

# Becoming One: Intercultural Church

Key note -Sat 12 May 2018-Laidlaw College- Steve Maina

**Intro:** Video clip on global dance: Keep that image in mind as I will come back to you.

## Observations

- **Illustration:** Image of me becoming a kiwi (citizenship). All four of us in our family were each given a native tree seedling to plant to symbolise planting our roots in New Zealand. Kanuka, Papauma, Akeake and Mingimingi.
- We love the international flavour, cuisines, travel stories etc
- People value being politically correct and there is a growing desire to support ethnic minorities.
- I have noticed that sometimes the questions people ask seem to imply I'm not meant to plant my roots in NZ. It's not being overtly racist but it's what I would call unconscious bias. Who is a kiwi?
- In the Church, somehow, it seems it takes longer for people to feel that they belong. One way this plays out is the use of the term immigrant. If a NZer goes overseas, they are expat, if an African skilled worker comes to NZ, we call them migrants.
- I have met quite a number of pastors who have been called to come to NZ as missionaries. It seems politically correct to talk about mission overseas but if overseas people say they are coming on a mission to NZ, we feel a bit uncomfortable. The concept of polycentric mission still appears new to some. Diaspora mission has three elements- mission to, with and by. It's the latter two that we are learning more about.
- The cultural shape of NZ is changing dramatically not just in Auckland. I was in Queenstown a few weeks ago. There are about 4000 Brazilians who live there. Portuguese could even be the second most commonly spoken languages in Queenstown. How has this shaped the local church there? I spoke to a pastor down there recently who said the Brazilians don't come to their church as they have their own services.

- I have noticed that the dominant culture's perspective seems to carry the day eg. Welcome and greeting on a Sunday, hospitality, acknowledgement, pastoral care-visiting when one is sick.
- I have also noticed that when growing disciples, we tend to reproduce after our kind.  
**Illustration:** Last Sunday service in Wellington.
- In a nutshell, I have noticed that while Multiculturalism is growing in our Churches I think the journey to Inter-culturalism has been a bit slow. You see, multiculturalism maintains cultural boundaries within the church (Tongan, Samoan, Filipino congregations etc, but an intercultural church celebrates and seeks to be strengthened by these differences.
- Having this that, I want to honour you and many others around the country that are working hard to have these conversations. The future has got to be bright.

### Obstacles

- Finding **common ground**-language, interests
- Differing **Worldviews**/ Communication patterns/Conflict resolution- Hot/cold cultures
- The problem with **blind spots** (assumptions), of course, is that we're not aware of our assumptions. One side cares about efficient problem solving and personal success and individual responsibility, while the other side is offended at how little attention is being given to personal relationships or family obligations.
- **Social class/economics** -Hierarchy and equality, roles, social obligations among friends, a place to stand (*I was once asked to move in a church service when I sat in a place that belonged to someone else*). Comfort zone.
- **Theology of mission** - West to Rest, Rich to Poor, What it means to be the body of Christ in Jesus upside down Kingdom. The A reading of I Cor 12:21-22 from a global perspective *21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ....* Challenges us to consider how we can receive the gifts of the global Church.
- **Personal experiences**/What's your story? How people respond could trigger something in the past and cause one to react a particular way.
- **Perhaps fear of losing control**.../unfamiliar/ or creating a barrier for seekers.
- **Don't appreciate what the other bring to us. The gifts of the global Church.**
- The Congo Story
- Kenneth Bailey from his book *Jesus through Middle-Eastern Eyes* says *..The gospel is not safe in any culture without a witness within that culture from beyond itself. In*

*every culture the message of the gospel is in constant danger of being compromised by the value system that supports that culture and its goals. The stranger to that culture can instinctively identify those points of surrender and call the community back to a purer and more authentic faith.*

## **Opportunities-Potential pathways**

Over the last 25 years of ministry, I have been deeply enriched by others. Although it's easier to grow a homogenous Church, I have learned that when I only surround myself with people who think like me, I can develop "blind spots." I have learned that I need different voices speaking into my life and also enjoy learning about the creative beauty of our Lord from among people of different cultures, races, and perspectives.

Because as I do this, I gain a much broader perspective on the Kingdom of God. I also think other's benefit from my vantage point. Missiologically, I am convinced that building churches around homogeneous groups is not what Jesus meant when he prayed '*may they be completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me*' (John 17:23 NRSV).

*An intercultural congregation is a community of believers centred on Jesus who intentionally celebrate God's creativity by empathetically listening to one another. Their oneness in fellowship is a sign of the work of the Holy Spirit, and their love is a witness to the world.*  
*Kirk Sims, The Mission Society* <https://www.seedbed.com/3-things-you-shouldnt-expect-in-an-intercultural-church/>

So what are some potential pathways to becoming more intercultural?

1. Be prepared for the adventure of engaging differently. **The what if** question.....courage to ask what's your story, go deeper, allow room for the unexpected.
2. Find a person of peace/a cultural interpreter/gate keeper/ door opener/guide to grow your understanding
3. Start small.....International service/celebrating diversity in worship, prayers, music, dance, reading. International meal....
4. Create an environment where people can feel they belong and to contribute. What people value may be different.
5. Diversify your leadership team/faculty-Story of the Diocese of Birmingham
6. Build relationships – Listen a bit longer, be patient with their language and get to the heart of their story. It's about honouring the person God puts in front of you. And partner with other churches or organisations.
7. Be willing to fail/drop the standards e.g. service could go a little longer....., the sermon may be different but its ok.

8. It may be hard work initially and you may even step on each other's toes but when you finally get that dance rhythm, its beautiful. Its ok to allow the other to take the lead....

### **Conclusion**

Allowing space for different dancers Genesis 11:6

We are invited to join what God is doing to build His Kingdom even right here in Aotearoa.

It could be like Joseph and Daniel of old..our ongoing prosperity as a nation spiritually depends on how we welcome the strangers among us.

### **For Further reading**

<https://www.seedbed.com/13-tips-for-leading-an-intercultural-church/>

Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, Churches, Cultures and Leadership, IVP: Illinois, 2011