

Published by Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry in 2006 this excellent resource has been used by some individuals and groups since. Some of the stories were made available last year for "One Great Sunday of Sharing". Some others are made available here.

It is our hope that they will continue to inspire local ideas, efforts and opportunities while also encouraging the telling and sharing of other such stories in your local context and ministry. You would like the full set of stories the book containing them is still available from the office of the Uniting Church National Assembly national office: Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry.

Some stories from

"Snapshots of Multicultural Ministry"

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Snapshots of Multicultural Ministry

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Multicultural Congregations:

- (1) Are open to receive the gifts of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, are inclusive and welcoming and have hospitality as a hallmark of their life
- (2) Are passionate about cross-cultural ministry and intentionally build bridges with new communities and people groups
- (3) Respond to the needs of the culturally diverse communities in which they are placed and recognise the different needs of people from diverse backgrounds
- (4) Find ways to utilise the gifts of all God's people and enable the participation of all members
- (5) Are aware of power dynamics and learn the importance of cross-cultural communication
- (6) Challenge racism and paternalism and foster relationships based on mutual respect and trust
- (7) Honour a variety of cultural perspectives and make time for people to listen and share with one another
- (8) Make space for people to maintain language, cultural patterns and traditions that are life giving and use property as a resource for the ministry and mission of the whole people of God
- (9) Reflect ethnic diversity in the leadership and worship life of the congregation
- (10) Are learning and growing together as God's diverse people

Prayer

Loving God,

We affirm our cultural diversity as Your gift.

*Make our (congregation) a place where all people are welcomed
and the love and hospitality of Christ is evident.*

*Help us to build bridges with people from different cultural groups
and reach out to serve our community in culturally sensitive ways.*

*We celebrate the ways people from different backgrounds are taking up their place
in the life of our congregation and contributing to its life...*

*May equality and partnership be evident in the way we share resources;
respect, trust, justice, mutuality and love visible in all our relationships.*

*As we embark on an exciting cross-cultural journey together,
open our hearts to receive and learn from one another,
and may we be open to the transformation which the Spirit brings!*

Amen

2. Ingredients for a Multicultural Church: Sacrifice, Humility, Love and Respect

by Revd Abera – minister of the Griffith and Yenda/Binya congregations

Hello, G'day, Ciao, Ning How Mar, Bula, Talofa lava, Malo e lelei, Fakalofa lahi atu, Kia Orana

Today the Griffith Uniting Church is a multicultural church with 10 nationalities represented. How did this come about? This is our story.

The Griffith and Yenda/Binya Uniting Church was formed in 1977 when Revd Don Erickson (former Presbyterian Minister) and Revd John Butson (former Methodist Minister) led the congregation over the first hurdles associated with forming a new church and a new community.

For the next 19 years the church was mainly made up of people from Anglo-Celtic background. However, in 1996 a Samoan group joined the church, the first Pacific Island group. A few years later in 1997 a Tongan group joined. The Revd Liva Tukutama, a Niuean minister, was called to help develop this ministry with a focus on initiating this bridging together. The Cook Islands group joined the church in 2005.

The church's mission statement speaks of our commitment to be:

A multicultural and diverse group of people unified by our common desire to grow in love and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this means all people are offered a welcome to Griffith and Yenda/Binya.

The church has and is working together as one in unity regardless of our cultural diversities. We worship together, fund raise together, do church activities together and have encouraged families to invite other families of a different culture to share meals together twice a year. This has been very significant in growing relationships.

The church has a young peoples' group who call themselves the "Dare to Dream Team". They visit other Uniting Church congregations around the Griffith region within the Riverina Presbytery twice a year during weekends. They perform items from their different cultures on Friday and Saturday nights and worship with the hosting congregation on the Sunday. Often they visit rural congregations which do not have a minister and this brings great encouragement.

We have a combined service once a month and this is conducted in English, but other ethnic groups are invited to contribute to the service through bible readings, singing of hymns in their language and a variety of other ways. We often choose music where each ethnic group can sing a verse in their own language. At the present time we are exploring whether we will have two combined services a month, one service to be conducted in English and one service in an Island group language.

Working across cultures is still an issue that needs to be addressed and handled with great humility, respect and love. People's minds are shaped by their different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. This affects the way we think and do things and what are our expectations and needs. There is also the language barrier. Sometimes people feel they can not join in activities or take on leadership roles because of a language handicap or the fear and insecurity of being a minority.

Griffith Uniting Church is looking forward to doing more activities to bring the people together as one. We have a combined service at Yenda/Binya at 8am and in Griffith at 9:30am on the first Sunday of the month. On other Sundays we have morning English services at Yenda/Binya and Griffith, a Fijian worship service at 10am at the Hyandra village, a Cook Islander group worship at 1pm at Griffith and Tongan worship at 3pm also at Griffith. This takes a lot of awareness and sensitivity on the part of everyone in terms of sharing the property resources God has given us.

Griffith and Yenda/Binya Uniting Church is moving forward as a unified but diverse group with one desire, to grow in love and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. One family of the church from an Asian background has worshipped here for 38 years. They have a great commitment to God and love for God's people.

Working in a multicultural church brings a lot of sacrifices, and requires commitment, humility, love and respect. We need to be committed to God and to each other and respect each others' differences in humility. These are the keys to growing a multicultural congregation.

4. Rural Victoria – Opportunity Knocks by Revd Dr Tony Floyd – currently in the Mission Planning Team – Rural and Cross-cultural Ministry, Commission for Mission of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

In a substantial number of places in rural Victoria and Tasmania, congregations are receiving ministry from people from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Many of these ministers from a non English-speaking background [NESB] are serving in rural placements in contexts that are largely mono-cultural. With few exceptions, this experience has been positive. In some cases initially there were fears expressed particularly relating to whether they would be able to understand the minister's accent. But with time, a common response seems to be: *"We worried greatly about her/his accent, but soon we never noticed it."*

Rural congregations are receiving with appreciation the energetic ministry being provided by ministers from NESB. The kind of comments I regularly hear are: *"Their ministry is strong, vital and alive; a real blessing!"* or *"Our minister connected us to the world church (without ever making us feel guilty for our previous isolation)"*. There has been less intrusion of perceived difficulties [language and cultural practise] than was anticipated and a surprising growth in faith and discipleship. The pastoral and preaching presence of ministers bringing insights from their own cultural heritage and faith journey gives an added richness.

Multiculturalism sometimes comes slowly in rural areas and for some, it is experienced as a very mixed blessing.

When a rural congregation is looking for a new minister, often it is not on their radar to consider calling a minister from a NESB. Such a placement sometimes became a choice through a long vacancy and the increasing difficulty of getting a minister [any minister] to seriously consider rural placements, or by the initiative of presbytery and the theological hall exploring possible placements for exit students – ministry interns.

"It never occurred to us to have a minister from a non-English speaking background [NESB] – until we had a long vacancy and were offered an exit student from We were pretty desperate by then so we said 'yes'. Now we are learning a lot together and hope the family will stay a while."

"In our conversations with him we were very impressed with the minister and his gifts. But we had strong reservations – he seems too spiritual for us, his emphasis on prayer and personal relationship with God in Jesus, for example."

Such reservations rarely last long once commitment is made and relationships built.

This is also often the case with field placements for NESB theological students. In several recent occurrences it was time spent in field placements with small rural congregations and in regional rural centres that provided the opportunity for actual ministry experience. More importantly, it exposed them to actual ministry contexts and has given them encouragement to think more seriously about possible options in the future and a willingness to consider a calling to serve in a rural setting when they are to leave the theological hall.

One student recently spoke to me about his summer placement in a remote community in rural Victoria. He was well supported by the neighbouring minister who was sensitive to the

possible difficulties and cultural differences that might arise, but also open to what positive things might come out of those differences. After his placement, he spoke with energy, warmth and affection about the welcome he received, the nature and strength of his support and supervision, and the real opportunities and exciting ministry that can be exercised together in rural settings.

"It was a valuable time in which I learnt lots and grew significantly. It was different from my expectations. I did not feel so different as I imagined I would. Their welcome and care and the care of my supervisor made enormous difference!"

Ministry for NESB ministers outside metropolitan areas is often a two-edged sword. Rural ministry is sometimes characterised as being quite appropriate for overseas born ministers, especially Pacific Islanders, however is also recognised that there are some special challenges. Maintaining cultural and language links in isolated rural settings can be difficult. Sometimes locals express this recognition sympathetically: *"We worry about their disconnection from their own culture and language, so we encourage them to connect regularly with their own cultural and language background community."*

At other times the recognition of the importance of language and cultural links becomes a factor influencing rural congregations not to consider a minister from a NESB or to expect them not to stay for long:

"We don't consider them because they would want to be their own people and their own culture and language."

"We worry about their disconnection from their culture and language; we don't expect them to stay here any longer than they have to."

Most of the ministers and their families recognise this need and take steps to maintain important cultural links, especially for the sake of their children. Making the time to travel, often very long distances, to connect with cultural programs and events, can be an additional cause of stress and even guilt. Support and understanding from a supervisor, presbytery minister and members of the congregation are vital ingredients in enabling this nurturing and spiritually necessary step. This connection provides far more than simply familiar language and cultural activities. There is also nurture of the spirit through connecting with what many NESB ministers refer to as 'heart language' – the language of memory and spiritual journey which are not readily accessible for many years through English alone. This nourishment then flows on into and enriches and sustains the current English language ministry in places as far apart as Hobart and Corryong, Robinvale and Coleraine, Warracknabeal and Monash and so on.

Superficial understandings reflected for example in the statement: *"We love their family, their singing and dancing and the foods they bring to our progressive dinners"* give way to a deeper appreciation and acknowledgement of the minister and their family's contribution to the local faith community and the district.

Members of the Synod Cross-cultural Mission and Ministry Committee have discussed issues relating to the difficulty some NESB ministers are facing in being placed. It reflects ongoing debate about how the Uniting Church can be open to receive the gifts of people from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Hopefully it will become more common within the Uniting Church to recognise the possibility that cultural difference and a world-view other than European/Western might be particular gifts that enrich the life of our church. Discovering and using the gifts that come in and through the cultural background of the ministers and migrants, and using them appropriately in growing the rural faith communities of Christ into the 21st century, remains a challenge and a gift of grace.

Ministry in rural Victoria is being enriched, challenged and renewed through the gifts of ministers from non English-speaking backgrounds. As more and more migrants find their way into rural and regional communities, those ministries become more and more cross and even multi-cultural.

7. Many Cultures – One Community: Exploring Ways of Being Church in a Disadvantaged Multicultural Community by Anne McPherson – Community Minister and Team Leader serving at Bidwill, in Western Sydney

Bidwill Uniting Church Community Centre proudly displays on the church sign "*Many Cultures – One Community*" which expresses both a reality and our aspiration, but let me first give you some of the history of this Centre.

Bidwill/Mt Druitt demographics

Bidwill is one of 11 suburbs that make up Mt Druitt in Western Sydney. The development of Mt Druitt began in the 1950's with large residential land releases. From 1966 the NSW Housing Commission (now Department of Housing) developed several large public housing estates in Mt Druitt. At the 2001 census there was a population of 51,909 in Mt Druitt. Over 28% of the population was born overseas, and 89% speak a language other than English. More than 5% of the population is Indigenous. In Bidwill, Indigenous people represent 9% of the population.

Several Mt Druitt suburbs have been identified as disadvantaged, citing such factors as low incomes, high unemployment, low education and skills levels, and significant numbers of single parent families.

The early years of ministry

In 1975 a non-denominational Sunday School was started in Bidwill. Worship services began in 1976 in the school weather shed. In 1979 a modified cottage was built on the church site providing a church meeting room, crèche and counselling rooms. A couple who had trained as missionaries began the first local ministry. The congregation grew rapidly to an average attendance of 90, with many activities for all age groups. Those participating at this stage were primarily of Anglo and European backgrounds.

The church was built in 1984, with assistance from the NSW Synod and the St Marys Parish of which Bidwill was a part. With a change of ministers there was a time of instability but the congregation stabilized with about 30 members and rejoiced at its growing multicultural nature. A Tongan and a Samoan congregation were formed at Bidwill with links to Uniting Church congregations outside the local area. Other community groups also used the building.

In 1989 a Community Support Service was established, a significant ecumenical ministry venture, offering community development and family support. In 1998, Burnside took over the service known as NEWPIN and developed a specialized program working with children at risk and their parents.

Bidwill Square went through a difficult time with neglect of buildings, ongoing vandalism and closure of many of the shops. After several ministry changes and the gradual withdrawal of outside financial support, the English-speaking congregation dwindled and was closed in 1995.

The present

A new ministry team was developed in 2003 as a partnership between the Uniting and Catholic churches, and working co-operatively with the Mt Druitt Indigenous Church.

The work of the team includes pastoral care and community development, with a focus on cross-cultural children's and youth work and the development of resident action groups. The property and ministry are managed by Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery.

Currently there are five groups using the church at Bidwill for worship, including two Tongan groups, a Samoan congregation linked to the Samoan Parish and a Cook Island congregation which has developed a close link with the Uniting Church over recent years and has a very energetic woman pastor.

Moving forward together

At first there was little contact between the different worshipping congregations, or with the ministry team. We are in a rather unusual situation as there is no long-established English-speaking congregation managing or 'in control'. The Cook Island and Tongan congregations both now host a service in English once a month, with some Anglo and some Indigenous participation.

This is an exciting development, and provides the opportunity for young Australian born Pacific Islanders to connect their faith not just to the cultural traditions of their parents (which is important) but also to the language and community in which they live and work. It also means shows that the Pacific congregations are discerning their mission to the wider community. It means that English speaking people are able to participate in worship.

In spite of negative images of Mt Druitt in the media, there are great strengths in the community and a strong resolve to be part of the solution to local problems. Mt Druitt is rich in its diversity of cultures and this is regularly celebrated at local festivals, schools and community events. We have also experienced racial tensions between young men, some turning to violence and we are aware as well, of tensions between people of different faiths. It is not easy because each group at Bidwill comes with its own identity and convictions as well as its own hesitations and we have to build relationships of trust amongst ourselves.

This will take some time, but we feel we are beginning to see ourselves as one community through our connections with the many aspects of worship, witness and service based at Bidwill Uniting Church Community Centre. We are making some tentative steps in cross-cultural ministry and what forms of worship might look like in this multicultural community.

It is in this environment that we are exploring together how we can witness and live Kingdom of God values, and how we can make a contribution to the wider community, like yeast in the dough.

13. One Congregation's Journey in Ministry Alongside Sudanese Refugees by Revd Elizabeth Vreugdenhil – minister at Maughan Uniting Church, Adelaide

It is Good Friday at Maughan Church. Imagine a rough wooden cross processed down the aisle carried by Chinese, Sudanese and Anglo-Australians. A Dinka choir, clothed in traditional African dress, chants in their native tongue. A drum beats time. Bible passages are read and prayers are spoken in a succession of four different languages. Together we prepare for the crucifixion of Jesus. Three times a year, the three congregations of our church – Dinka, Chinese and Maughan Uniting Church – join as one for a multicultural, multilingual service.

How it all began...

Six years ago, a small group of Sudanese people from the Dinka tribe approached Maughan Church asking if they could worship in our building. Since then, their numbers have swelled to over 300, involving worship services, Saturday prayer meetings, and a holiday school for children. A Chinese congregation of approximately 250 people began worshipping with us in 2002.

Many displaced people are trapped in refugee camps for want of an airfare to Australia. In 2003, the Sudanese approached the Maughan congregation for help. \$10,000 was raised and a loan fund established. It is a revolving fund and the loans are interest free. The fund itself is managed by a Maughan church committee and the Sudanese members decide, through their committee, who is to receive the loans.

When a person arrives in Australia, they are given time to settle in and then a repayment plan is devised. They are given a set of dated envelopes and they come to the church office each fortnight with their repayments. If they fall behind, they are contacted and the loan

schedule can be renegotiated if necessary. In approximately two and a half years, 85 people have had loans from this fund. There have been no bad debts. The success of the fund has been due to the careful supervision of the debt repayment process and close involvement of the Sudanese committee.

The Sudanese Support Group

If you have lived in a refugee camp for up to fourteen years, coming to Australia is incredibly bewildering. Airports, buses, bus tickets, tenancy agreements, paying rent, drivers' licenses, Centrelink, school uniforms, laws. All these things are foreign. When the first Sudanese to benefit from the loan fund arrived in 2004, it immediately became apparent more than financial help was needed. Very soon, however, the amount of help needed began to overwhelm the church people. We established the Sudanese Support Group.

The reference committee comprises both men and women from the Sudanese congregation and Maughan Church. Our Sudanese friends have helped us set priorities. They understand the best way to relate to their people. There is dignity in this approach as decisions are taken together. We established terms of reference with clearly defined aims and objectives. We needed to focus on what was possible to achieve with our limited resources of time, energy and money. Our chief gift to the Sudanese people is our knowledge of how to live in Australian society. We have sought to be guides and gatekeepers into our way of life rather than giving handouts which create dependency. For example, teaching someone how to use the timetables for public transport is of more long term use to them, than regularly providing them with lifts.

Until the Government took over this function in October 2005, we provided a "meet and greet" service for people upon arrival at the airport. Temporary accommodation was available if necessary, at a Uniting Church conference centre. We have accompanied them when they look for rental accommodation (real estate agents are more willing to let to a large immigrant family if there is an Australian contact person). We have taught people how to cope with modern kitchens with electrical appliances. We have accompanied people to a variety of appointments, including doctors, Centrelink, and schools.

As our work with the Sudanese has developed, Maughan Church has been approached by other churches wanting help with Sudanese who have joined their congregation. We commissioned two social work students from Flinders University to develop a resource for churches and others to use when helping new arrivals settle into our society. The students worked with the Sudanese people and in the process they developed a CD which comprises a section on Dinka culture and a summary of government and non-government community agencies. There is also a pamphlet for Sudanese who have just arrived in Adelaide with helpful information regarding our way of life.

Refugees are in great need, a humiliating and powerless position for them to be in. Some are the epitome of graciousness, but others, in their pain and distress, may resent their helpers and/or take them for granted. Learning about the horrific suffering of people in the Sudan and the refugee camps can cause vicarious trauma. In order to avoid burnout, we give one another emotional and prayer support. We have also learnt how to set limits. We can help meet some needs, but not all.

In 2005, we obtained a Living in Harmony grant from the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs to employ a project officer to run six events to promote racial harmony between Sudanese people and the wider Adelaide community. Part of the difficulty in getting used to Australia society is not having any Australians to call on for advice and explanations. The *Aussiemates Project* involves matching Australian families with Sudanese families. Friendships are offered and mentoring relationships developed so that good role models are provided for living in our society. Often refugees are housed in areas where there is a high rate of juvenile delinquency and drug addiction. Young people especially need to be provided with an alternative to this way of life. We have joyfully participated in sharing our food, our ways of relating as family and friends, and a Harmony Day picnic. At the time of writing we

are looking forward to learning more about our attitudes to the law, our differing styles of humour, and our ceremonies and rituals.

Working with refugees is wonderfully stimulating and rewarding, yet it can also be a difficult and painful journey at times. Helping others is both joyful and painful but we continue because of our faith. We believe our community of faith is called by God to serve in this way.

15. A Multicultural Feast of Language and Love by Susan Turner – Family and Children's Worker, Adamstown UCA, Newcastle

Until recently Adamstown would never have considered itself a multicultural church. In fact, it has been predominantly Anglo-Saxon for many years. But in the last three years this has changed. Cultural diversity has become a reality and cross-cultural issues now need to be addressed. It began when three Sudanese families started attending on a regular basis and several people from other cultures also became part of the congregation.

The language barrier has been the most difficult obstacle to overcome. We realised that our traditional services relied very much on the written word. Our hymns, prayers, liturgy and Bible readings all depended on literary cognizance. Without this ability, even the printed Newsletter was irrelevant. We decided that we would attempt a service using an Interpreter so that everything was translated into Dinka, Arabic and English as a way of helping people to understand what was happening and feel included in the service. We have begun discovering new ways to worship that do not rely so heavily on the written word. Let me tell you about Palm Sunday celebration this year.

Someone had the idea that our Palm Sunday could be a Modular Service with an African theme. The story chosen for the occasion was from a wonderful book called *Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andredde and Guy Parker-Rees (Orchard Books, 1988). African animals were the order of the day and we managed to borrow several wonderful African animal outfits for the children to wear. A greeting began the service but it was all spoken in the Dinka dialect and then translated into English. I think everyone began to appreciate the difficulty of not always being able to follow what is happening! Side drums and Conga drums opened the service to the well known song, "Now is the Time to Worship" with young people leading. The story was told in English and Dinka with the pictures projected through a data projector. The story became the sermon. Our Bible reading was read from the Arabic, translated into Dinka and then into English. Our congregation then divided into four groups: one was a more meditative group using prayer circles and music; another used a scrap booking and music, pasting in African animals and an Arabic translation of God Bless You; the Youth had a more active session and another group stayed in the church with discussion questions. After twenty minutes everyone congregated at the front of the church and marched together into the church again to the South African Song "We Are Marching".

When everyone was assembled, the young children performed two items using their animal costumes and animal puppets. The prayer circles were placed on a large canvas alongside an African display. One of the Sudanese mums led us in a Sudanese Song and we finished with a giant morning tea. What a celebration it was and how we all enjoyed ourselves so much! It was a joy to see our Sudanese brothers and sisters understanding the service in their own language and having pride in their amazing culture. That evening we featured our wonderful multicultural singing group called *Solid Gospel*. This group of twelve young people includes young people from different backgrounds including Samoan, Tongan, Filipino and Australian born kids. We incorporated the music with the prayer circles and displays from the morning service and a time of sharing. The group sang in various languages and it became a multicultural feast of language and love.

What a rich diversity of peoples God has brought to us at Adamstown! We are very fortunate to have a wealth of talent and people with a willingness to be servants of God. Our church continues to explore and experiment with creative ways of worship in an endeavour to help

people worship God together whilst also acknowledging people's different spiritual paths. It takes a lot of energy, enthusiasm and a willingness to use our Spiritual gifts as a team to allow the Spirit of God to move us where He wants us to go. We need to continue to be willing to think "outside of the square" in order to reach people with the love and grace of God. We pray that every congregation, large or small, can be involved in creative worship that breaks down the barriers of culture and language and binds us together in love.

19. Stumbling into Multicultural Ministry - Intentionally Seeking Cross-cultural Ministry by Revd Jill Lienert – minister at St. Thomas' Uniting Church, Craigieburn, Melbourne

Four years ago as I began my ministry at St. Thomas' Uniting Church in Craigieburn, I looked out on my congregation to be met by a sea of Anglo-Saxon faces and one family of five who had recently arrived from Sri Lanka. Craigieburn is located on the northern edge of Melbourne suburbia. Over recent years Craigieburn has experienced rapid growth in its population as three major property developers have established large housing estates on every side of what was once a small country town.

Two years ago, as our church council looked carefully at how it could manage the many challenges and changes associated with being a growing congregation in a rapidly growing community, we met with the Regional Development Worker of the Presbytery of Maribrynong Valley, Revd Barbara Spencer. We outlined to her the many changes we had experienced which included embracing many families from different cultures and hence different experiences of church and different expectations of the Church. Barbara was delighted that we had become a multicultural congregation and she asked us how we did this. We all looked at each other blankly and asked "*Isn't every congregation multicultural?*" To our amazement the answer was "*No*". We had simply thought that a congregation would naturally reflect the diversity of its community.

This conversation marked a change in our approach. We had been made aware that we had embraced through genuine love and care a whole new way of being church, but we had also been made aware that whilst we had in many ways 'stumbled' into this, to embrace being a multicultural church would require some intentional ways of being. The last two years have been intentional. We now prefer to call ourselves a cross-cultural congregation which, for us, says more about us learning from one another and embracing one another's culture and experiences respectfully. Individuals and families who worship together at Craigieburn originate from many countries; these include: Australia, England, Wales, Scotland, Tonga, Fiji, India, Sri Lanka, Germany, Iraq, Ukraine, Samoa, Cook Islands, Philippines, and Malaysia. Some of our people have worshipped for most of their lives in denominations that have not accepted women ministers. For others it is something new to have lay leadership and see the ministry of all believers. Some bring different symbols and expressions of worship that are meaningful to them.

By the middle of 2005, there was no longer a dominant culture in our congregation. Much effort has been made to ensure that people of different backgrounds use their gifts for ministry in a diversity of areas of congregational life including music, gardening, lay preaching, fellowship groups, pastoral care and committees including church council. Endless effort is made by everyone to learn new names (no matter how difficult they may be to pronounce) and there is abundant grace from all people as we make accidental cultural errors. All members of the congregation are tireless in being prepared to learn and be open to different ways of doing things that reflect people's different experiences of being church, for example: learning to 'Pass the Peace' the way it is practiced in the Assyrian Orthodox Church!

In 2005, our church council developed a strategic plan with the congregation. It determined that it was not necessary to make a big deal of being cross-cultural, just as we would not

make a big deal of youth, children, adults, women or men. With a rich diversity of ages, cultures, gender and theologies, we call ourselves the Body of Christ in this community. We come together faithfully to worship God, to love one another and to undertake God's work in the world. We praise the Lord for the many blessings God has bestowed upon us and pray for the wisdom to deal with the many challenges such diversity poses.