

Thoughts from a Pastor on Multicultural Ministry in Sydney ACL Address – Oct 2011 - Peter Lin

Intro

No longer a “Meat and 3 veg” society, are we?

Can't even imagine this city with no pizza, no kebabs, no butter chicken or no sweet and sour pork? Households regularly devour spag bog, fried rice and lasagne?

Food simply reflects fact that we are no longer a mono-ethnic or mono-cultural, mono-anglo society anymore. One of my daughters at 6yo, whose favourite food is pasta, declared one dinner: “I might be Chinese on the outside, but I have an Italian stomach.”

Basic stats...

In Sydney now...roughly

1 in 4 were born in Non English speaking country

Just over 1 in 3 are from Non-English speaking background (or more crudely, broadly speaking, 1 in 3 do not look white).

Projections are that Sydney is quickly heading to 1 in 2 people being from a NESB, and add to that second (2G) and third generations (3G)...if Sydney multi-cultural now, nothing compared to how it will look in the next 20-30 yrs.

However, we need numbers to convince us of what we see already when we walk down the street or into a Food Court. We are a multi-cultural or multi-ethnic city (using those terms interchangeably for our purposes tonight). We are a city of many ethnicities and in significant numbers. And also, for our purposes tonight, by “ethnic”, I refer, in the main to non-English speaking, non-Anglo Saxon origin.

Purpose:

Tonight is not to bore you with numbers but to provoke you and hopefully generate further thinking about what the increasing multi-ethnic reality of Sydney means for us as a Diocese, as churches and for our Mission.

Important to also notice that not only have the overall numbers of ethnicity increased but their distribution around Sydney has changed.

In the past, we tended to have **mono-ethnic enclaves**. That is not the case anymore. No longer are the Greeks in Arncliffe, Italians in Leichhardt, Chinese in Chatswood. Whilst there are areas of ethnic concentration, the fact is that ethnic groups are now living in all areas of the City and especially 2G.

SO WHAT?

What it looks like out there is not what it looks like IN HERE. Our Anglican churches do not reflect our community profile ethnically. I'm hoping we can assume that they should. How many of you can say that a third of your church is not Anglo-Celtic? How many of us can say our church is on a trajectory towards being 50% non-Anglo?

[Further, a significant proportion of our non-Anglo representation is not widespread amongst the parishes]

IOW, in a multicultural city, we would struggle to say we are a multicultural church.

So what does that mean for us?

1. Clearly need to be seeking to reach more than Anglo's. As we do that, because there are less mono-ethnic enclaves, gone are the days when we think of "cross cultural ministry" as how to reach the "other culture" in the parish. Now need to ask how do we reach the maybe 10, 20, even 30 cultures in the parish.
2. The obvious question then is, how do you reach so many different people from so many different places? Massive topic and outside of what we can do tonight.
3. Another implication...which is often neglected in thinking about cross cultural ministry. That is the matter of what might we need to change **inside our walls** i.e. **inside our gatherings**.

When we think about cross cultural ministry, tend to think about what we need to do when we go "out there" to reach them – how we need to change or adjust to connect. However, we don't often think about what we might need to change **once they come in the door**.

That is, often the unconscious expectation that once they're "in here", they'll just have to fit in. *We'll* change to get them, *they* change once we got them. "Cross cultural ministry" then becomes something we do "out there" but not what we do "in here". It's the *outside face of evangelism*, not the *inner life of church*. In my limited experience, it seems to me that often we are better at getting them in than keeping them in.

Don't hear me wrong...many of our churches are very welcoming. You can be sure a new person would be greeted with a smile, a newcomer's card to fill in, leave with a newcomer's pack, and get follow up call or email during the week.

Keep doing that but understand how weird and unwelcoming it *might* seem for ethnic person to walk into a service, engage with the back of someone's head for an hour, afterwards be given a Tim Tam and Styrofoam teacup, whilst standing in a hall that's possibly almost empty half an hour after the service, and expect them to feel like you want them to stay??

We've got to ask the question, do we need to do cross cultural ministry "inside" as well as "outside"?

That can be hard, because we like the way we do church. We're used to it. It's comfortable. We know what's going on. But what about the person who's come from a country where they might never have been to a western church before or engaged so closely with westerners? What happens if they end up being 30% Or 50% of the congregation? Are we willing to change how we do what we do, so they get it? So they feel more at home?

I was asked to plant a church in FF when I was at College. So in 4th yr, went there as a student minister to help decide. Attended the Prayer Book service held there at the time – small, all elderly, all Anglo.

They were mostly welcoming, they smiled, they gave me tea, but on one of my first weeks one person said to me, "We don't mind if your kind come, as long as they do things our way."

Still shocks me when I think about it, and pretty sure most don't think that way, but *is an unwillingness to change what we do inside the walls, in effect, have the same result, and maybe send the same message?*

Our churches, collectively and individually, need to think about how to make what we bring the nations into multi-culturally friendly.

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The consequent issue, once our churches under God become more multi-ethnic, is how do we bring the many and varied cultures together into a “multi-culture”? In mono-cultures, the culture of how you relate together is unspoken, assumed, known. Not the case when you put two or more cultures together.

My church has people from about 30 backgrounds. It’s fun just watching how the various nations interact with each other. Never forget observing an Chinese guy talking with an Assyrian guy over supper. Now understand, Chinese are generally very hands off. No kissing or hugging. Not demonstrative. We have wide personal space. Assyrians not so. Much closer personal space. So as intermittently looked at these two talk, the Assyrian would move closer to the Chinese guy. As his lesser personal space was invaded, he would take a step back. The Assyrian, for his comfort zone, would move forward. Over the course of supper they began at the front of the hall, and ended at the back of the hall.

I, as an Asian, even Aussie Asian, have grown up not very demonstrative. Not with family, not with friends. That’s how we Asians are. As our church grew we started getting South Americans, Middle Easterners, Mediterraneans...they all come from hugging and kissing cultures. Was hard enough getting used to it with the women but hugging and kissing men (hairy men) was a real challenge. They don’t do the awkward “pat on the back” male hug. They bear hug you. How many of you get that at church??

Point being, the culture of church changes when many cultures are there. So how do we facilitate that? How do we build multicultural churches, with a “multicultural culture” and into loving community of believers?

What do we need to do?

The “how” question again is beyond this address but let me say,

For a start, need to cement a mindset that sees ourselves as a multicultural church...a church where there isn’t a dominant culture. In reality, there will still be majority Anglo Saxon, but there’s a huge experiential difference walking into a meeting with 2% non-Anglo and 30% non Anglo.

Good news...changes we need to make mostly *tweaking* rather than wholesale. But a little goes a long way! Here’s a tip to start. Got to have more than a packet of Scotch Fingers for morning tea. Some things we cannot change. For eg, most churches, seating in meetings has to be in rows, but, let’s ask, are there ways to soften the cultural disconnect of that and other culturally confusing ways we might have?

Also, language is an issue to think through. We do need language specific ministries, with English off-shoots of some description, but we want to avoid creating a Diocese divided along ethnic lines as our bread and butter. Aside from that, in my opinion, being harder and requiring more resources, it’s hardly a commendation of “all one in Christ”.

As a Diocese...starting or continuing to address cross cultural ministry and multicultural ministry but more of our churches need to ask...

What are we doing now, as a church, to reach the nations in our parish and accommodate them?
Do we have *plans* or programs?
Do we *budget* for it?

Most churches will give to see the gospel preached to the nations overseas, but not to the nations in their parish!!

Many churches will bend over backwards to identify, train, encourage and support someone to be a missionary overseas, but don’t walk down the street to share Jesus with the person who may be from the very country you’ve sent someone to!!

And on slightly different tack...where are all our multicultural staff teams? I know of a couple but not many.

And where are our non-Anglo Senior Ministers in churches that are predominantly white? I don't know, but *could* that be the reason many of those churches are still pre-dominantly white?

And can I say...I've heard some very disturbing stories of Senior ministers and Wardens not employing ethnic assistants because it's a white church in a white area. Problem is that there is hardly anywhere in Sydney that is all white. Secondly, can an ethnic minister not effectively minister to whites?

They fix our teeth, file our taxes and fight our cancers but they cannot feed our souls?
They can build our homes, they can build our portfolios, but they cannot build our churches?

Need more multicultural ministry teams. Need more ethnic people recruited and sent to Anglo churches in ...well anywhere in Sydney.

Conclusion

The changing face of our city presents us with challenge that is not by chance.

In Acts 17:26-27:

"From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us."

Principle here is that God determines where the nations go and his determination is so that they would seek him and reach out for him because he commands all people everywhere to repent (v30). Well we know that people repent as they hear the gospel of Christ.

God has brought the nations to our backyard. Not here by mere fluke. Brought here that they might hear call to repent and so seek God and reach out to him.

He has directed the nations to us. If we're not to be reaching them with the gospel, then who is? If God wanted someone else to preach the gospel to them, he would have sent them somewhere else. But he has not. He's sent them here so that we can reach them with the message of Jesus.

God did not bring them because we can reach them, we're Anglicans...he brought them because the power of the gospel can. And he has entrusted that gospel to us to preach to the nations.

In Rev 7:9, John's vision of the multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne, started when the dividing wall of hostility between the Jews and the Gentiles was destroyed and abolished in Christ.

The body of Christ is not "Meat and 3 Veg", nor should our churches be.