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Cross-cultural Church



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Cross-culturalism: 20/20 and 80/80 Vision

Stuart Vogel, Northern Presbytery

In August last year, I drove six young people from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan from Auckland to Wellington, via Napier, Hastings, Feilding and Levin, and back again. They were visiting New Zealand as part of an exposure programme. One moment during that trip encapsulates for me the meaning of cross-culturalism. Esther Chang, a 22 year old education and counselling student from Taipei, is standing ankle deep in cs (read “bs”, but the “c” here means calves) on a Manawatu farm. The gumboots that she is wearing are far too big for her, but they are the smallest that the farmer could find. She is sandwiched between two calves, both of which are at the very least twice as heavy as she is. The farmer is trying to explain to her why the calves are just sucking her fingers and won’t eat them.

Esther has never been on any kind of farm, has never seen a “real” cow, isn’t used to the Kiwi English accent and isn’t sure what is happening. She is ankle deep, literally and figuratively, in the poo. It is taking a great deal of courage and trust to allow herself to be squashed between two big calves. It is taking concentration and will-power to listen and to try to understand that she isn’t being eaten.

The farmer is of course in his element on his own farm. And yet he, too, is way out of his comfort zone. He has never met a Taiwanese person before. He is not used to Esther’s accent. He cannot rely on her even having the most basic Kiwi knowledge of cows as he tries to explain what is happening. *He does not of course need to know more stuff about calves.* NOBODY knows more about calves than a Manawatu farmer. No, he is faced with a very different kind of challenge: the hard, down-to-earth slog of trying to explain something he knows inside-out, in new and creative ways, tailored directly to, and personally for, the person to whom he is talking.

Cross-culturalism is about summoning up the courage to get out of your comfort zone. It is about trusting the other. It is about harnessing all our powers of concentration, determination, creativity and knowledge and using them sensitively and imaginatively, to jump over fences into someone else’s very different and unfamiliar paddock.

Cross-culturalism and the Presbyterian Church: far more than new regulations and specifications

In 2012, the General Assembly asked the Council of Assembly to “initiate a process of discussion about the implications of declaring the Presbyterian Church to be a cross-cultural Church within the context of a bicultural Church, with a view to adopting a short statement on the nature and priorities of the Church as an ethnically diverse community in and for its mission and ministry”.

This edition of *Candour* is an invitation to take part in that discussion. It follows papers presented to Assembly and the winter edition of SPANZ this year. It will be followed by a public issues booklet, *Multi-culturalism and the New Zealand Church*. I encourage you to read all this material with the spirit that Esther and the farmer took into their conversation. Our hope is that the next General Assembly will declare that we are a cross-cultural church in a bi-cultural setting. This would be hugely significant, but it would not *in itself* achieve much. It would simply mean that we have placed ourselves in the right cowshed. The hard work now begins.

Job 28: humility, openness to God and each other and acting justly

In Job 28:28, Job concludes that the only way to find true wisdom is to revere God and turn from what is wrong and unjust. It is striking that here, in the depths of the Jewish scriptures, there is no suggestion that only *the chosen people* can or will find wisdom. The search for wisdom is universal and so too is the failure to find it. Job 28:13 says: “it cannot be found in the land of the living” and “no one knows its true value”. No one is handed wisdom on plate simply by belonging to a particular culture or religious group.

Job, who should perhaps be the patron saint of ornithologists, stresses the point in 28:7 “No bird of prey knows that hidden path, no falcon’s eye has seen it.” In June this year, I saw a magnificent display of falcons and owls, which are birds of prey, at Dunrobin Castle in Scotland. Falcons have 80/80 vision, whereas humans have at best, and ideally, 20/20. High in the sky, the falcon can see the smallest movements happening far below them. Nothing misses its eye. No bird is faster than a falcon. The peregrine falcon has been recorded as reaching the staggering speed of 389kph. In contrast, owls are relatively slow and they don’t actually fly well at all. However, they glide silently through the air, with absolute aerial precision, to attack their prey, which never hear them coming. While like us, owls have 20/20 vision, they also have a kind of infra-red vision sensor. At night, nothing even twitches without them knowing.

Job didn’t know such scientific details about birds, but he was an astute observer of their skills and powers. Job argues that if they can’t catch wisdom, we humans have no chance at all of doing so, *unless we do what they cannot*. We alone can listen “in reverence” to God, to watch for the insights that only God can give and to do what is just and right. Cross-culturalism means doing so together.

Cross-culturalism is about summoning up the courage to get out of your comfort zone. It is about trusting the other...

Cross-culturalism: overcoming the crises in the Church

It is often noted that the word in Chinese for crisis, *weiji*, is a combination of the first parts of the words for “danger” (*wei*) and for “opportunity” (*ji*). A “crisis” is a threat full of possibilities and new potential. I had originally intended to suggest that the Presbyterian Church had gone through four “crises”. The first took place as the Presbyterian Church was transplanted from Scotland to this land. The second occurred when we accepted that we are a bi-cultural Church in partnership with our Maori sisters and brothers. The third crisis began in 1969 when the Pacific Island congregations joined the Presbyterian Church and we began to strive to become a genuinely multi-cultural community. The fourth crisis was sparked by the arrival of Asian migrants which began in 1989 under new immigration policies. For the first time, large numbers of Asian people have become genuine Kiwis and this has led, I had wanted to note, to the emergence of the crisis of cross-culturalism. But now, I believe, I was wrong.

Cross-culturalism is not a fourth crisis. It is a major resource for dealing with the other three. We are still nurturing and growing the Church in this country. We are still discovering the unique joys and challenges of being this uniquely bi-cultural and multicultural Church. The call to be and work together as the Body of Christ in this land which we all call home, remains. Moreover, Aotearoa is rapidly changing and bringing new challenges. In 2026, 16.6 percent of New Zealand’s population will be Asian and largely young. Anecdotally around 15 percent of marriages are between people of different ethnic backgrounds. According to the census, the percentage of people claiming to be Christian is declining. There are very ugly statistics concerning Maori people in jail and failing in schools.

Cross-culturalism is a means and a tool for the family of Jesus Christ to describe and resource our universal, combined task of bringing people to faith, of our search for justice, reconciliation and renewal. It demands humility, which will allow us to accept and develop the different skills, gifts and insights that we all bring to the search. It requires us to share our faith experiences and insights, and to find within and among ourselves the courage, trust, imagination and creative drive to take the Gospel to *everyone* who lives in Aotearoa-New Zealand. That, and no less, is the cross-cultural journey.

Finding Ways to Build a Multicultural Church

Sun Mi Lee, Northern Presbytery

In the last twenty years, we have seen marked changes in the demographic composition of New Zealand, with an attendant marked increase in ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity.¹ Due to a change of immigrant policy in 1987, increasing numbers of migrants came to New Zealand, bringing their own culture. Many churches seem challenged when it comes to accepting ethnic minorities and have difficulty embracing cultural diversity. While ways of celebrating cultural/ethnic diversity have developed, our churches are likely to be struggling with living in diversity.

I am a minister serving a multicultural church and in this essay I try to reflect on my personal journey. Based on my own limited experience and more researching, I see three steps to building a multicultural church: crossing cultural barriers, finding unity in Christ, and creating a new community.

Crossing cultural barriers

I feel deeply sorry to hear that churches are defined by language and ethnicity on Sunday morning. Especially in Auckland, people work in diverse multicultural urban settings during weekdays, but on a Sunday they prefer a monocultural setting to worship God. If someone tries to trace Christians' line of flow in a week, it will be on the Sunday that they are most segregated and divided into their own races.

Regarding this tendency, McGavran explains that: "people like to become Christian without crossing racial/linguistic/class/cultural barriers... Culturally they remain the same and tend to gather with others from the same culture who share their faith."² It seems to be a natural tendency to feel insecure and uncomfortable when we meet or stay with those who are not like us and who have different thoughts, feelings and desires. So we are retreat to a church of the same language, customs, cultures and beliefs.

However, the gospel challenges us to move out of our comfort zones and to engage those who are different. Jesus himself put it into practice. He moved out of Heaven to the earth, particularly to Israel; he moved out of Judah to Samaria. He reconciled and broke down cultural and social barriers.

I was born in South Korea and raised in a Presbyterian family. After moving from Korea in 2000, I identified myself as a missionary bringing the gospel to people in different cultures. Early in my life in New Zealand, I was engaged in two churches in Auckland; one was an immigrant church of Korean speakers. It was a big homogeneous congregation. The other was a small multicultural church with more than ten ethnic groups speaking English. This was a great time for me to learn the differences between homogeneous congregations and heterogeneous multicultural groups.

In 2002, I left the Korean congregation to focus more on the multicultural church. It was a big decision to leave my comfort zone. For the next 8 years I engaged in kids and youth ministries in the multicultural church. Being a member of a multicultural church was not always comfortable and ministry at the multicultural church was challenging. Feelings of inadequacy and insecurity would often hamper me. The bigger I felt the differences between me and others, the harder it was for me to enjoy the congregation's diversity and richness.

One day I realized that even though I had physically settled in a new country and a new church, I had not left my own culture. As I saw persons or things, I perceived them with my own beliefs or worldviews, which had been shaped by my own culture. If I felt something different from my norm or something beyond my understanding, I had a tendency to criticise and condemn and so I would not want to be with them and wanted to go back to my own culture.

¹ Stephen May, "Accommodating Multiculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand: Implications for language education", *Waikato Journal of Education*, 8, 2002, 5.

² Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 198.

In this sense, I affirmed Eric Law's statement:

*"One of the major barriers to building a multicultural community is our ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is the assumption that the worldview of one's own culture is central to all reality. In our ethnocentrism, we perceive and evaluate persons, things and events according to our values, beliefs and assumptions, often not knowing accepting other worldviews as valid or important."*³

It seems to be a natural tendency of human beings, hard to overcome.

Many European churches that are monocultural may be challenged by new ethnic groups. As groups want to join these churches, they experience insecure feelings because of the many differences. In the same way, these ethnic groups are also not easy to engage with in a church because they may perceive that the Europeans think their ways are normal or right – "if you want to join here, you need to be like us". This is not just prevalent among European churches, I see similar attitudes among Samoan churches and Korean churches which are dominant groups within Pacifica and Asian Christian circles.

I often hear this from people who belong to a multicultural church: "We are all equal at this church". Crossing cultural barriers is the first step to building a multicultural church. We are called to convey the gospel's role in reconciliation and breaking down barriers. Some churches try to encourage people to have compassionate openness, or introduce inter-racial/multi-ethnic leadership, or develop new worship styles adapting to various other cultures. These are all important strategies, but not always necessary. I think the most important thing we must start doing is to recognise our ethnocentrism and humbly give it up. Crossing cultural barriers starts not from a change of church administration or system, but from within each individual; changing our mindsets.

Finding unity in Christ

Once we move across cultural barriers we need to find unity in our diversity. How can we find unity in various cultures and differences? This is the most critical issue in a multicultural church. We can see the answer from the New Testament, particularly in Paul's Epistles; it is "unity in Christ".

In Ephesians 2:11-21, Paul describes oneness in Christ. He focuses on Christ's redemptive works – reconciliation and breaking down of barriers. So if we are in Christ, we are one regardless of different ethnicities, cultures and socioeconomic status. As we break down walls, the distance between us lessens. As Christ has accepted us, we are to accept one another. Being united in Christ enables the Church to be one. In Galatians 3:26-28, Paul insists our new identity is obtained through Christ. If we are baptised into Christ, we are Abraham's seeds and heirs according to the promise. We are the new humanity. There is no discrimination in Christ; we are equal if we are in Christ.

My second experience of multicultural church was during two years of ministry internship at Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership from 2010. The placement was a small congregation at Mt. Roskill, Auckland which had been struggling with ministry vacancy for a long time. Half the congregation were elderly European folk and the other half were Pacific Islanders, mostly Samoans. Worship was mostly led in English and one of the hymns was sung by Samoans. The church knew how these two different cultures could coexist so that administration could run well. However I noticed that it didn't seem to be the complete one body that Paul argued for. It was because of big cultural, social differences between the two groups and the lack of opportunity to be together except in Sunday worship. So I tried to become a bridge connecting the two groups.

A few days after I started my internship, a Samoan elder asked, "Sun Mi, what kind of ministry are you going to do here? You know, our church used to be a European church. Now it's half Samoan. You are here as a leader but you are a Korean. I'm wondering if you want to make this church... something like a Korean church." This question conveyed her anxiety that the church might lose its identity because of a new leader from another culture. And also it showed that people tended to identify church with their ethnicity. This question drew my attention to the importance of making people "united in Christ".

³ Eric Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993) 42.

How can we overcome power conflicts in one body? How can we find oneness within many differences? The Church needs to be united with Christ and experience oneness in Christ. One's personal encountering with Jesus will be the entrance of this oneness and the congregation's gathering to worship will be the place that our identity can be confirmed in Christ. "The unity that people from all of these different ethnicities and cultures had in Christ was primary and their ethnic or cultural identity was secondary."⁴

Creating a new community in the spirit of Christ

Once we find unity in Christ, we need to create a new community which celebrates its own culture and its diversity. In it God breaks down all barriers that divide the human race and accepts people from various cultures; Christ's completeness is achieved through their togetherness.

The gospel embraces both diversity and unity. It doesn't encourage us to leave our own cultures and ethnicities. In the first century we can see that different groups of Gentiles pursued their cultural practices at churches in Rome, Corinth, and Colossae. The multicultural church is a place of reassuring who we are based on our primary new identity in Christ. It is a place of re-discovering who we are among other people. In light of this, Ashlee Holmes reflects on her experience within a multicultural church:

*"Anyone feeling out of place experiences some level of discomfort when they're the 'other'. What I realised later in life, however, was that discomfort was actually good for me. Not only was I forced to seek my true identity in Christ — an identity formed on much more than the color of my skin — but I also took inventory of the people I'd chosen to surround myself with, and the inventory was beautiful. I realised my life was richer and more wonderfully complex because of others' uniqueness and truth in which I'd chosen to engage."*⁵

I was called to a multicultural church in New Lynn, Auckland in 2012; it is a small congregation consisting of Europeans, Samoan, Indians, and Filipinos, and a mix of other races. This ethnic variety represents the community of New Lynn. Worship is led in English and all ethnic groups are actively involved.

In terms of celebrating our own culture in Christ, we had a great experience through a special event; Indian Night. Indian families hosted the evening and all the congregation and our neighbours were invited. We were encouraged to wear Indian clothes, ate Indian foods, heard Indian songs, and watched Indian dancing in a hall decorated in an Indian style. Our practice reminded us of Jesus' incarnation; he became flesh, was born as a Jew, wore Palestinian clothes, ate their food, and enjoyed the Middle East's songs and dances. Jesus became just like us. In the evening, we all tried to become like our Indian friends, crossing cultural barriers and embracing their culture. It was a great evening, where our congregation learned about what an incarnational life in a multicultural setting is like.

Crossing cultural barriers is not always easy but this is the call to deny ourselves, give self-pride up. Finding unity in Christ is the space in which our identity is founded and we are reconciled to different peoples. And finally, the new community enables us to love and accept one another by celebrating our own culture.

As a local minister, my passion and interest is always in church, people of God, and the body of Christ. Some may think a multicultural church is a kind of modern church trend or a natural form that represents demographical change in the local community. But I think multicultural church is a way of Christian life, rather than an institutional system. It is a gospel life in the community, reconciling different peoples and breaking down walls, finding oneness in Christ, accepting one another and celebrating who we are. It is an incarnational life that we follow in Christ and practice this love and grace with others.

4 Kevin Ward, *Cultural Diversity and Unity in Christ: the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand in a land of many Cultures*. (Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, 2013) 12.

5 Ashlee Holmes, "Why Multiculturalism is a Must for the Church" n.p. Cited 11 August 2013, Online <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/church/why-multiculturalism-must-church>



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Closing date for the next round of applications: 30th September 2013

The Church in a Land of Immigrants

Kevin Ward, Southern Presbytery

Human habitation of New Zealand has always been by migrants. The first were people from the Pacific Islands in the 14th century who became the indigenous Maori population. Settlers from Europe began to arrive later in the 18th century and in increasing numbers from the early 19th century, particularly with planned settlement after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840.

For the next 130 years most settlers were from Britain. A few Chinese settlers joined gold rushes and chose to remain, and some Pacific Islanders arrived after World War II, allowed in because of New Zealand's relationship with some of the islands following World War I. Although there was no official "white" immigration policy as in Australia, policy made it difficult for non-Europeans to gain entry, and particularly favoured people from Britain. In the later 1960s and 1970s significant numbers began migrating from the Pacific Islands, welcomed because they were willing to do manual jobs, but unwanted and sometimes sent home when unemployment levels began to increase.

A major change in immigration policy in 1987 saw increasing numbers of immigrants from Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Southeast Asia, India and later the People's Republic of China. There were also immigrants from South Africa and Zimbabwe, but most migrants continued to come from the United Kingdom and Australia. This led to significant changes in the ethnic makeup of New Zealand's population and will lead to even bigger changes in the future. Figures from the United Nations show that currently New Zealand, with 24 per cent has the highest percentage of its population made up of people who are immigrants, of any country in the world.

- In 1961 New Zealand was 92 per cent European and 7% Maori, with Asia and Pacifica minorities sharing the remaining 1 per cent.
- In 2006 those who identified as European made up 68 per cent. By 2026 it is estimated they will be 62% and will probably be below 50 per cent by 2050.
- Maori were the next largest group with 14 per cent; by 2026 they will be 15 per cent.
- Asians grew the fastest between 2001 and 2006, making up 9 per cent. By 2026 they will be 15 per cent.
- Pacifica people made up 7 per cent of the population. By 2026 they will be 9 per cent.

Another significant factor fuelling change is the aging profile of the European population and the younger age profiles and higher birth rates of other ethnicities. In 2006, 92 per cent of the population over 65 were European, while 55 per cent of babies born were of Maori, Pacifica or Asian descent.

In Auckland – NZ's largest city – 40 per cent of inhabitants were born overseas; only 56 per cent of the population is European (likely to be down to 50 per cent by 2016) and over half of children enrolled in primary schools are no- European. Commenting on this increasing ethnic diversity in New Zealand and the failure of some established churches to connect in areas with a high concentration of ethnic minorities, Peter Lineham claims that "any religion that did not engage wider than the rich white middle-class will certainly not be growing in a city with Auckland's demographics today".

Immigrant churches

The first significant arrival of Christianity in New Zealand was missionary, with Samuel Marsden beginning mission activity in 1814. After a slow beginning there was a significant embracing of Christianity by Maori and estimates are that by the mid 1840s perhaps as many as 70 per cent had done so.

From the beginning of formal settlement, immigrants brought their churches with them. So, New Zealand had English Anglican and Methodist, Scottish Presbyterian and Irish Catholic Churches. For the first 100 years of its new history these four dominated the ecclesial landscape, including about 90 per cent of the population. This pattern continued with only minor variations until the mid 1960s.

The other significant event of early years was the collapse of Maori Christianity after the land wars in the 1850s and 60s. When Maori saw the church siding with British forces seizing their lands, they deserted the faith in droves. As one Maori chief put it to a missionary: "You taught us to turn our eyes to heaven to pray and while we looking up you took the land from under our feet". A consequence was the springing up of new forms of faith combining Christianity with traditional Maori beliefs and culture. The most significant of these in the 19th century was Ringatu, founded by the charismatic warrior chief Te Kooti, while in the 20th century an important movement was the Ratana Church, founded by the Maori prophet and faith healer, Ratana. Unfortunately, like all the earlier expressions, these were rejected by the European churches instead of being embraced as local contextual adaptations.

The church landscape began to change significantly from the late 1960s, with the decline of mainline churches and growth of independent evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal churches. A second factor bringing change was the arrival of many Christians from non-European countries with their own versions of church.

The first wave of these came from the Pacific Islands; their home churches having been established by Anglican, Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist and Roman Catholic Churches. In one sense, they brought churches that already existed. However the culture, beliefs and practices, as well as the language they brought, was significantly different. The role that religious communities play in the settlement experience of migrants is well covered in the literature. Helen Ebaugh, comparing early patterns of immigrant religion with those of these "new immigrants" found: "Then as now, ethnic places of worship served the dual purpose of reproducing the group's cultural and religious heritage while assisting immigrants in the process of adapting to the new society." So these new immigrants formed their own ethnic-specific churches in the new country, rather than simply becoming members of existing churches of the same denomination. One shift in this identity to note is that many Pacific Islanders were in the Congregational Church, a result of London Missionary Society activity. The Congregational Church was always very small in New Zealand and in 1969 most of their churches joined the Presbyterian Church, bringing many Pacific Island churches into the denomination.

In a time of general church decline it has become clear that since the 1990s much of church growth has come from immigrants. Certainly, a considerably higher proportion of Pacifica people, Koreans, Filipinos and South Africans go to church than do European New Zealanders.

Particular churches have benefitted from different ethnic immigrants: Roman Catholics from Filipinos; Presbyterians from Pacifica and Koreans; Baptists from Chinese and South Africans; Pentecostals and Methodists from Pacifica. The impact of this immigration from what might be regarded as part of the "new Christian heartlands" is similar to that identified by Jehu Hanciles for America. They are changing the face of New Zealand Christianity by de-Europeanising it. Immigrant congregations are the fastest growing segment across all traditions and represent forms and expressions of faith that may seem foreign to pakeha/palangi Christians. This immigration of non-Western Christians represents a new missionary encounter with New Zealand society.

Most immigrant groups have preferred their own congregations. It is estimated that 45 per cent of the 1100 churches in Auckland are ethnic communities. I will focus here on Pacifica churches as they are the longest term non-European immigrants and because of Pacifica involvement in Presbyterian Church. The issues identified here, however, I believe are true for ethnic groups in other churches.

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Pacifica people have the highest rates of Christian identity in New Zealand at 76 per cent, compared with 54 per cent for the population overall and 28 per cent for Asians (although an estimated 40 per cent of Koreans attend church).

It is understandable that new immigrants form or are attracted to churches of their own kind that provide a stable base in a precarious new world – a “place to feel at home”. The islands from which these immigrants come had generally been christianised in the 19th century. The church was very much at the centre of village life. For immigrants the church in many ways operated as the village community for much of life and culture in a strange new land.

When the Congregational Church joined Presbyterian Church, a Pacific Island Council was set up and eventually become a Synod. Tensions, though, began to develop between older immigrant leaders and younger first and second generation people. The former want to retain original forms, practices and languages, while the latter increasingly want to adjust to wider New Zealand cultural ways of doing things and also to become increasingly involved in multicultural or multiethnic settings.

At a national level, older leaders, dissatisfied with what they see as a lack of recognition of Pacific Island cultural concerns and practices by the wider church, and seeing increasing integration as being simply assimilation into a palagi church in which they have little power, have increasingly wanted to set up a separate Pacific Island structure with full powers. This is the structure of the Anglican Church, with a Tikanga Pakeha, Tikanga Maori and Tikanga Pasefika, each having the power of veto and so making cooperation and unity difficult. For the Presbyterian Church this issue is also fuelled by historic Congregational roots as that Church gives more autonomy to local congregations. As a result of these tensions, and a degree of intransigence among the leadership in a hierarchical and age-oriented culture, many younger people have either begun attending Pentecostal churches or have left church completely.

It is important to recognise that this is not just a Pacific Island issue. Many Pacific Island churches exist for separate island groups and current research indicates that 83 per cent of churches are ethnically homogenous, defining ethnicity in the Pacifica context as being a separate ethnicity for each group. Other Pacific Island churches have distinct worshipping congregations for each group and attempts to merge these have usually been resisted. It should be noted that the Asian communities involved in the church, as they reach considerable numbers of 1.5 generation members, are showing a much greater degree of willingness to adapt and become multicultural. It is interesting to discover that as the largest Korean church (the three largest Presbyterian churches are Korean) has begun an English language service for its 1.5 generation; it has attracted Japanese and Chinese people, thus becoming pan-Asian.

Calling New Zealand home

In our increasingly multicultural society it is questionable whether the practice of maintaining ethnic-specific churches has long-term merit. When I was visiting the UK in 2000, researcher Peter Brierley told me that he could describe where the church was growing in one word: “black”. He said that high levels of church attendance existed in migrant communities - in the 1970s and 80s with migrants from the Carribean, in the 1990s with the new immigrants from Africa. The point he was making – identified in other studies – is that as a community moves through the generations in the new land, so people [especially the young] become more like the host community. In the UK, as in New Zealand, regular church involvement is not one of its characteristics. This shows up in statistics on church involvement among young Pacifica people born or raised in New Zealand.

As well as those who leave church altogether, many who have left Pacific Island churches have moved to multiethnic churches. Yannick Fer, researching change among young Pacifica people, found that in New Zealand many have moved to Pentecostal churches which provide a way for them to express their Christian faith in cultural forms appropriate to contemporary New Zealand society.

It remains, then, an open question as to whether pursuing ethnic-specific churches long term is the most effective strategy for the church, once immigrant communities move beyond the first generation. Adding further to this question is interesting research in both the UK and US indicating that churches with an ethnic mix were more likely to grow than those of one ethnicity, and that the richer the ethnic mix the better.

All of these factors, of both demographic change and research on religion in immigrant communities, indicate that how we negotiate our journey of becoming a multicultural, or intercultural, church is both our biggest challenge and greatest opportunity.

Cross-cultural Ministry

Michelle Shin, Wellington Presbytery

It humbles me to be asked to speak about ministry in a multicultural context. I speak as someone who has learned and grown through trials and errors and as someone who believes in the God who loves me and carries me through the challenges and opportunities of ministry.

So, what is ministry?

I believe that Christian ministry is to do with communicating the gospel in response to Matthew 18: 19-20. Today, ministry is in the context of an ever-changing world. People no longer stay in one place, and a country is no longer ethnically definable. Our world is globalized with trade and migration. Still, our core purpose of ministry continues to be communicating the gospel of Christ and God's salvation.

Cross cultural communication is an essential skill in any sector of society, business, education or service. People need to be competent in cross-cultural communication not only to be successful, but also just to function. It is important to understand that there are cultural differences with the people with whom we are communicating the gospel.

Cross-cultural communication

Cross-cultural communication is important because we have much to do with one another across the globe and with people who migrate to places that they never thought that they would live. So, in cross-cultural ministry, we need to communicate the gospel with a wider set of communication skills.

When we think about communication, we think about language. Most of the people in our context speak English, but with varying degrees of competency. There are not many ministers of the gospel who learned to speak other languages to communicate with the people they minister to in New Zealand. Anyone who wants to minister in New Zealand needs to have competency and proficiency in English. However, it is also important for English-speaking ministers to learn the languages of their ministry context, or at least have appreciation for these other languages. This helps to understand the place that language has in one's culture and will help us not to treat someone like a child just because their English is not up to our standard. We need to tune our ears to understand the accents of a person who is trying hard to speak a foreign language.

It is also important in cross-cultural ministry to understand the different cultures in our congregations – some are obvious and some are not so obvious. There are those who were born in New Zealand from parents who came years ago from England, Scotland, Pacific Islands and even China; there are those who were born in other countries and came to New Zealand as children and there are those who came to New Zealand as adults. They are all from different cultures.

There are those who live in between cultures. We often called them 1.5ers. Their culture is different to the two cultures that they live with. There is nothing more annoying than someone presuming to know all about you, because of your appearance, or because they have met someone from your country. Sometimes our differences may overwhelm us.

Yet God is God of all people, regardless of language, race, colour or background. There is always common ground on which we can talk about our experience of the living God.

Cross-cultural ministry is "incarnational"

If ministry is about communicating the gospel which says that God who created us and gave us life, loves us and wants us to know that we are loved; God who came in Jesus wants to have a relationship with us as God's sons and daughters so that we all can share in his blessing of life. Our welcome in the kingdom of God through Christ Jesus should be reflected in what we do or say. We have to be "incarnational". What we are thinking often shows in what we do.

The Presbyterian Church, like other mainline churches in New Zealand, has become much more diverse and better at embracing other cultures. There are growing ethnic churches, such as Korean churches which are made up of Korean migrants and their children; Chinese churches are much the same. Pacific Island churches going further back in generations have often maintained their

ethnic heritage and there are ethnic congregations like the Pilipino congregation that began as a church plant within an already existing congregation. There are also churches that are multicultural and made up of people of many different countries and cultures. There are clergy in these churches who were not born in New Zealand, and there are churches made up of people who are majority European Pakeha.

I, as a Korean-born minister, am ministering to churches that are made up of many cultures and races. However, I do not consider myself to be an experienced minister in cross-cultural ministry. I have become so immersed in this cultural mix that I do not see the barriers I am crossing everyday! Perhaps the situation would be different if there were Koreans in the congregations I minister to. I minister almost intuitively without realizing that I do move across cultural boundaries. However, people tell me that there are barriers, some of which are more easily overcome than others. I think my biggest fear is that a barrier may become so big that people I minister to feel that they cannot come to me for pastoral care.

Once I was asked to leave the room of a patient who was racist toward Asians – she said politely that she didn't want to talk to me and asked for a European chaplain. As I was leaving a woman in the next bed stopped me, apologised quietly and started to minister to me. It was pointed out to me later in my supervision that rejection can happen because I am a minister, a woman, short or fat. It is important to know how to stand up for yourself while being nice to people. In any case, even Jesus says dust off your feet and never look back!

I believe that as ministers of the life giving Word, it is our commitment to do our very best. I think we are to have the mind of Christ who became one of us so that we may know and experience God intimately and comprehensibly. Once I befriended a man who was dying of Aids, I visited him as a hospital chaplain almost every day until he died. We were from vastly different places, culturally and otherwise, but at the end what brought us together was the God I saw in him who is loving and compassionate and forgiving.

We can play with concepts and theories of cultural psychology and politics. We can blame everything that is not good on the colonialism that has oppressed other cultures. We can leave all that is difficult and tedious and go separate ways; we can create separate governances and structures instead of letting the other cultures influence who we are. Racism comes from fear of the differences which we feel threatened by. Racism also comes from complacency. We say you are so different that I don't understand you, be whatever you are, just don't ask me for anything! This leaves people even more alienated and isolated. In a society that constantly judges by appearance and skin colour, the church is the last place for anyone to have to feel alienated.

I remember a father of a baby boy who was prematurely born with birth defects which led to his death. One afternoon when the baby was in surgery, I spent some time calming him down because he had lost his temper with some staff earlier that day. He said, in the middle of our conversation:

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"I know what they think of me..." indeed, he was covered with tattoos, and many staff including me thought that he was a gang member; it turned out he was an award-winning tattoo artist who owned businesses in the area. We make mistakes like that when we fail to see the person as created in God's image.

After a service a man wanted to talk. When I finally sat next to him ready to talk, he produced an old note book full of choruses. Sometimes we rush around and miss the opportunity to sit and really listen. Something about the sermon that Sunday made him want to share his faith with me. Christ came to be one of us, dwell among us so that we would know God's glory and understand God's truth and mercy.

If anything is essential in cross-cultural ministry it is the ability to listen without judging and simply be present and journey with others. It is to recognise God's image in them and be curious about what God is doing in their lives and in your life as you meet together in Christ. It is that openness to step into the unknown which is known in God. It is that willingness to see as God sees, and trust in God who brings reconciliation to the world and perhaps right where you are!

Cross-cultural ministry is about sharing in the body of Christ

I remember early one day I had to bless a bad space where a person had died. As the staff stood in a circle there was a sense of calm; tears were shared and tributes made; a space was created. Sometimes cross-cultural ministry is about creating a space, creating common ground, creating a breathing space where all are accepted and valued. And most importantly it is about creating a "God space". Cross-cultural ministry is ministry within the circle; around the communion table, for example, where we are united with Christ and with one another.

I think the worst enemy for cross-cultural ministry is fear. We fear as a human being something that is unknown, something that we cannot understand. If we are afraid of people we don't understand and have difficulty communicating with, multiply that by five thousand or more to know how people from different countries are feeling. We need to be able to walk in their shoes; we need to address and work towards being free from our fear. Empathy is really the key. Treat them as you want to be treated is not only a nice saying, it is biblical.

It is said that the biggest barrier in cross-cultural ministry is the language. We all desire to communicate, speak the language, understand concepts and values and know what to do without embarrassment. Recently we opened our church space for refugees from Myanmar to learn English and come together as a community. Communication is more than about speaking and understanding. Language is not only about speaking. Language in ministry is about life and love.

Living in a foreign country is very lonely. Many are grieving, whether or not the decision to come to a foreign country was theirs. Looking at the history of migration in other places, such as the puritans in America, their faith in God who loved them was the only strength that saved them in their life in a foreign land. Faith is what we share in our ministry; growing in faith is what we do as a Church that grows from our baptism. We encourage people who long to find a faith that gives them strength.

My earliest memory of New Zealanders and their hospitality goes back to a woman called Doreen Park. She was an elder of a congregation in Christchurch. She came every week to teach us English at home. She and her husband befriended us and introduced us to Kiwi cooking, history and culture. We communicated at levels deeper than words. She showed me the gospel of love that I try to follow in my ministry.

I guess that is what it comes down to. Even if we fail at all the above, love will win everything, especially the human heart. Love is what we are to communicate in ministry. Words are useful sometimes, but what we do with them is more important. Cross-cultural ministry, therefore, is about love and how we speak the love of God. The rules of love are, according to the Apostle Paul:

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

Ministry in a Multicultural Context – A Personal Reflection

Anne Thompson, Southern Presbytery

As a student at the School of Ministry, I had to undertake field education placement in a local parish for three months. I was very aware that my adult church experience had been largely in Dunedin, and therefore largely monocultural. I was also very aware that much of our church (and wider New Zealand society) is multicultural, and I felt the need to experience something of ministry in such a situation. First Church of Otago stood out as a parish that was multicultural, so I asked if I could do my placement there.

My three months at First Church as a student was a very rich experience and taught me so much. I realised that I had been somewhat in awe of the historical position First Church holds, particularly in the south; I discovered that it was a parish like any other, with ordinary folk worshipping together, engaging in fellowship together, working together. Within First Church three communities meet, focused around three regular Sunday services: the 10am congregation – the long-term heirs of the historical heritage of First Church; the Cook Islands community who worship at 12.00; and the Samoan community with their service at 2pm.

Being included in the Cook Islands and Samoan communities was a highlight of my placement. Because experiencing multicultural ministry was a goal for my time there, I attended all three services most Sundays, and discovered that worshipping in another language is still worship. Much was familiar – even if I didn't know the words; I could pray along with the prayers, do my best to join in the hymns (for traditional Cook Islands reo metua, that is a bit of a challenge), and take the time during the sermon to read and meditate on the Bible passage. I found it very enriching.

I attended all three services most Sundays, and discovered that worshipping in another language is still worship.

Being an orometua ('minister' in Cook Islands Maori) even one in training, placed me in a privileged position which at times I found awkward – being invited up to the top table at a kaikai (feast), being called upon without warning to offer a prayer or a devotion, having a status that seemed to set me apart or above others. How far was it appropriate to challenge cultural practices on the basis of my understanding of ministry – that the heart of ministry is service, not status; that all elders are called and ordained to leadership? Watching the way Samoans acknowledged a bereavement, with the presentation of gifts and fine mats; being part of a Cook Islands unveiling – my exposure to other ways of living and being community was such a gift.

What I didn't expect during my time at First Church was that a year later I would be back there, initially appointed as half-time assistant for six months, and later called to the position. I have realised that my field education placement experience provided me with the lens through which I see the congregation; a multicultural lens – a perspective that not all at First Church share.

Samoans and Cook Islanders have been part of First Church for almost fifty years (we are looking forward to celebrating that in 2016) but becoming a multicultural community is still a work in progress. (The mission statement says "we are striving to become a multicultural community"). While there are some friendships spanning the different communities, each tends to operate largely in isolation. The regular places of intersection are quarterly communion services and the session. The ministry team (the senior minister, the Rev Tokerau Joseph and myself) are the most visible continuity between the congregations, since we lead worship in all three services, and usually both attend most services. But is that enough to create community?

As a student I read a book about multicultural congregations that suggested it was important for different cultural groups to have their own place to be themselves (their *turangawaewae*) as well as common spaces where the whole community comes together on equal terms. The three Sunday services at First Church provide that place of identity for each of our communities, and combined services – for quarterly communion, Christmas and Anniversary Day – bring us together in worship.

For over ten years First Church has used a multilingual communion liturgy, with responses in Cook Islands Maori, English and Samoan, along with a Cook Island and Samoan hymn. In the past five years we have moved the time of the quarterly communion service to 11am, a reminder that this is “our time”, different from the regular timing of services. (But there are always a few who arrive at 10am, wondering why no one else is here – and others who arrive at noon and join in at the end of the service).

I have also discovered that use of a shared kitchen can become an exercise in power and control.

Increasing the use of languages other than English, using the Cook Islands sung Lord’s Prayer or the Samoan offering hymn, has not found universal approval. For some of the pakeha congregation, it felt like, “50 percent of the service was in another language”. Yet around the Lord’s Table we come as different members of the Body of Christ, united in Christ within our diversity, and that perspective is the one we want to express in our celebrations of Communion. I have suggested that at First we have the privilege of practising for heaven, where people of every nation and tribe and language and people will worship together around the throne.

I have always believed that table fellowship is an important way to experience and express our identity as the body of Christ. I have also discovered that use of a shared kitchen can become an exercise in power and control. Whose kitchen is it? Who checks hygiene standards and food safety? Who has control of the plates and cutlery? Currently there are three sets of locked cupboards in the First Church kitchen, so that different sets of crockery and cutlery are used for different events – and occasionally I say, “We will know we are truly one people when we all use the same plates and knives and forks because they belong to First Church”. Such questions of power and control are always present in any congregation – perhaps the lines of demarkation are more obviously defined at First Church. But in any church where different groups worship and fellowship together, tensions and challenges arise around use of buildings and facilities, and who has control of those things.

Issues of power and control arise in other areas too, of course – who makes decisions? (Particularly around money and property.) Who has access to information? Who is responsible for ensuring that such information is shared? (If no one from a particular community can come to a meeting, whose responsibility is it to find a way to include the community in the process?) Who is at the centre of the informal decision-making that always happens in a congregation, and who is on the outside? How much autonomy do the different communities have, and how much mutual accountability?

At the end of my Field Education placement, the question I took away was “Who is First Church?” Five years into ministry there, I am reminded of that question. It is probably less pressing now – but only because I have become part of the place, used to the patterns and dynamics of life in this wonderfully rich congregation. But it is a question that holds the future within it. Who will First Church be in twenty years? My dream, my hope, my prayer, is that First Church will be a place where different communities join together to worship, to fellowship and to work, each strong in its own identity, each appreciating the contribution differences of language and custom make to a richer whole; each open to the variety of life in the Spirit that is God’s gift to a church that will include every tribe and nation and language and culture.

A Cross-Cultural Church – Then and Now

John England, Christchurch Presbytery

Although comparatively new in Aotearoa New Zealand, Christian cross-cultural encounter, and acceptance – involving those of different races, cultures and faiths – has a long history world-wide. The history for cross-cultural Christian churches includes that from Jewish-Syrian-Persia-Indian encounters – from the 2nd century on; with these including Turkish-Mongol-Chinese peoples from the 5th century on; along with Korean, Japanese and Malay (peninsular and archipelagos) from the 7th century on. All these encounters were enriched by the tolerant policies of the Indian – and for a period – of the Mongolian (until the 14th century) and Chinese (until the 18th century) empires. There are now cross-cultural churches, rooted in their unique settings, throughout the region, from Central Asia or Afghanistan, south to Indonesia (and Australasia) and north to Korea and East Russia.

One of the most significant periods of encounter, with resulting cross-cultural churches, was that from the 8th to 11th centuries in Central Asia/Turkestan/China, for from this there is a fascinating library of writings, paintings and records. Here were involved Buddhist Indians or Chinese, Palestinian Jews, Persian or Syrian Zoroastrians or Manichaeans, Chinese Taoists, and Turkish Muslims or Shamanists in churches of Merv or Samarkand, Bishbek or Kashgar, Turfan, Dunhuang or Chang An (to mention only a few). We now know that Oriental or Orthodox Christians and the Church of the East included members from each of these ethnic groups and that their exchange of insight and tradition was rich and plentiful.

Many documents have shown that these encounters were marked by mutual tolerance, appreciation for the highest teachings of each (very different) tradition or culture, and a readiness to shape terms and concepts in order to share their faith more clearly with others. This was true, too, of their relations with those of other faiths; extant records show there were extensive interchanges and mutual learnings. The extent to which language and understanding are shaped here by the particular locality and the environment of the encounters is remarkable, as is the forging of new terms for the communication of gospel truths. (And this of course has given rise to various contextual, Christ-centred theologies).

The earlier Roman Catholic encounters with Chinese Christians and scholars from the 13th century on, had also led to significant changes in liturgy and belief for the Jesuit missionaries. In contrast it may be true that a majority of Protestant missionaries (from the late 18th century on) rejected such approaches, along with any reflective studies that would have made changes in liturgy and belief possible.

Yet many significant figures of the modern missionary movement were leaders in cross-cultural (and inter-faith) encounter and acceptance. Mission history shows that Christian communities were greatly enriched by their example, studies and teachings. To select just a few of the many missionaries who were deeply involved: in India, there was William Carey, Charles F. Andrews, Marjorie Sykes, Bede Griffiths and Henri le Saux; and in China, Elijah Bridgeman, Timothy Richard, W.A.P. Martin, Gilbert Reid and Herbert Giles. There are many more indigenous Christians of similar faith and practice that could be included here, as well as many missionaries and native Christians in other countries across the region.

What would a more fully cross-cultural church look like?' ...and then,' how much do we really want such a church?'

For us in Aotearoa New Zealand we have these forerunners in our own region, as mentors in our cross-cultural (and inter-faith) encounters. We also have a rich heritage from our own former overseas missionaries, who devoted immense energy to collaborating with indigenous colleagues. For example, in India there was Norman Porteous, Mary Salmond, Morton Ryburn, Hugh McLeod and Doreen Riddle; for China, there was Alexander Don, George McNeur, Annie James, Paddy Jansen and Frances Ogilvie; for Vanuatu, John G. Paton, J. Graham Miller, Dr J. and Margaret Gunn, Basil and Ailsa Nottage, Will and Jemima Milne; and in Aotearoa, J.F.H. Wohlers, Hoani George Laughton, Sister Annie Henry, James and Alice Irwin, Robert Lye Challis, Ta Upu Pere, and Kenape Faletese. Note that for most of these people, their ministry overflowed into inter-church concern and activity – mission required many degrees of unity.

Some implications for us now personally, if we are to be a genuinely cross-cultural church.

'Porous diversity' and misunderstanding

Extensive studies in sociology and anthropology have established just how porous and fragmented cultural boundaries always are. There is always some interchange, even fusion, between differing cultures and living faiths. This is now increasingly obvious in a supposedly cybernetic and global age. But, also obvious now is a great internal diversity whether in religious, cultural or ethnic practices, and an even greater diversity in Christian interpretations of these.

And this poses sharp questions as to *which* interpretation/understanding of ethnic or faith traditions, taken by whom, is the framework for our encounters and exchanges. *Where*, and in what form, do the cultural/religious boundaries in fact lie? *How* can they be crossed? What are the misunderstandings which have to be first recognised? ... projections or biases perhaps that we have from our upbringing or education? And what does following in the-life-of-Jesus-with-others require of us here?

In any case there is inevitably for all – and pakeha/palagi in particular – a western slant to our thought of others, so that in our actual cross-cultural encounter this must be recognised and assessed. A fuller critique of our own cultural history is necessary; but also an awareness that just as in a European/New Zealand heritage there are many diversities – of culture, denomination or theology – the same is true within Maori, Pacific or Asian Christian heritages and practices. This is particularly true for Asian Christians, not least because of the large extent of their Christian histories and traditions, from scores of different cultures.

Listening to and accepting the other

This makes it important that we be ready in all our encounters to first listen to the other; to be ready to treat very seriously what is communicated, always alert to the possibility that this is being misunderstood. In this way a fully mutual exchange is made possible – a mutual recognition rather than accommodation or absorption. Unfortunately we did no better than this in the years following our welcome to the Pacific Island congregations from the 1970s onward. This must, and need, not happen again with whomever our companions are. Nor are our approaches to mutual understanding to be confined to the accepted or supposedly correct terms or theologies, of whatever might be our tradition.

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But we *can* be sensitive to histories and presumed meanings other than the Western or the pakeha / palagi (and other than each *ethnic* group). After all we – regardless of background – are living now between cultures, each of us with many cultural facets. Yet in a ‘cross-cultural’ church there is an over-arching unity which assures us that intentions and hopes are being shaped by the-life-of-Jesus-with-others, and that we are walking towards God’s New Commonwealth together... with “yet more light always to come”.

There *are* still differences however in language, social custom and expectation; with different theologies too, of Church, of following Jesus, and of God’s coming Commonwealth. And only the honest accepting and self-critical facing of real differences – rather than merely friendly, formal, or dialoguing – can be called mutual, or indeed Christian.

A cross-cultural church?

Keeping in mind some of the insights forged by our overseas forebears in many years of missional ministry, there are some hard questions still to consider if we wish to become more of a cross-cultural church. These can be grouped under the questions: “What would a more fully cross-cultural church look like?” and then, “How much do we really want such a church?”

I would like to suggest a few necessary steps:

- i. Assuming that we do wish to go beyond a mono-cultural church and be ready to accept each other’s unique understandings, we would all be ready to question the centrality or supposed normativeness of our own cultural heritage. Considering that *more than half* the world’s Christian history and of the present Christian population, around two-thirds belong to the non-Western world, this requires Pakeha / Palagi to take a critical approach to Western modes of discussion, of procedure and of theology. It is also necessary for all of us migrants to have awareness of cultural dilutions and hybridities will be encountered, as well the likely dilution of formerly unique Christian identities. This can be a fascinating and practical study!
- ii. There would then be ongoing programmes of study and discussion – in, for example, short courses, seminars, study-days – of *each* culture and Christian history, by at least the leaders in each national / cultural grouping. This should include some understanding of key linguistic terms in other cultures, this being only a gesture when compared to the exhausting study which overseas staff must do in preparing for their ministries across cultures. Also included would be at least outline study of the respective histories, cultures, living faiths and Christian theologies (brief hand-books could be prepared to assist here).
- iii. Regular study tours would supplement the above short courses, in order to establish and apply an effective understanding of particular cultures and Christian histories. This could be to the churches of countries especially in Asia and the Pacific, and an extension of the tours already arranged by Presbyterian Church Global Mission. Actual encounter with the life of overseas churches and with their cultural and economic setting, is essential if a cross-cultural church here is to be more than an accidental and polite exercise in tolerance or assimilation.
- iv. There would be too, a fuller integration of our differing ethnic and Christian cultures, in the membership of all regional and national bodies and committees. All ministries would also be fully integrated with Te Aka Puaho and the Pacific Islands Synod, along with the groupings of Korean, Chinese and Southeast Asian congregations.
- V. To go beyond mere tolerance, there is a particular challenge for us to understand at least some of the traditions of belief and worship, and therefore of theology, held by those of each culture / church. These are diverse and today there are rich resources which gather some of the long and rich traditions of, in particular Asian and Pacific, partner churches in our region. These have far-ranging value for the faith-understanding of all of us, even where the cross-cultural encounter has not yet become fully evident.

One last note concerns the impossibility of our working in any cross-cultural church if we ignore and fail to study our present cultural / Christian differences... Or if recognising the extent and diversity of Christian mission which is now necessary, we limit our endeavours to the needs of one denomination. There can be no grounds for crossing cultural boundaries that are not also grounds for crossing denominational boundaries: Cross-cultural demands cross-denominational!

Conversations and Interpretations

Martin Baker, Assembly Executive Secretary

Since when was 12B ever a window seat? I was on a flight to Auckland a few weeks ago. When I walked down the aisle I noticed that a person was sitting in my seat, 12A. I am a window seat person. He insisted that 12B was by the window. I looked at him, said something to myself and sat down in the middle seat – my least favourite. I wasted a whole hour of my life thinking dark thoughts about the person next to me, and, clearly, given the fact that I am writing about this a month later, the issue still hangs around. “Get over it”, “Suck it up”, or, “Don’t sweat the small stuff” I know you will be saying. Maybe even, “Turn the other cheek”.

As a way to lower the tension I could have said: “Yes, you’re right. You are was sitting in window seat 12B”, or “That’s great. I always prefer the middle seat”. I could have told on him to the aircrew person. But I would have still had to sit beside him, albeit me in 12A and him in his “proper place”, of 12B. (People should know their proper place. After all, I could have been doing him a favour.) Who knows what would have happened if I had somehow compelled him to move? Would we have survived the flight? I thought he was a bit dodgy anyway. In fact, I could write quite extensively about why I thought he was dodgy and you might find yourself nodding sympathetically.

I think I admire the nation of Finland. A Finish friend of ours, tells me of going to dinner parties in Finland where people would sit together for long periods, in silence. I said to her that I thought that scenario defeated the whole purpose of dinner parties – most of the ones which I have attended (on the very odd occasion that I am invited) are actually filled with people saying a great deal about not very much at all. She tells me: “Exactly! That’s the whole point”. Culturally, according to my Finish friend, Fins tend to have a much higher degree of tolerance with the social acceptability of silence. (I guess for a nation that invented Nokia and Angry Birds I can kind of understand where she is coming from. I have spent hours in silence trying to figure out how to work my Nokia – and playing Angry Birds? Where do the days go as you try to catapult all those strange birds at the pigs? Thank you Finland.)

While running the risk of some damaging self-disclosure, the worst conversations (arguments, fights) I have had with neighbours, and even pretty much strangers, have revolved around ownership, property, money, a sense of been unfairly treated or someone else undermining my “rights” – those sort of things. The “fruit of the spirit” (Galatians 5: 22-23) all seem to wither instantaneously when the person driving the car in front does not seem to have noticed that the light has changed to green.

I fear that these same dynamics that sometimes lead us to do think and say the wrong and destructive things can plague our conversations about where Jesus might be calling us to be as a Church. Those conversation that seek legalistic answers to the way our mission and ministry should be ordered; the seeming inability we have to even have a hopeful conversation about how our property and assets may be used for fulfilling some purpose beyond the preservation of our own pre-determined physical and cultural boundaries. Some conversation seem to affirm a view that God chose 1961 – a point at the height of the social and physical constructs of modernism – as the perfect time to set in place for all eternity the systems, structures and theology of the Church.

Would our forebears really, really want us to preserve the buildings and communion tables that they left us with, or could we instead claim their hope, sacrifice and commitment to the Gospel as the qualities which should empower and lead our decision-making for today and tomorrow? I think our obligation to our tupuna is to proclaim their hope, not to preserve the things relevant to the mission and ministry in their time and place.

I know how difficult these times of change can be, and I do believe we have a responsibility of care for those for those who are most unsettled or hurt by change. But I also think that in this culturally complex environment in which we live and serve, there is reason to feel excited about the hopes and possibilities that God may be calling us to fulfil as we seek to live life in the fullness of Christ.