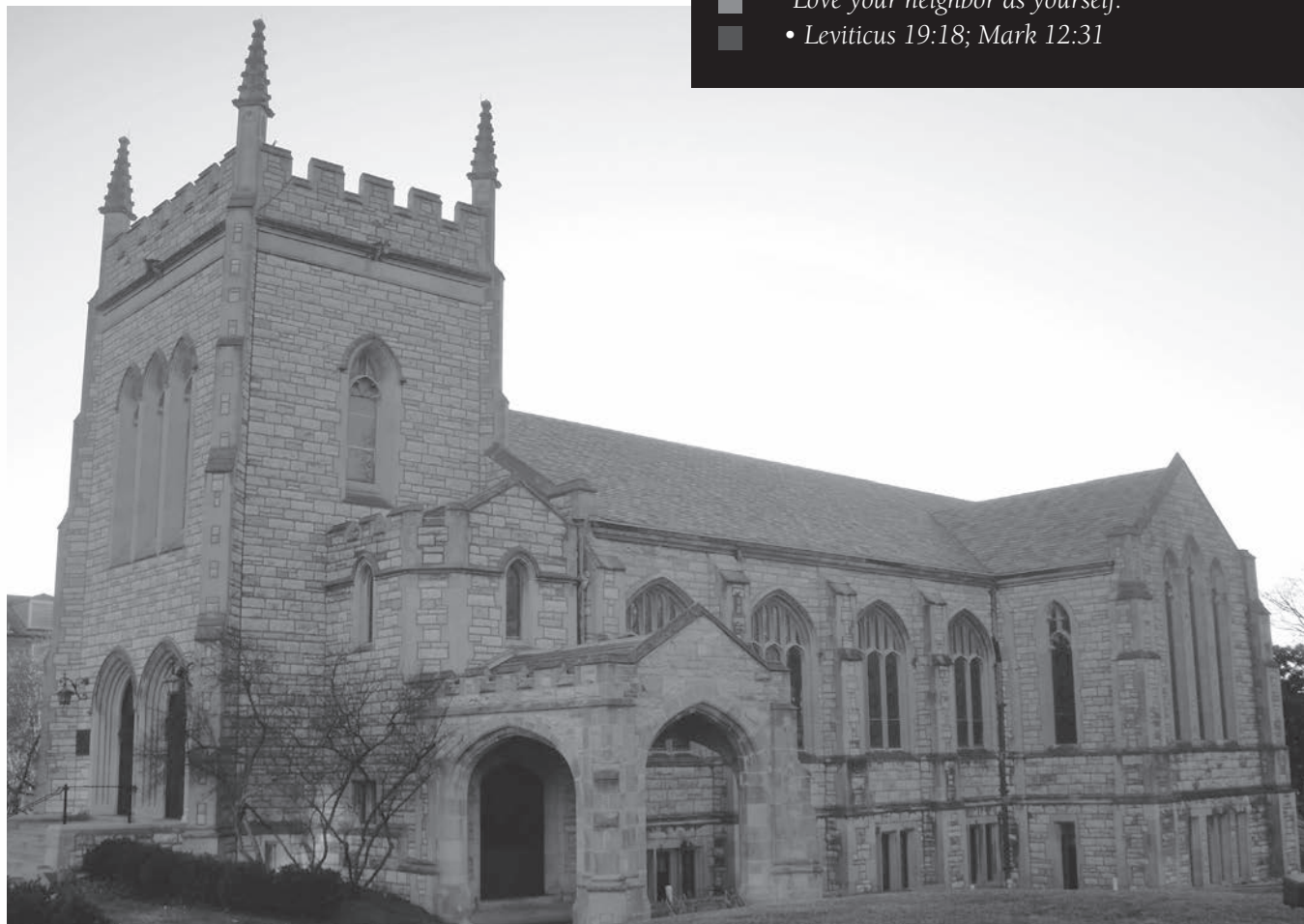
The most important tangible outcome of the partnership has been a joint ministry to the Saint Louis County jail. Central and Friendly Temple both send team members, who together model reconciliation. Inmates see the power of the gospel on display in these teams, and inmates have been encouraged that that hope goes with them when they are released.

Leaders from both churches acknowledge that there are internal difficulties for both partners—after



all we live in a polarized culture, and the church is not immune from the spirit of the age. Central members can be hesitant because they fear the agenda of critical race theory. Friendly Temple members can be fearful that Central is not a trustworthy partner. Not all small group conversations go smoothly.

Nevertheless, the Gospel compels us to join together side by side as the body of Christ for the transformation of the world. Friendly Temple and Central are trying to do just that, demonstrate a little more of God's kingdom work in St. Louis, a racially divided city



Reason for Concern

“Consider this: More than half of Black practicing Christians have their race in mind frequently, with nearly one-third saying this is “very often” the case. Their Hispanic peers follow in race-consciousness, and Asians are the minority population least likely to say they are often thinking about their race. For white practicing Christians, however, their racial identity isn’t much of a focus; six in ten say their white identity is rarely or never on their mind.

In short, the lens through which you might never look may be the ones your neighbor is always compelled to wear.”

BEYOND DIVERSITY, A 2021 Barna Report, page 6.

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”

• Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:31



An Invitation

As stated at the beginning of this brochure, the purpose of the Revelation 7:9 Task Force is to motivate and equip our EPC churches to emulate the worshipping church described in Revelation 7:9 as much as possible in this broken world, and by doing so, to live out the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

If you sense the call from God for your church to grow in this way, consider joining the Revelation 7:9

adventure. It will be costly. There will be sorrow. We will all make mistakes. The Task Force acknowledges that we don't have all the answers. In some ways, we're still learning the right questions. It is a heart and Holy Spirit endeavor. We don't know where it will all lead, except that it will lead us closer to the one who is the Lord of all people and to fulfillment of our Lord's Prayer,

"Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven".

The Process for joining the Revelation 7:9 Movement

The first step to become an EPC Church to join the Revelation 7:9 Movement is for the pastor and session to commit to the process. There are two established essentials that must be in place to begin the process:

- **The senior pastor has to be on board and involved.**
- **There must be a commitment to establish a future looking team, which will set goals for near-term and long-term development.**

The next step involves getting the assistance of three teams from the Revelation 7:9 Task Force: The Assessment Team, the Resource Team and the Execution Team working in partnership with the pastor, staff and session.

This process includes, but is not limited to, assessing the readiness and capacity of a church to reach their neighborhood of 1-3-5 miles, the demographics, the attitudes and desires of the staff, leaders and congregation, setting goals, providing resources and training, refining ideation, planning initiatives, step by step implementation and establishing a strategy.

The aim of the process is to assist a church to create a future looking team whose objective is to visualize how the church wants to look and feel over the next ten years in preparation for the next generation.

If you are interested in more information about becoming a Revelation 7:9 Church please contact:

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Frequently Asked Questions

1. How does the work of Revelation 7:9 relate to church revitalization? Are these the same thing? How are they different?

Revelation 7:9 and church revitalization have some things in common, but also some differences.

Both Revelation 7:9 and church revitalization encourage spiritual renewal. However, revitalization most often involves in-reach of church members. Revelation 7:9 most often involves out-reach. Revelation 7:9 seeks to improve the delivery of the Great Commission of “making disciples of every ethnicity,” as well as to improve the delivery of the Second Great Commandment, loving our neighbors as ourselves.

The reality is that most churches within the EPC do not reflect a reasonably proportionate level of ethnic or economic diversity of the people within their 1-3-5 miles ministry radius. A Revelation 7:9 path seeks to encourage a more robust and reflective congregation that mirrors the local community in which they are located.

We believe it is helpful to think of Revelation 7:9 as a dynamic tool in a church’s existing evangelistic arsenal.

Unlike revitalization, pursuing a Revelation 7:9 path will more likely address the social ills of racial division and Biblical justice that need a gospel perspective.

In the final analysis, it does not matter the path a church chooses to renew its gospel sharing if it addresses both their Jerusalem and Samaria areas.

2. Is the Revelation 7:9 Task Force all about racial and ethnic diversity? Aren’t other kinds of diversity important?

No, it is not all about racial/ethnic diversity. Other types of diversity are also important. Revelation 7:9 also recognizes the need for age and economic diversity in our churches.

However, we must not pretend that the church has not been “leading from behind” on the divisive issue of race and ethnicity. Nor should we deny that we have allowed secular culture to fill the vacuum and control the racial narrative. Thus a Revelation 7:9 path seeks to emulate the early Jewish Christians who “leaned into” the tension of Gentile inclusion, by providing the gospel solution of radical love, righteousness, biblical justice and mercy.

3. I am not a big fan of terms like “white privilege” and “implicit bias.” If Revelation 7:9 comes to my church, will you use these and other similar terms?

No, we do not focus on such terms. Our National Leadership Team and the Revelation 7:9 Task Force focuses on biblical rather than cultural language—words like ignorance, fear, prejudice, hatred, love, justice, etc.

On the other hand, we must be conversant in these cultural terms and ideologies (that some fear lead to embracing a godless Marxism) in order to give an answer and winsomely contend for the faith (I Peter 3:15). The Task Force is therefore ready to resource those churches who want to engage the culture in their language.



Revelation 7:9 Task Force Members

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TE Andrew Smith, *Co-Chairman*

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