A Cross Cultural Bible Study Program

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1. FAMILY

Story
One special Sunday morning, two congregations came together to celebrate their diversity. A Chinese congregation and an Anglo congregation organised a speaker using an interpreter, and prepared some hymns they could sing together. And name tags, yes, they were also important to allow people to get to know one another personally.

After a most interesting service on the Sunday, people from the two congregations became engaged in conversation over a cup of tea.

Ann: (Approaching a Chinese man and asking)
Your name is...?
Lin: (Lin answers while Ann looks at his name tag)
I am Mr. Lin.
Ann: Mr. Lin. Do you have a first name? It’s always easy to remember a first name.
Lin: Yes, my first name is Da Fu. But I prefer to be called by my family name.
Ann: That’s all right Mr. Lin. It’s just confusing that some of you want to be called by your first name, some of you prefer the family name, and your children even use English names.
Lin: Yes, you are right, Ann. It confuses you, does it? By the way, do you know why I want to be called by my family name?
Ann: No. Why? (Mr. Lin pauses briefly to think how to explain the importance of his family name.)

Sharing Experiences
Share with your group a similar story from your experience.

Bible Reflection (GENESIS 45:1-15)
Among the many stories in the Bible, readers love particular stories which touch them personally. However, even with the same story, those who have grown up in a Western culture and those who have grown up in an Eastern culture may have different understandings and emphases.

Joseph’s story is one example. From Genesis Chapter 37 to the end of the book, the story of Joseph has many turnings and sub-stories. Reading stories of Joseph, a person from a Western culture may feel moved by the individual Joseph who is honest, able and faithful to God. As a boy, Joseph was taken from his home, survived in harsh environments and succeeded as a prominent political leader.

However, those who are from Asia and the Pacific region feel particularly touched when they read of the relationship of Joseph with his family. The love of Jacob, the envy among the brothers, separation from the family, the forgiveness and tears of Joseph, and the dramatic reunion with Jacob; all these family stories make the reader cry inside. Many Asian people can relate the story to their own life.

When Jacob hears that his beloved son is still alive, he says, “This is all I could ask for! I must go and see him before I die” (Genesis 45:28). All the life-long bitterness and animosity in his heart is breaking down as the family relationship recovers.

Individuals are often sacrificed to honour the family in Asian culture, while personal freedom and decision are more respected in Western society. For some cultures, it is important to know the family name while in others, the given name is more commonly used.

Discussion
1. Discuss the biblical ideas of the community and the individual.
2. Discuss the differences between ‘me culture’ (individual) and ‘we culture’ (family or tribe).
3. What kind of misunderstandings and conflicts are possible in a multicultural society regarding ‘individual versus community’?
2. PROBLEM SOLVING

Story
In the church kitchen, two groups of people were washing dishes. After a joint worship and a shared lunch, each group of volunteers gave a hand to clean up. Korean women washed the dishes with detergent, and then rinsed with clean water. Anglo women and men took them to dry with tea towels and then piled them in the cupboard. They seemed to enjoy working together as they talked with one another.

However, a few days later a problem appeared. Some of the women from an Anglo background complained that the Koreans were wasting water, because they kept the water running while they washed and rinsed the dishes. For those who always tried to save money, or with an environmental interest, that caused concern.

When this concern was heard by the Korean women, the Koreans raised another issue. “Those Australian people do not rinse the dishes with clean water after washing them with detergent. It is not hygienic.” For the Koreans, the Anglo people were not washing the dishes clean enough. Both groups of people continued to raise concerns from their own standpoints.

After a while, an Anglo woman wanted to hold a meeting with the Korean women to talk the issue out, whereas the Korean women asked their pastor to explain to the Anglo people. The Koreans did not want to embarrass the Anglo women or to be embarrassed by them with direct contact. However, the Anglo women could not understand why the Koreans always put their minister in between.

Sharing Experiences
Share with your group a similar story from your experience.

Bible Reflection (GENESIS 13:5-9)
A problem arose between Abraham and Lot. After they had been to Egypt, their possessions became so great that they were not able to stay together. Between the uncle’s herdsmen and the nephew’s herdsmen quarrelling arose, which needed to be solved somehow.

There is no record in the Bible of Lot’s suggestion about the problem. But Abraham said, “If you go to the right, I’ll go to the left; I’ll go to the right, if you go to the left”. Giving priority to Lot, Abraham took one step back. Is it goodwill Abraham wanted, or did he want to avoid bringing shame to the family name?

There have been different ways of problem solving in each culture and even among individuals. In general, however, Anglo people solve an issue through an eye to eye discussion. Through a series of meetings, recording minutes, and majority vote, they then execute the motion. Asians, on the other hand, have developed ‘under the table’ or indirect communication. With proverbs, stories and informal dining together, they try to convince others, or at least try to reach a common point. When there is an extremely sensitive or difficult problem, a third person who has their absolute trust will be asked to mediate.

Especially if the issue is related to the family or within a group, they try to solve the problem without it being known outside. Family name and losing face are taken seriously. For Christians, the principle of problem solving is love. To listen to the other and ‘stand under’ them may lead to not only an understanding but also accepting one another. What made us good and righteous in the first place? The Apostle Paul asks us to remember the cross of Jesus Christ. It is through his love that we are together in all our diversity. And we know that Abraham’s generosity to Lot eventually turned out to be a blessing to himself and to his family.

Discussion
1. What ways of cross-cultural problem solving are there in the Bible, especially in Acts 15?
2. Discuss the pros and cons of different problem solving methods in our culture.
3. If you were called as a mediator, how would you solve the problem between Anglo and Korean groups in the previous story?
3. MULTICULTURAL PARISH

Story
After many meetings and long discussions, an Anglo parish and a Tamil parish finally decided to amalgamate. From a ‘Landlord and Tenant’ relationship, the two parishes became partners in God’s mission. The Anglo parish had always envied the number of vibrant young people in the Tamil parish, and the Tamil parish had always envied the church buildings belonging to the Anglo parish.

They have decided to share their resources and blessings with each other. Furthermore, both parishes had a common call to reach out to the community where they were.

However, there was still a question to be solved. Was it going to be ‘one parish, two congregations’ or ‘one parish, one worship’? ‘One parish, two congregations’ would mean two different worship groups, i.e. English and Tamil, whereas ‘one parish, one worship’ would mean one Sunday worship service where the two groups would participate together. Some members of the Anglo parish argued strongly to adopt the model of ‘one parish, one worship’, otherwise what was the point of trying to become one parish?

This question was fundamental to answering the larger question, ‘What is a multicultural church? Is there a model for it?’

After a number of meetings, they both agreed on three points:
1. Sunday schools will be jointly run.
2. There will be two different worship services on Sunday mornings, there will be fellowship together after worship.
3. They aim to have one joint worship and one church council in five years time.

Sharing Experiences
Share with your group a similar story from your experience.

Bible Reflection (DANIEL 1:8-17)
Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was keen on implementing an assimilation policy. He chose some of the young Israelites from the royal family and nobility to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians, to feed them with royal food and wine, and even to change their names. Furthermore, there was even a conspiracy to change their religion as they were forced to worship an image of gold on the plain of Dura.

Before the religious assimilation attempt, the cultural assimilation was carried out through language and food. Daniel and his three friends, however, rejected eating and drinking the royal food and wine. They wanted nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink for ten days and then to compare their appearance with other men who had the royal food and wine. Verse 15 tells us the result: “At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.”

The reason Daniel rejected the royal food was that Israelites considered food from the king’s table to be contaminated as it was offered to idols. Furthermore, they would not want to be assimilated into the cultural imperialism of Babylon.

Some Anglo Australians still expect migrant people to assimilate into the dominant culture in society, and commend those who do so. Some new Australians from overseas also downplay their own culture and tradition in order to be part of a dominant culture and of a new church. Although not all cultural adjustments are considered bad, cultural assimilation is portrayed as not always conforming to the purpose of God. God intended to use Daniel and his friends, with their distinctive culture, for God’s purpose in the culture they joined.

Discussion
Do we ask Christians from other countries to compromise their faith through adaptation to a materialistic Australian lifestyle?
Discuss pros and cons of multiculturalism in Australia.
Identify some models of multicultural congregations in the Church.
4. PROPERTY

Story
John, a Samoan minister, drops in at the church one afternoon. Although his Samoan congregation uses the church building on Sundays, his members seldom visit the building during weekdays.

After John prays in a pew, he notices that a couple of Anglo members of the church are doing some cleaning. With a rag, an elderly man known as Steve is dusting the pews.

“Hi, Steve. What are you doing here?” asks John.
“Hello, John. How are you? I am dusting the pews”, answers Steve.
“I know you are cleaning. But why are you doing this? Haven’t you employed a part time worker who does the cleaning once a week?” John asks again.
“Oh, yes. But that doesn’t stop me doing this. I have been doing this for the last 30 years. Every Tuesday morning you will find me here”, Steve smiles.
John’s face blushes, thinking that his Samoan congregation has not done much cleaning until now, and he offers, “I will ask my Samoan members to join you from next week”.
However, John is surprised by Steve’s response.
“No way, John. I would not give this privilege of cleaning the Lord’s house to your people.”

Sharing Experiences
Share with your group a similar story from your experience.

Bible Reflection (MATTHEW 28:18-20)
Church buildings exist to facilitate four tasks: worship, mission, education and fellowship. Before Jesus ascended, according to Matthew, Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything he had commanded. All Christians are called to be disciples of Jesus and are to carry out the gospel imperative. As the early church fulfilled the tasks of worship, mission, education and fellowship, all the Christian churches in history have existed to fulfill these same tasks.

Presbytery and Synod exist also for the same work, assisting and helping God’s mission in each parish. The Presbytery provides pastoral and administrative oversight for the mission of the local congregations while the Synod provides support, resources and encouragement. All church property should be used to worship God and bear faithful witness to the gospel in the local community.

Therefore, if a parish cannot fulfill its tasks any more, or if it has lost a conscious mission strategy, the parish should be disbanded (remember what Jesus said to his disciples about the Jerusalem Temple in Matthew 24:1-2) or combined with another parish. The property should be transferred to another group for the best interests of God’s mission.

It is heart warming to hear the story of Steve who has loved and cared for the church building for 30 years. Many members in Anglo parishes have special historical relationships to a particular church property through many generations. However, that relationship alone is not sufficient reason for the continuing possession of the building. A church building should not be a museum or a memorial hall. It should be a centre for active worship, mission, education and fellowship. If the church is to be truly a fellowship of pilgrim people responding to God’s call to mission, worship and service, our only right to ownership of property is surely where it is a creative facility furthering that purpose.

Discussion
1. What insight does the biblical passage offer on the use of building and property?
2. Discuss other biblical stories that relate to the use of building and property.
3. How could we maximise the use of church buildings for the best interests of God’s mission?
5. RACIAL PREJUDICE

Story
Noel, a Filipino minister, comes into the church hall. It is Tuesday morning and he is dropping into the hall to pick up a book he left there the previous Sunday. As he steps into the hall, a notice board is the first thing he sees. ‘There are no photos on the board’, he realises. On Sunday, his young members had put family photos on a large sheet of paper and put it on the notice board. ‘Where are they?’ Noel asks himself as he looks around the hall. Soon he finds them next to a rubbish bin. Noel wonders who would have done this.

It has been a year now that the Filipino congregation has been using the building which belongs to an Anglo parish. Although most of the Anglo members in the parish have treated them well, some of them are always complaining about something that the Filipino congregation does.

Once a Filipino put an advertisement on the notice board, but he was told that the board was not for the Filipino congregation. At that time, Noel met Robert, a parish minister and asked, “Is this South Africa? Why do we have to have a separate notice board?” Robert was very sorry for that but things have still not improved. ‘Somebody from the Anglo parish must’ve thrown our photos away.’ Noel becomes quite upset and goes to Robert again. However, Robert is not convinced that any of his parish members would do such a thing. Robert asks around whether anyone had taken the photos down. But no one comes forward.

“It might be the wind, Noel. When the wind comes into the hall through the door, sometimes it blows the papers off the board”, says Robert. “That’s a good solution, Robert. The wind is to be blamed. Even the wind in Australia knows all the people in the photos are black-haired”, says Noel. Robert and Noel both laugh uneasily.

Sharing Experiences
Share with your group a similar story from your experience.

Bible Reflection (LUKE 4: 16-30)
Every group of people have their own home town. Migrants in particular have their motherland to which they want to return or at least visit sometime. They bear hardship in foreign lands, dreaming that some day they will visit their home town with their hard won success.

Jesus was coming home. People in Nazareth were waiting anxiously to welcome this son of the town. They had heard from outsiders that Jesus had become a good teacher, ‘who was praised by everyone’ (4:15). When Jesus arrived, he read Isaiah 61:1-2 in the synagogue on the Sabbath. The people in town responded with a ‘gentle stir of admiration’. As a son of the town, Jesus did not disappoint the people.

However, this scene of respect changes to anger and results in murderous behaviour by the people. What has happened? What has Jesus said that makes his people so outraged? It is two stories from the Old Testament that Jesus has mentioned. The first story is from 1 Kings 17:1-6, about a gentile widow, and the other story is that of Naaman from 2 Kings 5:1-19. Apparently Jesus was paying a compliment to gentiles.

At this point, the people have become angry. They cannot accept these stories of blessed gentiles. In their faith and prayer, there is no space for other traditions, races or religions. They believe that “God created the gentiles to be fuel for the fires of hell”. The new message of Jesus is nonsense and outrageous. It is heretical. It is something that has to be pushed off the cliff.

Is this Jesus still too uncomfortable, too controversial and too upsetting to be our Lord? Wouldn’t we have rejected God, if we had known in the first place that God is so inclusive and universal?

Discussion
1. Why in your view did Jesus choose those stories from the Old Testament?
2. Identify subtle forms of racism in the church, if any.
3. How can we consciously overcome our racially biased behaviours?
6. COMMUNICATION

Story
There was a small Anglo congregation with a long church history. Since the congregation had no settled Minister of the Word at this time, guest preachers took turns to lead Sunday services.

One Sunday morning, members of the congregation found that an “Asian preacher” (it was an actually a Korean Pastor) was delivering the sermon. Probably it was the first time they had seen an Asian in their pulpit or heard a sermon preached with a “strange accent”. They also discovered that the Asian minister was going to preach there once every month.

After the service the Korean Pastor, Kim, was sharing fellowship over a cup of tea in the hall. While Kim was talking to one person, he overheard an old lady saying that she could not understand half of his sermon. Kim was very uncomfortable at hearing this comment and he wondered how many of the members had the same trouble. However, as time passed, the relationship of the minister and the members improved, as they got to know each other better over cups of tea.

A few months after Kim’s first sermon, it was his usual turn to preach. After preaching, Kim greeted the members in the front yard. The old lady approached Kim and said, “Now I understand most of your sermon. Your English has improved a lot”. Pastor Kim and the woman laughed with each other as they shook hands.

Sharing Experiences
Share with your group a similar story from your experience.

Bible Reflection (ACTS 15:1-11)
In the Christian community of Jerusalem, there was a group of Pharisees who insisted that before a person could become a true Christian, that person must keep the law of Moses, and the test of such compliance was circumcision. Some of these went to the Christian community in Antioch saying, “unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved” (15:1). This caused a sharp dispute and debate within the community. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

Travelling through Phoenicia and Samaria, they arrived in Jerusalem and gave a report on how the Gentiles had been converted. Then the Pharisee Christians again stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses” (verse 5). It was Peter who got up and addressed the apostles and elders.

Peter made three points: 1) God chose Peter to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles; 2) God accepted Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit; 3) God made no distinction between us and them. A key phrase lies in verse 8, “God, who knows the heart”. People look for a sign from outside, whereas God searches our heart. To listen to the heart is a key to accepting each other as family.

Communication in a multicultural society is the same. Although we communicate with verbal and body language, if we do not listen to the heart of other people, misunderstanding or no understanding is inevitable.

It was not that the Korean pastor’s English had improved dramatically, but it was more the opening of the heart of the old lady. Through fellowship, they both began to listen to each other, which made communication possible.

Discussion
1. “God, who knows the heart”. Discuss.
2. Have you ever changed your mind about culturally different people after you actually talked to them?
3. What means of communication can be used in a multicultural church?
7. DECISION MAKING

Story
There is an urban Presbytery which has a vision of developing a Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry. Through a Korean minister, Park, a partnership with a Presbytery in Korea has been suggested to a Presbytery Standing Committee meeting.

As members of the committee begin to discuss the matter, some of them ask questions. What does it mean to be a partner? What do we do if we have the partnership? How much money will be involved? And so on.

Park answers as best he can and says, “After we set up the partnership, we can find better answers to those questions together with the Presbytery in Korea”. But Walter is not convinced.

Walter: “Without knowing the meaning and content of the Partnership, how could we make a decision? We need more time to study.”

Park: “I don’t think it is a good idea to defer this matter, since the Presbytery in Korea is waiting for our response. If you believe this partnership will help us in developing cross-cultural ministry, we can agree in principle and work out the content later.”

(As the two ideas sharply clash, the meeting becomes tense.)

Park: “It’s like a marriage. How could you plan all the details of family life before the wedding? If you love each other you marry first, and work out the details together as you go along.”

Walter: “That’s why match-makers in your culture do good business. Here, we take a long time before marriage. Nevertheless, we have a high divorce rate!”

(A light laughter sweeps the committee.)

Sharing Experiences
Share with your group a similar story from your experience.

Bible Reflection (ACTS 13:1-3)

In the church at Antioch, the Christian community set Barnabas and Saul (Paul) apart to be sent as missionaries. There were prophets and teachers in the community and their five names are mentioned in verse one.

After the killing of Stephen, the early Christians had scattered as far as Antioch, and as a result of their telling the good news about the Lord Jesus a great number of people there became Christians. As the news of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. Barnabas went via Tarsus to bring Paul to Antioch in order to work together. For a year the Antioch church was taught by these two good teachers.

As the people in the Antioch church were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit asked them to set the two apart. The people in Antioch knew the reason for it. They fasted, prayed and placed their hands on them, and sent them off. This was the beginning of the first missionary trip of Paul.

What we are interested in here is the process of decision making in the Antioch church. There is no record of big meetings and debate on finance, but as the Holy Spirit guided them, they boldly followed.

Think of all the committee meetings we have. Two-hour meetings are common without even a short pause. Fasting and praying have no important role here. Having meetings like this seems unavoidable in a church organised as we are. Through a rational discussion, solving an issue democratically leads to fewer mistakes, but is also less creative. In other cultures, however, a decision is made first on the basis of vision and trust, which may induce more mistakes, but also provides a challenge and a new possibility.

Discussion
1. Compare the decision-making process in Anglo, Asian and Pacific cultures in the light of the biblical passage.
2. What is the real meaning of the majority consensus model we have?
3. ‘Take care’ versus ‘Take risks’; discuss in relation to the ministry of the Jerusalem Christian community and the Antioch Christian community.
8. SECOND GENERATION

Story
A musical drama “David and Goliath” was planned. Since an Anglo parish and an Indonesian parish were using the same church building, youth groups from both parishes agreed to put on the musical drama for the celebration of the coming Pentecost Sunday. They began to choose the cast and crew.

The mother of an Indonesian girl learned that her daughter, Jenny, was going to be involved in the drama. She tried to convince Jenny not to participate. “How could we understand the drama when it will be done in English? And don’t waste your time for a trivial role”, said the mother. But Jenny, who was born in Australia, could not be convinced, and she participated in the rehearsals from the beginning.

At last Pentecost Sunday has come! Jenny insists her mother should come to see the drama, as it will surprise her. Jenny’s mother, however, is not very keen. She thinks that the drama will be boring and she wants to avoid meeting Anglo members. Later, she changes her mind and goes to the theatre. There are more people in the theatre than Jenny’s mother expected. She finds that she is seated next to an Anglo couple, both elders. As the drama unfolds, Jenny’s mother begins to doubt her eyes and ears. Even though the drama is performed in English, a summary in Indonesian is provided. Jenny, her mother’s only hope, is starring as David! She is so proud of her daughter performing so well with all the other members.

When Jenny’s mother watches TV or meets Anglo members, she always feels upset and uncomfortable because of the language problem. But today, she feels her stressed heart is melting away. When the drama finishes, Jenny’s mother offers a handshake to the elders. The only words she can say are “Very good, very good”, but her wet eyes are speaking more than words.

Sharing Experiences
Share with your group a similar story from your experience.

Bible Study (ACTS 9:1-19)
Saul was very dedicated to following the God of the Jews. His God could only be found in the tradition of the Old Testament. This belief drove Saul to arrest and persecute followers of any “false God”. In Acts, Saul is introduced as a violent, active, committed persecutor of the Christian community. The sovereign God whom Jesus proclaimed, who included the Samaritans and the Gentiles, was a false God to Saul. With the permission of the high priest, he determined to exterminate the believers in the “false God” not only from Jerusalem, but also from Damascus.

This violence, however, was suddenly interrupted. The God of the people intervened. “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Saul fell to the ground, then got up from the ground and opened his eyes, but could not see a thing. In fact, he was extremely confused. He could not understand why God had scolded him. Saul believed that he persecuted those Christians just for the glory of this same God. No wonder he did not eat or drink anything for three days. It was not easy for him to give up the God of mono-culture. His conversion was a turning from the God of one race or one culture, to the God of all races or identities.

The change of his name from Saul to Paul symbolised that he was now called to be a bridge between the Jews and the Gentiles. When Jesus was taken to heaven, he said the good news must be preached to all nations (Luke. 24:47). Now in Acts, the names of those nations were mentioned, and Paul was one of the instruments used to carry out that mission.

Conversion or transformation is a process more than a moment. It takes place throughout the life of all Christians. The stories of conversion in the Bible are not only of people moving from being a non-Christian to being a Christian, but also to being a Christian in a wider sense. This means seeing not only the God of my culture, but the God of all people, the God of the universe.

Discussion
1. In the light of the story of Saul who became Paul, what are the necessary qualities for being a bridge builder?
2. What are the struggles of second generation young people in the church today? (Include intergenerational issues.)
3. Discuss what second generation youth contribute to your congregation.
9. RELATIONSHIP WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

Story
The Eucharist was prepared. A loaf of bread and a jar of black tea were put on the table. After a week of meeting in central Australia, this was a final ceremony to conclude the whole week. Some church representatives of Aboriginal people, Anglo people and recent migrant people had got together to find a way to improve their cause. Man, one of the Aboriginal woman, was not very happy from the beginning of the meeting. She felt that the church still had not understood the plight of her people, nor had the church well supported their struggle.

One starry night at a campfire, Junko, a Japanese migrant, had asked the group, “How can I as a most recent Australian participate in the reconciliation process?” The answer from Man was not friendly. “You recent migrant people do not respect our people and land. Your people buy land from the white fellows and live under them. There has been a lot of mistrust toward your people too.” Junko agreed with what Man said. “Yes, you are right. That’s because we learn Australian history from white teachers. We do not have much opportunity to hear from your people directly. Don’t you think you should educate us too?” However, throughout the meeting there was minimal interest expressed in working with recent migrants.

When people gathered at the Eucharist table, many of them were shocked by what Man proclaimed. “We have got together here for a week, visiting and talking. But I feel that we have not moved a step forward. Without reconciliation done, I will not take this Eucharist.” As a number of Aboriginal people joined with Man, the rest of the participants could not proceed with the ceremony. People departed, with the bread and black tea still on the table.

On the way home, Junko thought, “If you want a reconciliation of the past, we may not have a role there, but if you are serious about our present and future, we recent migrants share the same fate”. Junko’s troubled heart was not easily calmed.

Sharing Experiences
Share with your group a similar story from your experience.

Bible Reflection (ACTS 10:24-33)
In Acts 10, a story that is one of the great turning points in the history of the church is introduced. Peter, the representative of the Apostles, and Cornelius, a Roman centurion meet for the first time.

Although we read plenty about Peter in the Gospels, there is just a brief story of how and why Cornelius is called. “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.” It is evidence that the God-fearer Cornelius had been prepared for this moment for a long time. One person had been trained, as the older son at home, and the other younger son had been prepared outside the family circle. And there is the Father of both. Both Peter and Cornelius heard the call from God while they were praying. In fact, Cornelius immediately dispatched messengers to invite Peter, and Peter did not waste time responding to the call. For the work of God’s Kingdom, a Jew and a Gentile come together without reservation.

It would not be easy at all for Aboriginal people, Anglo people and more recent migrants to co-operate with an open mind. Without prayer, it seems impossible. However, it is God who mediates between different peoples, and each people needs to respond to the invitation for the shared future and common goal. As Cornelius wants to listen to the will of God through Peter, each group needs to listen more carefully to each other group about how God works there. This is where reconciliation and mission begin.

“It was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us”, says Cornelius.

Recent migrants to Australia should be able to say “sorry” to Aboriginal people for the past and present, and Aboriginal people should be able to accept other groups who share their future in this land.

Discussion
1. From a stranger to a guest, and then becoming a friend: what does the Bible say about it?
2. How can non-English-speaking churches educate themselves on the history and culture of Aboriginal people?
3. How can recent migrants participate in the covenant and reconciliation process?