

THREE ANGLICAN CHURCHES
ENGAGING WITH PEOPLE
FROM CULTURALLY AND
LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE
BACKGROUNDS



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Published 2015 by The Bush Church Aid Society,
Level 7, 37 York Street, Sydney, Australia.
Printed in Australia by The Bush Church Aid Society, 2015.

Cover: *Outreach* by Jan Stead

Three churches engaging with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. By Monica Short, Charles Sturt University.

ISBN: 978-1-86-467270-1

Culturally and linguistically diverse – religion – Christianity – spirituality

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Acknowledgements

A debt of gratitude is owed to the 25 anonymous voices in this report. Your commitment to your community, Church and God is entralling. Thank you to Bishop Andrew Curnow, Chaplain Judy McAdam, The Very Reverend John Roundhill, Archdeacon Michael and Kris Hopkins, Logie Onslow, The Reverend Gregory and Pricilla Chiang for your thoughtful input; your kindness was outstanding. My doctoral supervisors Associate Professor Wendy Bowles and The Reverend Dr Geoff Broughton have provided excellent advice, for which I am very grateful; thank you.

Thank you to Jan Stead, Raymond Howes, Rachel and Dale Barclay for bringing colour and beauty to this work. Thank you to Reverend Dr Mark Short, Rachel Barclay, Andrew Short, Matthew Short, Jill Baxter, Raymond Howes, Helen Howes, Kylie Anne Good, Janine van den Tillaart and Melinda Law for patiently proofreading my work and challenging my writing. I enjoyed seeing this report through your eyes.

Thanks to my dear husband and director of The Bush Church Aid Society, Mark Short, my sons Andrew and Matthew Short. Your encouragement and love inspires me.

To all mentioned, I thank God for you.

Foreword

Cultural diversity is one of the blessings of living in contemporary Australia. God is bringing the world to our shores, our cities and to the bush. Our communities and our churches are all the richer for sharing in the gifts and experiences of people from many nations.

The Bush Church Aid Society and the Anglican Diocese of Bendigo share a commitment to nurturing Christ-centred, mission-shaped, inclusive communities of faith. The following report recounts the experiences of three churches in the Diocese and their engagement with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. It gives those people a voice and allows us to hear their testimonies to God's grace and their hopes for the future.

We are delighted to sponsor and publish this report, praying that it will encourage other churches and ministries to embrace their mission to the world for which Christ gave His life.

The Right Reverend Andrew Curnow

Bishop

Anglican Diocese of Bendigo

The Reverend Dr Mark Short

National Director

The Bush Church Aid Society of Australia

Executive Summary

This paper presents the themes from a case study of three Anglican Churches engaging with people from diverse cultural backgrounds who settled outside capital cities. It addresses the following questions:

- How does the Anglican Church of Australia outside capital cities engage with people from diverse cultural backgrounds?
- What are the intentions, impacts and implications of these engagements?

Twenty-five members from St Paul's Cathedral Bendigo, House of the True Light Church Bendigo and St Margaret's Anglican Church Mildura participated in this research. These three churches are located in rural and regional Australia and have active engagements with people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

The key themes from the interviews are:

- Participants from CALD backgrounds desire to intentionally connect with God, church and others; and to feel heard, included and have their abilities respected as well as utilised. Faith is part of the participants' identity and informs their actions.
- Migrating to a new country can be confusing and isolating. For the participants, joining a church is part of the migration experience.
- Church is perceived by some as a 'go to' place for assistance, love, warmth and/or kindness in times of confusion or when experiencing exclusion.
- Building a genuine culturally respectful church community amongst different ethnic groups was considered to be time well spent. All those interviewed, both Australians and people from diverse cultural backgrounds, felt they benefited from the relationship more than others realised.
- Public spaces – such as churches – which connect people with people and with God were seen as vitally important. Some interviewees connect to church because it felt like a safe place for them and a window into the Australian community. Others consider it a place to meet people and make friends. Some thought of it as a home away from home; a kind, helpful and nurturing place. Others describe it as a place that will help them grow in their personal relationship with God.
- This research encourages Christians and all people to treat immigrants with dignity and respect – as they would to Jesus. This involves

intentionally listening to people from CALD backgrounds, identifying with them and making them feel heard.

- Participants from CALD backgrounds felt valued when their help was warmly received. They desire not to be seen only as people who need help from the church but also as people who can help the church.
- Interviewees described barriers in engaging with general Australian society, including churches. These include: misunderstanding Australian Anglican Church culture and an inability to negotiate entry into Christian activities.
- Engagement upholds people's well-being and develops social capital. The three churches in this report affirmed and utilised the skills of migrants in their congregations and promoted people from CALD backgrounds abilities within the local communities. Participants consider that a consequence of this emerging multi-ethnic social capital is the connecting of churches to local communities.
- Social integration and inclusion has the potential to grow churches.
- A challenge for local Anglican churches is to develop a national and global vision of social justice, inclusion and integration. Culturally-sensitive approaches to ministry, mission, evangelism, discipleship and prayer can help build Christian unity and develop community with each other and with God.

The report recommends:

1. Training in cultural competency for leadership teams for churches – specific to their local rural communities.
2. Churches connecting with locally established rural community networks which are building multi-ethnic social capital and well-being – including spiritual well-being.
3. Churches analysing local CALD communities' demographic trends and developing a culturally sensitive action plan through reflection and prayer.
4. Diversifying local church leadership teams to represent the diversity existing within their rural communities.
5. Mission societies identifying pockets in rural, regional and remote Australia where CALD people have congregated and partnering with the associated dioceses to jointly develop a 5-10 year vision for engaging with migrants in these areas.
6. Churches considering how they will evolve ministries over time, particularly when first and second generation migrants no longer need help but wish to engage with the church and utilise their leadership and other skills.

Three Anglican Churches engaging with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Introduction

This paper narrates the engagement of three Anglican Churches in rural and regional Australia with people from culturally and linguistically diverse cultural backgrounds. The information is presented in two sections.

The first section introduces key terms, drawing on theological, sociological and social work theoretical concepts and outlines the research methodology.

The second part of this paper presents the narratives of the participants. This study is action research focusing on writing 'with' people rather than 'about' people [1]. The people interviewed frame and inform the analysis, discussion and conclusion. People from culturally and linguistically diverse cultural backgrounds highlight the various intentions, implications and impacts of the engagements.

Background

Multiculturalism is a "structural and comprehensive response to cultural and ethnic diversity" [2]. Multiple views exist about the role, intentions, impacts, implications and importance of linguistic and cultural diversity in Australia – including within social institutions like churches. Some embrace diversity because it expands Australian culture and enhances social well-being and extends Australia's economic productivity [2]. Those who agree with this, including some church communities, recognise, support, celebrate or actively promote multiculturalism [2-4]. Others oppose diversity [3]. An extreme form of this opposition were the racist riots in Manly 2009 [3].

Whilst differing opinions coexist, Australia is a culturally and linguistically diverse nation benefiting from the migration and integration of people from different backgrounds. For example, humanitarian entrants to Australia and their children help overcome labour shortages in regional and rural Australia, participate in voluntary activities benefiting the local community and bring entrepreneurial skills and global trade connections to Australia [5]. In 2006, 4.4 million Australian residents had been born overseas in over 200 countries [6].

Many Australian institutions and businesses actively connect with, service, or employ people from diverse cultural backgrounds. For example, the Anglican Church of Australia, the second largest religious group in Australia in 2011, embodies, celebrates and encourages cultural diversity and supports multicultural mission [4,7,8].

In 2011, 7.59 million, or 34% of people in Australia, resided outside capital cities and 15% of migrants settled outside major urban areas [9, 10]. Less is known about people or families and their experiences of living outside capital cities compared to those living in capital cities [11]. This includes knowledge about people from overseas and their engagements with churches outside Australian capital cities. Organisations like The Bush Church Aid Society acknowledge the diversity existing in rural, regional and remote Australian Anglican Churches [12]. It is timely to consider the personal experiences of people from diverse cultural backgrounds' engaging with the rural Anglican Church. Narratives about engagements of people from Karen, Burundi and East Asian backgrounds with Anglican churches in a rural diocese – Bendigo, have been collected and presented in this paper. Knowledge from social work, sociology and theology has been drawn upon to aid this study. (A cross-disciplinary exchange of ideas between these three disciplines is possible for this case study because explorations of social fields are not limited by knowledge areas, discipline silos or boundaries [13].) Together they bring insights about how the church sees: itself and its mission within its local community; internal church structures like service, leadership and change; and external church structures like demographic changes and social capital and inclusion.

Aim, purpose and research questions

The aim of this paper is to present the themes from a case study of three Anglican Churches engaging with people from diverse cultural backgrounds who have settled in rural, regional and remote Australia. It addresses the following questions:

- How does the Anglican Church of Australia, outside capital cities, engage with people from diverse cultural backgrounds?
- What are the intentions, impacts and implications of these engagements?

The purpose is to identify themes that can inform further engagements between institutions and people from diverse cultural backgrounds.



Engaging with beauty by Jan Stead

Section A: Informing the Narration

Key concepts

Christianity, community and church

Belief, for example in God, is a complex and personal concept, explored by many disciplines and there is no universal definition [14]. Thinkers like Weber, Berger, Luckmann and Day acknowledge that belief can give meaning to life [14]. It has the ability to unite people into a single moral community such as a church [15].

Christian belief is grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ and acknowledges the authority of the Bible, recognising it has principles which can influence discourses about community engagement and immigration [16]. Yet regardless of the influence of Christian belief, it appears Christian theological thinking is not always considered in extant literature, or in social work and sociological conversations about community engagement or community welfare; and if it is referred to, it is often from an American perspective [17, 18]. This case study partially addresses this gap by narrating

experiences of engagements with Australian Anglican Churches located outside capital cities.

Community engagement can be defined as a “two way process: by which the aspirations, concerns, needs and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and in all sectors...; and by which...organisations involve citizens, clients, communities and other stakeholders in these processes...Engagement seeks to address barriers and build the capacity and confidence of people to participate in, negotiate and partner with, institutions that affect their lives,” [19]. Engagement is expressed in various forms, such as churches engaging with young Sudanese men via sport [20].

Church can be defined in many ways – theologically and/or sociologically. Theologian, Milbank defines church as “the community that is given to humanity and is constituted through the harmonious blending of diverse gifts” and Broughton describes it as “the earthly gathering of God’s people called his body” [21, 22]. Koeing sees Christ’s church as the household of faith [23, 24, Galatians 6:10], whilst Cole associates church with the Bible verse 1 Peter 2:9 “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light” [25]. For this research, church is defined as the gathering of people in Christian community [26].



Contrasting Cousins by Jan Stead

From its inception, the church has been multicultural, with people from different backgrounds gathering in mutual love to pray, sing, support each other, learn about Christ and eat together [27-31]. Since early days these gatherings engaged with their local communities, for example, through visiting programs, food distribution, hospitals and orphanages [27, 32]. Contemporary churches are at their strongest when they are extensions of their neighbourhoods, fully-engaged with their communities and containing a multiplicity of community based relationships [32, 33].

Not everyone sees church as a positive institution, some describing it as irrelevant, irrational, totalitarian or worse [34], some often as mono-racial and segregated [35]. Tragically, others have heart-rending stories of abuse by members of the church [36, 37].

In western countries, churches' compositions are changing due to an emerging emphasis on multi-ethnic church development [38]. For example, in Australia between 2001 and 2011 the number of people identifying with

Christian denominations rose by 3% and it is argued much of this is due to immigration [7].

Gushiken argues churches tend to take one of two approaches when conducting multicultural ministries [38]. One approach occurs when a dominant mono-cultural group decides on church structures without consulting others, including CALD people [38]. The second approach occurs when churches actively engage with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and include them in leadership [38]. In the author's experience both exist within Anglican Churches in rural Australia.

The Anglican Church of Australia is part of the world-wide Anglican Communion. The five marks of mission of the Anglican Communion are:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; to teach baptise and nurture new believers;
- To respond to human need by loving service;
- To transform unjust structures of society;
- To challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation; and;
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth. [39]

Presently, the Anglican Church of Australia is organised into 23 dioceses, including the Bendigo Diocese, and is grouped into five provinces or regions [40]. Each church within a diocese has a distinct worship style that is usually formal, written and participatory [40]. Worship is Biblically based and often informed by liturgy from *The Book of Common Prayer, An Australia Prayer Book and/or A Prayer Book for Australia* [40].

Rurality

In Australia terms like rural, regional and remote are described as “slippery” and “elusive” due to the numerous definitions that exist [41, 42]. This research interchanges the term ‘rural’ with ‘rural, regional and remote’ and it means populations located outside capital cities or their immediate surrounding suburbs [43]. This research recognises people in rural communities have multiple relationships and roles – known as multiplexity [44].

Thoughtful research and writing about rural Australian communities exists. However, the extant literature often focuses on demographic characteristics

like population, income, employment, geography, and does not always appear to consider the role of religion (including Christian Churches) [45, 46]. This study partially addresses this neglect by investigating engagements in the Anglican Diocese of Bendigo and reflecting on the intentions, impacts and implications of such engagements with people from Karen, East Asian and Burundi backgrounds.

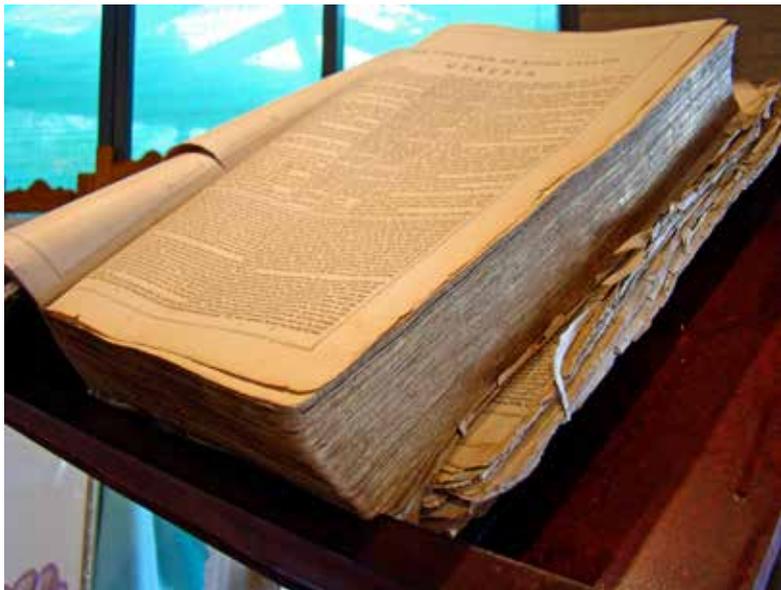


Lock 11 Trees by Dale and Rachel Barclay

Migration and multiculturalism

Numerous terms describe people who move from one location to another and who are not native to a local area. The Bible refers to this group of people as aliens, strangers, sojourners and foreigners [16, 24, Exodus 23:12, Psalm 129:19, Jeremiah 22:3]. International organisations use immigrants, emigrants, migrant, multi-ethnic or pluri-ethnic groups, minority groups, migrants, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) or people from diverse backgrounds [47, 48]. CALD people are defined by the United Nations as groups of people who are in a non-dominant position, differ from the majority of the population and are 'endowed with ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics' [47]. The preferred term for this study is people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

-
- Understanding the role of religion within a multi-cultural world assists in understanding a multicultural society and its people [49]. This study focuses on Christian beliefs. The Bible is a useful lens in understanding immigration, for migration is acknowledged throughout it [50].



Old Bible by Jan Stead

Numerous Australian policies influence migration, for example, the refugee resettlement policy. Simply, the policy is refugees need jobs, country towns have population decline, refugees can offset towns' population gaps and bring new ideas that make communities more rounded [5, 38, 51, 52]. However, discrimination, barriers to social integration, unemployment, mental health problems, injustice and exclusion exist [for example, 5, 52].

Many people who were refugees value their spirituality and engage with religious gatherings. Some find in religion a source of comfort that strengthens their resilience, including dealing with complexities associated with resettlement [53].

This study focused on three cultural groups: people who identify as Karen, East Asians (mostly Chinese) and Burundians. Individual data has been anonymised.

Karen

The Karen people are indigenous to the Thai-Burma border region in South East Asia and are one of the ethnic groups of Myanmar [54, 55]. Myanmar, previously known as Burma, has been under military rule since 1962. Karen villages are raided and burnt annually by the Burmese military [54]. Many displaced Karen people escape to refugee camps in Thailand, which are overcrowded, disconnected from traditional lifestyles and vulnerable to fire, ambush, violence, hunger and deprivation [54, 56, 57]. Some migrated to Australia. In 2011, 6399 people spoke Karen at home in Australia [58].

Horstmann reports a significant, though not quantified, number of Karen are Christians [59]. Many Karen refugees find in Christianity a spiritual resource helping them resolve their painful past and renew their hope for the future [55, 59]. Karen Christians are known for their daily practice of deep inner prayer and their willingness to offer the hospitality of God to anyone who welcomes them [56, 60].

East Asian – Chinese, Malaysian, Korean

In 2011, about 33% of the overseas born population living in Australia were from East Asia, including 319,000 from China [9, 61]. Bendigo and surrounds has a rich multicultural history dating back to the 1850s Gold Rush. Bendigo attracts Asian migrants who are often transient, such as, Chinese, Singaporeans, Malaysians, Koreans, Taiwanese and Vietnamese [62, 63]. Some migrate as Christians and others are unaware of Christianity and become Christians after arrival in Australia [63]. Many report that their faith helped them deal with difficult or complex issues associated with migration [63].

Burundian

Burundi is an African country neighboured by Rwanda, The Democratic Republic of Congo and the United Republic of Tanzania [64]. It is emerging from a long and painful conflict between the majority Hutus and the minority Tutsis which, between 1972 and 2000, left hundreds of thousands of people displaced [64].

In 2011, 1730 Burundians resided in Australia, many of whom were refugees [65]. Burundians have increasingly settled in regional Australia. (For example, refugee settlement – which includes Burundians – in regional Victoria has risen from 3% of the population in 2005 to 16% in 2011 [66, 67].) The relocations are often positive, as seen by the headline in the *Sunraysia Daily* – Proud of Cultural Diversity [68].

Christian faith and church is important for many Burundians, seeing God as helping them deal with complex social issues, difficulty and tragedy [for example, 69]. A case in point is Burundian theologian Harimenshi who sees church as able to show politicians and socio-economic operators how to avoid the trap of ethnic and tribal exclusion [31].

Reflexive Research

It is important to be a respectful researcher, to acknowledge my connection to the topic and to facilitate critical self reflection about myself and my engagements with the participants [26, 70]. I am a Lebanese Australian born in Australia. I am a Christian and a member of the Anglican Church of Australia. Professionally, I am a social worker and much of my practice has been within rural or regional locations. As a social researcher, I am interested in how theology, sociology and social work can dialogue together and provide insights into social phenomena, such as migration and multiculturalism.



Three in one by Jan Stead

Method/methodology

The preferred methodology and method for this study was qualitative research utilising illustrative case studies. This was chosen firstly, because a number of the research parameters were unknown [71]. Secondly, because it facilitated the extension of the themes identified from a previously completed co-operative inquiry into this field [72].

The case study is a useful exploratory method for studying groups of people within a particular setting [73, 74]. Action research is grounded in lived experiences and ideas [1]. Those who actively participated within this field of investigation were invited to participate in all parts of the project including commenting on the content and structure of the report [75].

This research utilised a purposive sample of three Anglican churches from the Bendigo Diocese located in Mildura and Bendigo. These churches were accessible and considered by 'informants' in the field to be engaging with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Snow-ball sampling was also utilised as interviewees kindly introduced other potential interviewees, facilitating a wider sample.

The interviews were semi-structured. (See Appendix A and B for further information about the interviews.) The Bush Church Aid Society and Charles Sturt University provided ethical approval for this research via the National Ethics Application Form. The Bishop of the Bendigo Diocese and the National Director of The Bush Church Aid Society shared initial thoughts about how to undertake the research, potential research themes and contacts.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 people from three churches, 23 face-to-face and two by phone – 14 females and 11 males. Interviewees ranged in age from 18 years to over 65 years. The majority interviewed were bi-lingual and from a diverse cultural background. A small number of people were interviewed with an interpreter. People interviewed included one chaplain, two ordained ministers and 22 people associated with church-based activities. Nine people identified as Australian and as supporting ministries with members who were from diverse cultural backgrounds, and 16 people identified as having migrated to Australia. Five peoples' information was not included in the research because they did not sign permission forms or they were under 18 years.

The conversations were typed into a password protected laptop and checked by the participants. A number of interviewees pointed out key themes and these informed the coding of the data, the analysis and the headings for the discussion. The participants informed the research, some initially and others throughout the whole process.

Section B: The Narration (findings, themes and discussion)

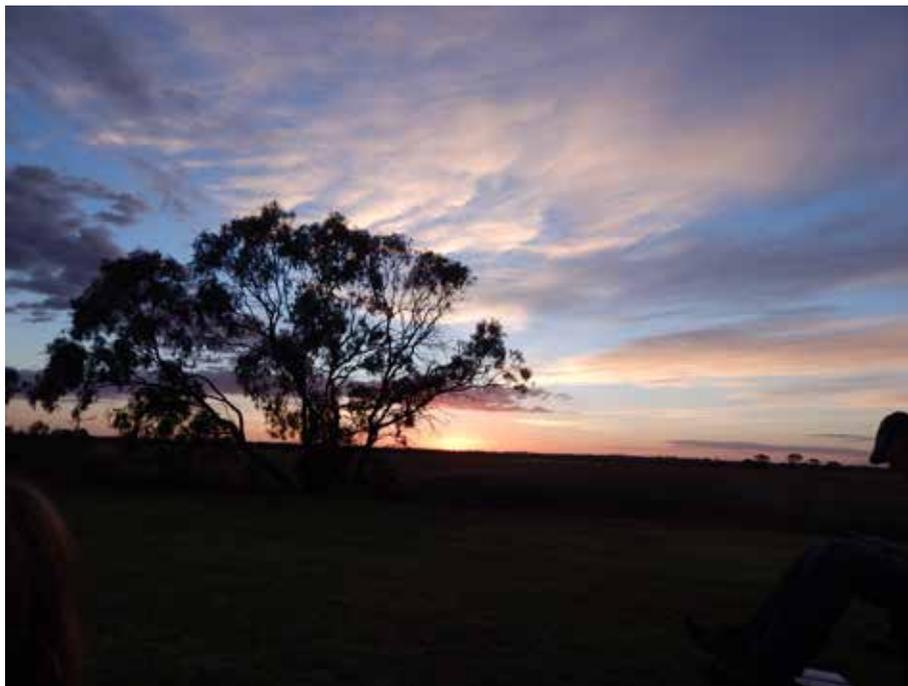
Introducing the Bendigo Diocese

The Bendigo Diocese strengthens and grows the Anglican Church in central and north-western Victoria in its ministry and mission [76]. The diocese came into being on 1 January 1902 and on 1 August 1977 St Arnaud's Diocese merged into the Diocese of Bendigo [77]. It covers 65,000 square kilometres, has 36 parishes and about 80 active and retired clergy residing in its boundaries, see map 1 [78, 79].



Map 1: *The Diocese of Bendigo* [79].

The history of the Diocese has been influenced by a major financial crisis, rural issues – including periods of rural recession, movement of young people to cities, shrinking congregations, parish amalgamations, multiculturalism, conversion and the planting of new churches [77].



Easter morning sunrise by Dale and Rachel Barclay

Introducing two population centres

Bendigo and Mildura are two population centres within the Diocese. Bendigo is a vibrant, contemporary regional centre with a growing population; nearly 105,000 people in 2011 [80, 81]. In 2006, approximately 8.2% of the Bendigo population were overseas born [82]. In 2011 Mildura was home to approximately 30,650 residents [83]. In 2006, about 10% of the population in Mildura were born overseas [82].



St Paul's Cathedral Bendigo [86]

Introducing St Paul's Cathedral, Bendigo

Construction of St Paul's Cathedral started in 1867 [84, 85]. The Cathedral closed in 2009 due to structural concerns [84, 85]. Currently the church meets in the parish hall. St Paul's is a traditional church with a Said Eucharist, Choral Eucharist, and Contemporary Eucharist each Sunday [85]. Multicultural ministry at the Cathedral started around 2008. St Paul's welcomes people from CALD backgrounds and invites them to join in with current church activities and services.



Christ's True Light Church Bendigo [88]

Introducing Christ's True Light Church, Bendigo

House of the True Light Church, Bendigo, an evangelical charismatic church, began in 2001. In 2015 it merged with Christ Church to form Christ's True Light Church Bendigo. It became an autonomous parish in 2015. It is a church plant lead by a CALD pastoral team to reach Chinese and other migrants. The church brings 'free-thinkers' to Jesus and trains them up for the Kingdom ministry in Bendigo and beyond. Church services are in Chinese and English and congregation members interpret the services. The service is followed by a community meal – noodles. [87]

Introducing St Margaret's, Mildura

Anglican services began in Mildura in 1862. St Margaret's Anglican Church's current building was established in 1901. It has a broad or middle approach to church, mixing new expressions, contemporary and traditional practices. This is a multicultural Christian community which places the Eucharist [John 6:25-59; 1 Corinthians 11:17-33], serving the poor and needy [Luke 4:18] and the call to make disciples of all nations and baptised them [Matthew 28:16-20] at the centre of their Christian life [89]. It draws inspiration from

the Scriptures and Christian traditions. The church expresses the generosity of God's love and justice. Its mission is about finding people, giving them the opportunity for new life and drawing them into the church community. It aims to be an inclusive church where all members can participate and be nurtured. [90]



St Margaret's Mildura [90]

A reflection about the three churches

The research themes mentioned below are consistent across all three churches. Engagement issues associated with culturally competent ministry, social capital and social inclusion appear to be consistent with the three churches' traditions. This is even though the three churches minister in different situations. An example of this difference is, St Paul's Cathedral is ministering primarily to people from CALD backgrounds that have prior connections to Anglicanism before moving to Bendigo. St Paul's is actively including new people into its church structures. Christ True Light Church Bendigo seeks to thoughtfully connect with, draw in and/or evangelise many who have no prior church affiliation. St Margaret's Mildura has a holistic ministry philosophy that incorporates worship, service and working for justice.

How does the rural Anglican Church engage? How are they perceived?

All 25 participants perceive their church engagements with and/or as CALD people as beneficial and effective. The engagements were numerous and dynamic. Some were **theologically focused**, often formal, spiritually refreshing, hope building and activity-specific. For example, rural church services in a particular language or with interpreters, culturally-sensitive prayer times, and discipleship and Bible study groups.

Some engagements were more aligned with service, **social work and/or welfare**, that is, a commitment to positive change and social justice [91]. These engagements were internally focused, servicing people and the local community. They are often flexible, empowering and enhancing well-being, for example: culturally-focused homework club and tutoring; driving lessons; English conversation and English as a second language groups; grants; job seeking assistance and hospital visitations.

Other engagements, had commonalities with **sociological thinking** about community interactions, rurality and responding to changes to local demography [92]. These church engagements support **external structures and connections**. The engagements were often informal, reflecting on the wider community context, responding to the population changes within the church and their surrounds, and supportive of developing social inclusion and social capital within the local rural community. They included: praying about work related difficulties, church members talking to the local rural school principals about needs, and leadership teams reflecting on and analysing what does culturally competent ministry, mission and prayer mean. The three churches constantly reviewed and modified their theologically informed engagements, internal structural developments and external structures and connections as their associated CALD communities changed. The perceived intentions, implications and impacts of these engagements by the 25 participants are presented below.

Observations: Intentions, impacts and implications

Interviewees from CALD backgrounds desire to intentionally connect with God, church and others; and to feel heard, included and have their abilities respected as well as utilised. Faith is part of their identity and informs their actions. It is not private, separated from their experience of migration, or isolated from their day to day life in Australia. Their faith impacts interactions with their local community and the church. The Bible speaks to

them intimately. The church, though imperfect, was recurrently seen as a source of support, encouragement and building hope. It is a 'go to' place for assistance, love, warmth and/or kindness in times of confusion or when experiencing exclusion. The three churches adapted in order to engage new church members from diverse cultural backgrounds and to boost their social capital.

The theme of engagement shared in this section is consistent with the extant literature. The Bible shares stories about migration, including the experience of discrimination, powerlessness and barriers [50]. People interviewed related to the Biblical themes of change, ethnicity, history, work, humanities' strengths and flaws or sins, language, faith, politics, culture, homesickness and daily life struggles whilst living in a different culture [50]. For example, the stories in Genesis of Abram (Abraham) migrating from Ur to Haran and of Joseph being human trafficked from Canaan to Egypt, the Exodus recount of the Israelite fleeing Egypt as refugees, the story of Ruth and Naomi's moving to Judah to be with extended family, the New Testament account of Jesus as a child fleeing with his family from Herod and seeking asylum in Egypt, and the book of Acts telling of the scattering of early Christians in Jerusalem because of persecution [16, 24, Acts 8, 50].

Migration and the local rural church

The lived experience of moving to rural Australia for many interviewees includes: feeling lost or confused and different, exclusion, discrimination and misunderstandings. Hurdles exist. Some reported having little in common with Australians, finding slang and the Australian culture overwhelming.

Moving from the hills of Burundi to rural Australia



Burundi by Raymond Howes



Mildura by Dale and Rachel Barclay

Person 3 *(name has been anonymised): In the human world we cannot speak English and we are not educated and I think when you look at [us through] the human eye a hierarchy exists like teacher, professional. Most of us do not understand what is going on when we ask for things in the local community. At church they are all nice to me. When I talk with someone at church, even if they are a teacher, they still treat me like a person. They love me. Most of the congregation have a professional job; they do not make me feel different to them... They do their best so we can be part of the church community.*

Person 9 *Once we arrive in Australia our English is not good, also the culture. I found it hard.... The relationship between me and Australians was not that close at the time... The church and the uni understand me. They help me speak slowly...One of our church members is really Australian. He speaks a lot of slang. Once he realised I did not understand it he tried to explain to me and tried to use simple language.*

Joining a local church was part of the migration experience. People interviewed from diverse cultural backgrounds appreciated belonging to their local Anglican church – enjoying forming friendships as equals, sharing opinions on issues and providing assistance with church activities. They valued church members noticing them and their struggles, sensitively modifying their day-to-day language to encourage clear communication, assisting them in crossing cultures and building their resilience and confidence.

Person 12 *They share their experience with you. I was doing [a course] and it was tough during the placement... I lost weight. She [friend from church] noticed and cooked me food [and encouraged me to eat].*

It is tempting to see the connections between the church and people from diverse cultural backgrounds as always positive. However, the churches in this study are learning about multicultural ministries in a dynamic environment due to visa issues and people relocating for work or study. Regardless of the associated complexities, all participants were committed to making the engagements work.

Person 25 *The traditions for us and them are totally different but it works.*

Local rural churches effectively welcoming migrants

Co-operation occurs when individuals are willing to come together in a manner that contributes to the others' welfare [93]. This is consistent with

the Biblical stories like the accounts of the good Samaritan and the healing of the ten lepers [24, Luke 10: 25-37, Luke 17: 11-19, John 4: 1-42, 50]. Such Bible stories talk about: working in accord and love; that Jesus has brought peace, unity amongst multi-ethnic believers; reconciliation with God for all; new life; and; the opportunity for citizenship in God's kingdom [16, 24 Ephesians 2, 35].

A number of interviewees also saw coming together in Christian fellowship as consistent with Biblical teachings [for example, 24, Galatians 3:28]. Such teachings included loving your neighbour; finding unity regardless of diversity by following Christ's example; and; sacrificially supporting others through words, with actions and resources. This was raised by both Australians and people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Person 9 *So church value is not to be self-centred. It is to love others...help others. It can benefit others...learn how to help others.*

There were different reasons initiating coming together in Christian community for those interviewed. For some it was a sense of duty; others talked about it being initiated by prayer or reading the Bible; and others again considered it to have happened through relationships such as encountering people at a church camp, over a meal or through conversation.

Person 2 *Everyone in the church is very nice and very helpful. They are very communicative. They come to us and ask questions and talk to everyone. We have more confidence to go to church.... We sometimes have lunch after church. We bring food and share food together. I am so happy they like our food.*

Coming together and engaging with others was not a discrete or homogenous experience. The interviews indicate, when done thoughtfully, the engagements are a mutual experience between at least two people and that each person involved is enriched over time.

Time for unity in Christ

Building a genuine culturally accepting community amongst different ethnic groups takes time [38]. A mutual sharing of time was seen by interviewees as different to providing a business or government service to someone; possibly because such service provision is about the maximum amount of people serviced in the shortest time allocated according to key performance

indicators and critical success factors [94]. In contrast, church engagements were seen as a community and person-focused Christian service.



Mechanical time shattered by Jan Stead

For some interviewees time was relational, not dominated by a clock and was about following the example of Jesus Christ in mentoring his 12 disciples. This meant standing alongside someone in unity and journeying together over a life time.

Person 25 *A number of teenagers....were baptised and ...confirmed [in the church]... grew up to be driving age. We ended up getting a couple of people [to help them with driving] and now several have their driving licence. This led onto what I do when I leave year 12. Getting into a course.*

We helped people do that. It has been a positive experience. At the end of the day education is [a] key for them to resettling. Learning English, helping them being comfortable in this new language space...I think if you have been in a refugee camp it takes 3-5 years to settle. So if you are in a refugee camp for five years it could take 15 years.

Spending time together differs between cultures or individuals and recognising this avoids misunderstandings. People leading or attending church may be accommodating numerous understandings of time whilst respecting their own cultural norms. This can be complex; some feeling that to fit in they have to abide by the dominant cultural opinion of time.

Person 25 *[Cultural group] had a function...Told us [different cultural group] to arrive at 2pm and we arrived at 4:30 and they all clapped [laughing].*

Some found differing cultural understandings of time bewildering whilst others were intrigued.

Person 22 *People [from this background] have a very long view of time. They do not have an adherence to clocks. They think we [different cultural group] are quite queer because... [we] finish a church service in an hour.*

People also explained it takes time to understand different new ideas. For example, they found understanding key Biblical concepts when explained in English perplexing. They felt they needed to intentionally share with others their confusions and explore slowly over time what something means. This has impacts and implications for church-based activities, for example, the additional time needed when Bible studies are conducted in multiple languages and with interpreters. Investing extra time was repeatedly described by participants as important as it made them feel empowered, respected, listened to and understood.

Person 22 *We often meet ... for Evening Prayer in someone's house... When we reach the place for the sermon, I speak briefly about the gospel reading [explaining what is happening next Sunday in church]. One of the group who has good English translates. It can all take time. I sometimes have to check I have heard them right. That works both ways.... Likewise, they give opinions back ...They are very patient with it.*

Interestingly, all involved in this study felt cross-cultural interactions were a valuable way to spend time and all people – Australians and people from

diverse cultural backgrounds – felt they benefited from the relationship more than others realised. Many interviewed felt over time they were becoming more empathetic, stronger in their Christian faith and/or were learning new skills. Each spoke glowingly of the person or people with whom they were spending time.

Person 22 *I have to say I am amazingly looked after by the [cultural group] people for no good reason at all...They are just gorgeous. I am so grateful for them. They are lovely people.*



Connected by Raymond Howes

Intentional Engagements

Public spaces have been increasingly replaced by interlocking semi-private ones, where people move between their home, the office and the shopping spaces [21]. In rural, regional and remote communities there are not always easy, accessible and comfortable locations for congregating, engaging with others and sharing language or culture. People can be busy juggling numerous commitments, developing their understanding of English and can have limited access to transport, leading to isolation, culture shock and disrupted relationships.

Person 2 *During the weekday everyone goes to work. It is hard to go and see our friends.*

Person 9 *[We] find another group of people they are from [cultural group] and they married Australians...Before they marry how they know each other are from the internet. The website for seeking a partner. They start talking on the internet. But the [cultural group] they do not understand English so they use Google translation... When they come...they have to talk face to face...No time for Google translation. They have to communicate. They find it really hard...The [church] English class helps them build up their English level.*

Church: A public space creating connections in the presence of God

Church is a public space supporting engagements which interconnects God and people [21]. It is in contrast to the market place which interconnects people and economics [21].

Some interviewees connected to church because it felt like a safe place for them and a window into the Australian community. Others consider it a place to meet people and make friends. Some thought of it as a home away from home; a kind, helpful and nurturing place. Others describe it as a place that helps them grow in their personal relationship with God.

Sometimes these connections were intentionally initiated by individuals and other times by the church. A couple of people indicated slight ambivalence about the intentions of these connections, wondering if they were motivated by growing the church. (It was unclear why they thought church growth was a negative thing). However, those questioning the intentions still described church positively overall, as a place that was welcoming of people from diverse cultures.

Person 11 *I came to church for a social reason. It is important for an international [university] student. You do not know the culture in Australia and it is hard to start the communication. You do not know what to say. Nothing to talk about sometimes. You do not know their lifestyle.*

Person 15 *It appears to be working very well because we are getting increasing numbers.... I am not a member of the church – my wife is. I think the church sees it [church activity] as a way to push the Christian gospel.*

Person 5 *It was done because of her love for God and the students.*

Church is also a comfortable place for people to congregate and intentionally meet others from the same cultural group, speak both English and their heart language and maintain social and cultural ties [95]. People

can hear what is happening back home, share their history and maintain bonds. They enjoyed seeing their children mixing with others from their cultural group.

Person 2 *After church we see our friends and talk. It is really good. Our children see each other. There is a lot of Sunday School there. They really like to go to church and they see their friends and they are so happy.*

Person 5: *We get together as a family, we feel God's love and warmth and we speak our hometown language. We feel very loved.*

Some interviewed (Australians and people from multi-ethnic backgrounds) highlighted the importance of churches intentionally and respectfully sharing with all people the Christian Gospel message. This gives people from diverse cultural backgrounds the option: to become Christians, to identify with other Christians, to participate fully – not partially – in all church activities and to develop their own independent relationship with God.

Person 14: *There were two months [spent] preparing [to start the ministry]. It was intensive. It took another six months... [We] were dealing with people who had no God concept.*

All interviewed (that is people who did not identify as Christians, new Christians and experienced Christians) appreciated connecting with the church. They felt they were becoming better people because of connections with each other, God and/or the church. They were learning to identify with others.

Rural churches identifying with CALD people

Christians are encouraged to treat immigrants with dignity and respect – as they would to Jesus [16]. It involves intentionally listening to people from diverse cultural backgrounds, identifying with them and making them feel heard.



Listening by Raymond Howes

Person 13: *[They give] eye contact. They nod, they are thinking about what you are saying. They give feedback. They listen to you.*

In this study two churches pre-existed and had Christians from CALD backgrounds move into the area and begin to attend church. In contrast a third church was a plant purposely established for evangelism and was particularly focused on engaging with people who did not identify as Christians. Many of the CALD people attending the church plant became Christians after attending the church.

However, all three churches intended their engagements to be a loving whole of church experience occurring throughout the week. This includes identifying with, sharing with and supporting all within their local community. Some said they enjoyed the engagements as it provided them with a different understanding of their society – moving them to forming a sense of community which is organic and tied together by kinship,

fellowship, custom, history and the sharing of resources [96, 97]. This was particularly commented on by interviewees who were retired.

Person 4: *I guess in small groups [Bible Study groups within the church] we know what is going on for people. It helps people, there are prayers, people know what practical help is needed. There are communications... like Facebook. I know there is an issue and you can join in. One girl had an emergency with her pet. We had a long conversation on Facebook. Where to go to next? The [ethnic group] culture is quite different to Australian culture and they have a lot of respect of elders.*

Supporting and sharing with others appeared to be initiated by compassion, holistic and focused on meeting people's needs. (The needs identified by interviewees are consistent with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which are summarised as physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, self-actualization and self-transcendence [98].)

Person 7 *We try different ways to help our people to secure jobs, to help the church... We are doing whatever we can do to help.*

Person 15 *Most of the volunteers value helping the kids in education.*

Person 18 *I am not sure I would be at uni studying [university course] at the moment if it was not for people willing to support me.*

Person 20 *I want to thank [people's names] for what they are doing. They do many things for us...in different ways... with learning to driving... we do not pay [person]. It is voluntary. We do not even buy petrol or fuel... [Person] gives advice to people... if they have goals they want to achieve. There are so many people who have seen good help... All [person] does is through love.... gives... [us their] time.*

Person 12 *I am touched by their compassion. At that time I was not a believer. She always picks me up no matter how far I live... Love in action touches peoples' heart.*

People from diverse cultural backgrounds desired not to be only seen as people who need help from the church, but also people who can help the church. (Some who were Christians before moving to Australia felt the Australian church is in need of assistance compared to their homeland church.) The participants felt valued when their help was warmly received.

Person 7 *[I was born overseas and I hoped for a] long time to help Australian Churches.*

Person 9 *Some of the members asked me if I am willing to help the church, especially sound management. I said I would try. Hopefully I can continue that. Then they gave me training and teaching... [on] how to manage the sound system. So from that time I started to get more involved in the church. Later on not just sound management but also to be a backup singer. Also I get involved in the home cell meeting. Especially the uni student fellowship. They are really good.*

Impacts of engaging

The impact of the engagements on the three Anglican churches and the associated people is multifaceted, sometimes predictable, often unexpected and mostly delightful.

Person 1 *The first five or six [cultural group] people just turned up one Sunday morning. We had no knowledge of them coming. I noticed them in the Narthex when I left after church. They were standing with some people from the [welfare service], who explained that they had asked to be shown where to come [to church]. They had had almost no English, but made clear that being Anglican was ...important to them. They have been with us every week since then.*

Person 25 *I find it exciting our parishioners are engaging in another culture setting. [Cultural group] operate differently. I think the exposure is positive.*

Benefits of and barriers to effective rural church engagement

Benefits from and barriers to engagement exist, sometimes occurring simultaneously. For these three churches the act of hospitality was seen as beneficial in helping overcome barriers. Hospitality is a key Biblical theme. It is warmly inviting all people around for a meal [24, Luke 14:12-14, Romans 12:13 & Hebrews 13:2, 50].

Some interviewees had never heard of Christianity or they identified with a different religion before moving to Australia. Church members initiated contact with them regardless of their religious affiliation and shared neighbourly hospitality. This hospitality gave some participants, when they were new to Australia, the opportunity to share with another their migration experience.

Those interviewed who became Christians after arriving in Australia are excited about their new belief and the benefits of being in relationship with God. Acts of hospitality provided opportunities to talk about their new faith and how it was influencing their lifestyle, relationships and decisions. It gave them an opportunity to develop their own conversion narrative.

Person 6 *I came to Australia I lived with friend and friend introduce me to the church. It was very nice. It is very difficult because the language is not simple with the Bible... [Where I come from] there is no way to get the knowledge [Christian gospel]. It is very different [where I come from]...The beginning of next year I will visit [overseas place where family lives]. I made a video... and a great speech to say why I believe in Jesus. I will present this video to the family.*

Some interviewees, who moved to Australia as Christians, had a strong sense of God working in the world. They too appreciated the welcome they received from their local churches and their members. These interviewees described church as having a positive impact on their family life.

Person 2 *It is good for our children that we go to church together so we can learn about God and they can know God.*

Alternatively, a couple of participants discussed with some sadness the impact of barriers imposed by the church. The barriers described appeared to be unintentionally constructed but resulted in people feeling excluded, overwhelmed and powerless.

Person 25 *Important to welcome people and churches can sometimes stuff it up... As a congregation we did not know how to do it. The issue [in the beginning] was [some of the congregation were thinking of] imposing 'our' ideas onto 'them'.*

Some shared narratives about misunderstanding Australian church culture.

Person 1 *They do not fit comfortably with some of it [church culture] and do not know why.*

Negotiating church celebrations and events or joining church activities like Bible studies was at times confusing.

Person 1 *We have had a couple of weddings... A couple of hundred of people turned up... They do not have an idea of weddings being private*

and only for people you are close to. They invited the whole congregation. They came to my house to work out how to do invitations.

Person 1 *The [person] is part of [an international church sub-group] and has been for [number of] years. She says [this group] saved her life in [birth country] and the camp in [another country]. She says she is not going to stop going [to this group] even though they are middle class and proper [in Australia].*

Stories of barriers and their impacts were not unique to the church. They exist in the market place and other areas of social and cultural participation [95]. For example, a number of people interviewed experience negative peer pressure about attending church.

Person 9 *[Colleagues] they do not go to church. They think church is just religious. They think it is not necessary to go there and it is not necessary to believe. [They think] somehow we do not need church... [They see it as] like a charity to help others and that is all. [To them] there is no different between church and other charity organisations. Somehow they are offended about the church...on various issues.*

Others mentioned negative local community attitudes, discrimination and bullying towards them; leading to a sense of exclusion from parts of society. Some talked of private worries associated with living in a capitalist society informed by secularism and materialism. They indicated concern about their children's future and faith in Australia.

Person 3 *My grandmother tries to call us to make sure we go to church. To get the young people to church. She is so strong behind her Anglican faith. As an immigrant mum you [have] to be strong for your children. Your faith. When you are in camp it is different. There is not much to do on a Sunday so you go to church. Here [in regional, rural Australia] there is lots to do and [so you need to stay] strong. So need to not drift away [from church and faith].*



Kangaroo family by Raymond Howes

Surprisingly, some people from diverse cultural backgrounds also mentioned they created their own barriers when engaging with church members and society in general.

Person 9 *We [can be] passive. We do not want to know someone who is not from the same background.*

Additionally to the above benefits and barriers, some did not wish to engage with church. This did not appear to be a barrier or a benefit, rather an option.

Person 1 *The [person in leadership] said to me sometimes we can swamp [people from diverse cultural background] in stuff. So do not let people knock on their door, and take it very gently.*

Overall, all people involved with this study indicated their faith and/or church helped them build networks, develop resilience and strength to face barriers and to embrace benefits or opportunities.

Person 6 *I also introduce them, those not nice, to church [local community members who have been rude to the person]. I do believe people can be*

improved, they can be changed...we have human nature. Some [people] we like, we dislike. I have changed my attitude [to those who are rude to me]... I want to be the nice person.

Multi-ethnic social capital connects churches to local communities

Various definitions of social capital exist. Sociological literature considers social capital in terms of social norms, human motivation and social organisation [99]. Social capital resides in social relations, focusing on the public good and involves the effective use of skills, sharing of information and mediating of conflicts [99]. Links between people, communities and social capital are not automatic – and consequently need nurturing [99].

All three churches encourage the mutual sharing and building of social capital between their local communities, people from all backgrounds and themselves. They are one point of contact for connecting networks and resources.

Person 9 *The meeting is a platform especially for [cultural group]... It is how to get the new migrant [group] or the students get involved in [locality] and how to know Jesus. The meeting is a platform for the [cultural group] to get involved in the community.*

They affirm and utilise the skills of migrants in their congregations and promote their abilities within the local communities. For example, their entrepreneurial skills, leadership skills, workforce skills, and, cultural, financial and social resources [100]. Over time a number of different government agencies, local businesses and/or community-based organisations heard about their local church and their networks with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Perhaps church activities are more noticeable in non-capital city communities as individuals have multiple links, co-operate in a variety of activities and have a unique sense of continuity and belonging in the town [101]. Organisations in the three locations observed the church blessing their whole community through the development of their localities' social capital. These community groups have consequently initiated connections with the churches and are actively supporting initiatives through volunteering, advice or grants.

Person 14 *The church connects with the community through businesses.*

Person 23 *[Volunteer] contacted us via the community [agency] from [organisations name].*

Person 25 *The community is aware, e.g., [organisation] know the homework club. The [organisation leader] are very interested... To integrate them. The [organisation leader] wants to send [groups of people]. The value of the program and the [organisation leader] seeing the kids improving.*

Growing social capital is complex. It may include engaging with new or expanding networks, responding to opportunities and boosting the well-being of all. Contemplating and responding to growth requires churches developing unexpected skills such as applying for grants to run programs.

Person 24 *Applied for a council grant and was successful. The council has a number of priority areas. One is about integration of CALD people into the [local] community and the engagement of young people with learning and community activities. We ticked two of their major boxes and managed to get over \$6500. We also applied for a grant through [organisation] and got \$750.*

Connecting the local community and multi-ethnic groups also involved the three individual churches sharing power and decision making with CALD people and accepting new directions.

Person 25 *We have [a young adult]. He made a suggestion as he is the only [cultural group] tutor. He suggested running sessions with parents... [about] homework...and what to do with it. We are going to start this next year, how to help parents know how to do homework without having any experience of homework. It is an extraordinary possibility.*

Firstly, it meant listening carefully to others when things are not working and responding appropriately.

Person 25 *[Name] is also really good. [Cultural group]...can tell us if we are doing something the wrong way. It is a two way conversation. I find it exciting our parishioners are engaging in another culture setting. [Cultural group] operate differently. I think the exposure is positive.*

Secondly, it requires regular communication with all networks, including ones external to the church about activities.

Person 25 *[Person] is linked to the department and the schools and the homework club is communicating with [community organisations]. There is the flow of information between people. No particular structure. We get the message out and it is flowing and working.*

Church promotes CALD people's well-being

Some people interviewed indicated they moved to Australia to improve their own and/or their families' well-being. Well-being is associated with strengths based and capacity building approaches [102]. It is informed by relationships and consequently dynamic [102].

However, struggles continued after arrival for some. Awareness of these struggles led to the churches offering support. Participants from a CALD background consistently mentioned that their church promotes their well-being.

Person 11 *I was a non believer. A friend said come. It may be good for us. We make decision [to become a Christian] together – we want to follow God. Church is like your family. As I go deeper I start to know God's love. I am willing to give my love to other people. I think that is what God wants us to do.*

Another repeating theme was how church can challenge peoples' values regarding their own and others' well-being.

Person 13 *Church has built up my own values... It totally changed my life and my thinking... Put faith in God is hard. I found that once we hold God's word, God is working [things] out for me. I think that is the lesson I learnt...I want God to open my eyes so I can follow his way. Not my way. I chose [course] as a non-believer. I can see God's grace through my life and my [course] degree. Every time God reminds me to be still and try your best and I will do the rest for you.*

Some interviewees also explained that faith and attending church was a countering force against negative and dominant discourses that can emotionally wound. It was perceived as facilitating resilience and emotional healing in difficult situations.

Person 13 *I was a non-believer. Life is tough. There is no one to look after you. I was bullied... Then a friend invited me to church. You meet other people in society. I [was] rejected by Australian society. Then I was invited to church.*

All three churches indicated that they are committed long-term to building up the faith of people from diverse cultural backgrounds and to promoting their well-being.

Implications for engaging

Engagement with people from diverse cultural backgrounds has considerable implications for these churches. In this study a number of participants indicated it involves them sacrificing their own needs for others, actively including others and learning to be motivated by love when supporting others.



Circle of light and love by Jan Stead

Culturally competent ministry, mission and prayer works

Culturally competent ministry, mission and prayer involves Anglican people connecting with others' cultures, values, lifestyles, networks and locations [103]. Culturally-sensitive approaches to ministry, mission, evangelism, discipleship and prayer helps build Christian unity and develops community with each other and with God.

Person 14 *[Starting a multicultural congregation] We would walk about the town and engage people. Invited them to a meal and then we started moving into a home meeting. Early days it was a social gathering. I would engage them in the supermarket. We would introduce ourselves. Give them our card. If you have any problems contact us... We...take them to the hospital, [helped with] moving home, looking for accommodation... We invite them to come here [to church] and we have a service starting with*

games. We played games. For fifteen minutes... Games, then worship, then preaching and then ministry. We had a good meal.

Person 14 *Usually I remembered the [person's name]. They come in [to my home], usually cooking for them. Some others as well. Helping them...I would say let's have] dinner together. So they can come and enjoy it... House use to be full of people. Lots of warmth... Our biggest was 60 adults.*

Some participants indicated multicultural mission and ministry had unique implications for discipleship and leadership. Culturally competent mission, leadership and discipleship is possible because interactions between people and the Bible and/or Christian traditions do not have to be determined by a dominant cultural lens [38]. Significant differences existed between the three churches including in their approach to Bible teaching, preaching and Christian worship. Regardless, teaching, preaching and worship can be inclusive of different languages and respectful of different cultures [35].

Person 10 *They were very intentional about discipling people. They were very clear about Jesus. They helped people become attracted to [Jesus]. There was a mission and they lived it. They acknowledged people's gifting. They saw someone was sincere in their faith, they helped them grow. There was a vision from a beginning. That vision was always there to always make disciples. People would come at all stages. Some would come not believing. They were always welcome and there was always an open door.*

For example, a few people interviewed indicated how comforting it was to pray for others and to be prayed for – including the freedom to pray in their own heart language or tongue with church friends, in small groups and in community.

Person 12 *I can share my difficulties. My tension and pressures. They encourage me. They pray for me.*

For some who were interviewed, ministry, mission and prayer were not limited to Australia. People shared stories about their experiences in Australian churches and their faith with friends and family, both in Australia and overseas. They are also highly mobile and were sharing with others about their faith whilst travelling or moving. The implication being the three churches needed a global, Christ-centred, Biblical vision for ministry, mission and prayer. (CALD people's response to the Great Commission challenge made by Jesus to the disciples is an example of this. That is, Jesus' statement: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them

in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”
[24, Matthew 28:19]).

Person 11 *Some of my friends believe there is God but they...do not want to believe. Some others see my happiness. Some ask how you are so positive. I say God gives me strength. You can make your life brighter and then other peoples' life brighter. My parents did not believe anything [about God]. My parents... tell me [only] to study. My parents come [to Australia] and meet the church and they believe in Jesus now.*

It also appeared from the interviews that the church needed both a national and global vision of social justice, inclusion and integration.

Social integration and inclusion changes and grows churches

Many people interviewed indicated their gratefulness for being in Australia and the hopes they have for a positive future. They spoke appreciatively of the chance to integrate into a different country with different opportunities to the one they left.

Person 6 *I can fly. There is no fear...I feel I can fly in this beautiful land.*

A number of those interviewed felt the engagements between church and people from diverse cultural backgrounds were allowing the church to change and grow – spiritually and numerically. A number of people interviewed indicated surprise by the positive impact of any changes and how well integration worked for all church members.

Person 25 *The integration of kids' church people which [has numerous cultural groups]. The ones I am interested in right now are those who can do things in the church and we have started training them. They have taken to it like a duck to water and it is a huge burst in their self esteem. There could be 10-15 kids a week.*

Numerical growth for the churches occurred or was occurring via word of mouth.

Person 6 *I [own a business]... I sell the product to my customers... [They ask] what I did last Sunday... I also invite some customers to join the church.*

It was also occurring through local community contacts commending church activities.

Person 14 *There was a [local doctor – not a church member] here and he would invite people. He knew a lot of people. Another couple... made a lot of effort to invite people [to church].*

The spiritual and numerical growth did have resource implications for the three churches. Extra or different resources were needed. It seemed to be a cycle – as churches actively included people, offered training and built resources, this attracted more people, brought change and they then needed more resources.

Person 25 *Homework club developed out of this about 12 months ago... we went from no kids to 19 kids. 19 are enough to cope with [for now] and they come every week. They are eager to learn and want to get on. We have a group in the parish [a number] who were [or are] teachers and they do reading or homework or games on ipad, craft so learning hands and coordination. All the kids rotate through two or three sessions in an afternoon. We were just talking to one of the parishioners who is a [trade] and how we would use his skills.*

Limitations

There are various limitations associated with this investigation. Firstly, this study is a non-random or non-probability sample. Consequently, themes may not represent all aspects of church engagements across rural, regional or remote Australia or within the churches themselves.

Secondly, none of the participants indicated dissatisfaction with the church engagements, thought the engagements ineffective or not beneficial. The methodology adopted meant there was no opportunity to engage with people whose dissatisfaction resulted in them disengaging from the church. Additionally writing 'with' rather than 'about' people meant participants directed the critical reflection. These together make this study vulnerable to bias and limited the critiquing of differences between the churches – for example, in theology and in people's experiences.

Final comment

These limitations do not necessarily reduce the significance of this research. This case study of three Anglican Churches highlights previously untold stories about church engagements. It notices, values and presents the participants' lives, faith, experiences, churches and communities.



Colours of community by Jan Stead

Conclusion

Bendigo Diocese contains stories of humble moments, great hope and community engagement. The 25 voices echoed in this case study are good news ones regarding church engagement with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The three churches involved are from different traditions. They role model sharing time, providing Christian service, culturally competent prayer, mission, ministry, evangelism and discipleship. They demonstrated the importance of respecting CALD people's spiritual needs, promoting their well-being, having an inclusive leadership and church model, and developing multi-ethnic social capital. The realities shared in this narration have the potential to inform other organisations – faith based and secular – engagements with people from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Recommendations

The below recommendations are not novel, are attitudinally focused and reflect what the interviewees considered to enhance engagements. It is hoped these recommendations build on current practices and affirm the positive engagements already occurring within rural, regional and remote Australia.

Train in cultural competency

First, it is recommended that the leadership teams within rural churches partake in cultural competency training regarding their local rural communities so they learn not to impose a western approach to church onto CALD communities.

Churches connect with multi-ethnic community networks

Second, it is suggested churches also actively connect with and listen to established rural community networks (local businesses and government and non-government organisations) which are building multi-ethnic social capital and well-being – including spiritual well-being.

Analyse demography and pray accordingly

Third, it is recommended rural churches intentionally reflect on and pray about the demography of their local area, including analysing if local CALD communities are declining, static or growing. These reflections can include identifying key entry points into CALD communities and genuinely inclusive opportunities for hospitality for people from CALD backgrounds.

Diversify leadership teams

Fourth, is recommended that a culturally-sensitive vision with associated five year action plan be developed and be embedded permanently within all structures of the whole church. This plan should be clear about whether it is integrating CALD people into existing structures, establishing new CALD inspired ministries, or both.

Set a vision for engaging with migrants

Fifth, it is recommended that all local church leadership teams, including those preaching and organising public worship, represent the diversity existing within their rural communities. This may mean church hierarchy intentionally respecting, planning and sensitively implementing inclusive recruitment, and mentoring or supervision strategies.

Additional to existing church structures it is recommended that mission societies identify pocket areas in Australia where CALD people have congregated. In partnership with the associated dioceses, together develop a 5-10 year vision for their local areas. The mission societies and diocese together invite and resource CALD pastoral leaders and lay workers to work within these locations, connect with CALD people, establish church plants or new congregations, develop culturally competent ministry, mission, evangelism, discipleship and prayer, and to develop multi-ethnic social capital. This may mean recruiting people from associated overseas locations.

Have a long term view

Sixth, it is recommended that current church activities be focused on helping migrants consider how they will evolve into the future, particularly when first and second generation migrants no longer need help but wish to engage with the church and utilise their leadership and other skills.

Appendix A: The interview

Each interviewee had a statement read to them which introduced the research and each signed a permission slip indicating they agreed to be part of the research project, please see Appendix B.

Initially each person was invited to have their interview audio-taped and typed. A few groups of people were uncomfortable about being audio-taped. Some people did agree to being recorded. However, part way into the interview they all asked for the tape to be stopped as they were sharing some information they did not wish recorded. Hence all interviews were typed as people talked. The transcripts were read back to each person. Each person modified their transcripts.

Appendix B: Permission, Statement and Consent Form

Each Minister and Chaplain was provided with the following email.

“My name is Monica Short and I am a lecturer with Charles Sturt University. Bush Church Aid Society and myself are hoping to undertake a small research project about how Rural Anglican Churches engage with their local community through groups like English as a Second Language (ESL) groups. We are particularly interested in what works well and why. I am hoping to run some semi-structured interviews with yourself and some key people associated with the ESL groups over the next little while. I am hoping to give you a call in the next few days to answer any questions you may have. Is there a convenient time I may ring you please? God bless Monica Short.”

Each minister and Chaplain was contacted via the phone prior to my visit to their church regarding the research. They approached key people supporting and/or participating in group or ministries in their churches and asked them if they would like to be involved in the research. The ministers and chaplain organised times for me to interview people.

Each interviewee was read the following statement:

“Hello, my name is Monica Short. Thank you for helping me. I am hoping to find out how this church through this group helps all people who have a little English or no English. I am also hoping to find out how this church helps others in town through this group. I am hoping to talk to you about the group and listen to what you think it does for everyone. I am writing a

paper about this group. I will not use your name in the paper. You do not have to talk to me. You can see what I write and say if I need to change it. If you think I am doing something very wrong then you can ring the Chair of the Ethics Committee on 0269332249 and please tell them.”

Each person also signed the following consent form:

Consent Form

Researcher: Monica Short

Email: mshort@csu.edu.au Telephone no: 0427251707

I _____ (print name), give permission for information obtained by interviews about groups such as Anglican Church ESL groups to be used in this research project. I understand that the information will be disguised as necessary to ensure my and others confidentiality.

I have read or had read to me an information sheet about this project and I have had opportunities to ask questions about the project and have received satisfactory answers. I understand there are no anticipated risks to me as a consequence of participating in this research. I understand that my participation is voluntary and will be kept confidential. There will be no penalty or disadvantage for me if I choose not to permit my material to be used. There is also no advantage to be gained by me through permitting my material to be used.

I understand that this project will be submitted for publication in an academic journal, and it may also be presented as a paper at conferences and referred to in other academic research and publications. I understand that no identifying information will be published. I understand that I am free to withdraw my information at any time prior to interview, during interview or up to publication without any penalty or discriminatory treatment.

I understand that BCA and the School of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee have approved this project and that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I can contact:

The Chair Research Ethics Committee

School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Charles Sturt University

Locked Bag 588 Wagga Wagga NSW Australia 2678

Phone: 0269332249

Email: humgen@csu.edu.au

Sign: _____ Date: _____

Would you like a copy of the paper/ journal article? Yes / no.

If so, where can I email it to:

Email: _____

Appendix C: Ethics Approval

Ethics was approved by Charles Sturt University Ethics Board on the 24/9/13 and extended with variations on the 20/10/14. Ethics protocol number is: 103/2013/07. Bush Church Aid also approved the research.

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