SHARE THE VISION
BIBLE STUDIES ABOUT THE VISION OF A MULTICULTURAL CHURCH

(Extract taken from “The Vision of a Multicultural Church” pages 22-38)

INTRODUCTION

There are eight short studies. Each is complete in itself; one or more may be used for a meeting or event. But they all follow the same basic pattern which will become familiar to groups using them for a study series.

Ask people to bring their Bibles with them. It will be good if some are in different languages or different versions.

It will be good if the group brings together people from different cultures, too. We need to listen to each other in Bible study. One way the Holy Spirit teaches us is through the insights of those whose backgrounds are different from our own.

The leader’s important task is to ensure that each person in the group has opportunity to offer their insights, present their questions, and share their prayers. Of course the feeling of freedom and acceptance that makes this possible depends on the whole group. So the brief notes to guide reading and talking are for every member of the group.

These studies arose from The Vision of a Multicultural Church, the theme paper of a National Consultation on Cross-Cultural Ministry in The Uniting Church in Australia. This is well worth reading. It presents a theological perspective on multiculturalism, recounts what has been achieved in the past, and suggests what we should do in the future. At its heart are the eight characteristics of a multicultural church which become the titles of these Bible studies.

The vision of a multicultural church must be more than a consultation’s theme paper, more than a working group’s conclusions. It must be a shared vision; it must be a lived-out vision. So the Committee on Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry asked eight people to introduce these aspects of the vision by helping us explore how they are brought to life by Bible passages.

The Committee is deeply thankful to those who responded to this invitation, whose insights about the multicultural message of the gospel are offered in these studies for all of us to share: Rev. Isobel Bishop, Miss Audrey Cramond, Rev. Wali Fejo, Rev. Kil Bock Hong, Rev. James Latu, Rev. Lalomilo Lima, Rev. Inoke Nabulivou and Rev. Ivan Roberts. May the studies be useful in helping many people in many congregations share the vision.
1. A Common Faith

What are the differences between us, and what beliefs do we share?

Begin with a prayer:

Creator God, in your great love you have made us
not from the same mould, but with common features;
not to be the same, but able to share.
Open our eyes to see your vision for each of us,
and for all of us together as one body in Christ. Amen.

Talk about our differences:

Where were people in this group born? And where did we grow up? Who is youngest, who is eldest? Do we all speak the same language at home? What are our special interests? What do we value most about being Christian?


This is a long reading, but it is an exciting story. These visions changed lives!

A suggestion: Write each of the following section references on a scrap of paper and give them to members of the group who are happy to read aloud. It is all right if some read from a Bible in a language other than English, so long as everyone follows in their own Bible.

10: 1 - 8 10: 9 - 16 10: 17 - 23a
10: 23b - 29 10: 30 - 33 10: 34 - 43
10: 44 - 48 11: 1 - 4 11: 15 - 18

Talk about the Bible passage:

What differences were there between Cornelius and Peter? What made the difference between Peter in 10: 14 and Peter in 11: 17? What were the main points in Peter’s sermon (10: 34 - 43)? Why is the word “even” used in verses 10: 45 and 11: 18?

Teachings for us today:

Ask someone to read each of these, pausing after each one first to give time for others in the group to repeat the statement in their own language or in their own words; and then to give time for us all to think silently about how the statement affects our own lives.

- Jesus is Lord of all. Acts 10: 36
- Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness. Acts 10: 43
- The Holy Spirit takes control of people who believe in Jesus. Acts 10: 44; Ephesians 2: 18
Invite everyone to say other teachings they have found in the passage. Again, allow time for translations, paraphrases and silent thought.

What will we do?

How do the beliefs we share apply in our local church? What practical things can we do to affirm our common faith with Christians from different countries or cultures, in our church and in our communities?

(For a start, we might write a short prayer expressing our thoughts on this subject. Publish it in the church news sheet, or make it into a poster and put it up in a prominent place.)

Close with a prayer.
2. Affirming One Another’s Culture

What is our response to racism?

Begin with a prayer:

Creator God, in your great love you have made us for yourself.  
You delight in the rich variety of human beings,  
and you invite us to share your delight.  
Open our eyes to see your vision for each of us,  
and for all of us together as one body in Christ. Amen.

Talk about our differences:

What aspects of our cultures would we affirm?

(Note that there will be different cultures represented in any group - ethnic backgrounds, church backgrounds, youth culture and adult culture, rural and urban... Look for something good to say about each one that group members identify with.)

Read the Bible passage: Colossians 1: 3 - 22

A ACKNOWLEDGMENT
F FAMILY
F FRIENDSHIP
I INSPIRATION
R RECOGNITION
M MERCY
I IDENTITY
N NURTURING
G GOSPEL

A suggestion from Rev. Wali Fejo: Make a copy for each group member, or a large copy to put on the wall, of the words in the box.

Talk about the Bible passage:

These words are thoughts from Colossians 1: 3 - 22 that give some focus for affirming one another’s culture. Is this an answer to the issue of racism?

Can we add other words or ideas that give genuine affirmation? Do translations of some of these words in other languages add to our understanding of them?

Teachings for us today:

God the Creator made everything for himself. It was good. Through error and deception, separation became a painful experience in all of creation. But when the Creator’s Son came down to us, the Creator’s mercy and care acted to bring back a broken relationship through healing and renewal.
Colossians teaches four ways of affirming others:

- by our Christian grace (towards others) Colossians 3: 12 - 17
- by walking and talking together (relationships) Colossians 2: 6 - 7
- seeing Jesus in others (realisation, revelation) Colossians 1: 27; also John 14: 20; 17: 23; Ephesians 3: 17 - 19
- thankfulness to God for a relationship that deepens every day Psalm 95: 2; Psalm 100: 4; Colossians 4: 2; Revelation 7: 12

A question:

Can you name people who have spent some considerable time with people of other cultures and have learnt from them?

What will we do?

How can we show in the life of our local church that we affirm the cultures of people who are different from the dominant culture of the congregation?

Close with a prayer.
3. Sharing all our Resources

What is the cure for selfishness?

Begin with a prayer:

Generous God, you have given us so much.  
And we know that our Lord Jesus Christ gave up all his riches 
and became poor so that we could become rich.  
Open our eyes to see your vision for each of us, 
and for us all together as one body in Christ. Amen.

Talk about our differences:

The church is a gathering of the people of God who have been saved by Jesus. The church has three great things to do:

1. WORSHIP AND PRAISE God for the great act of salvation;

2. Live with each other as the people of God in koinonia - FELLOWSHIP AND SERVICE;

3. Expand God’s great act of salvation in MISSION.

What resources do we bring to these tasks? What particular resources come from particular people/families/churches/countries?

Read the Bible passages: Genesis 26: 12 - 33; Galatians 6: 1 - 10

Before reading the Genesis passage, note this: The Philistines migrated to the land of Gerar before Isaac, so they thought the land and its resources belonged to them. Ask everyone to listen for what this story teaches about sharing resources. Then have one person read it aloud.

Before reading the Galatians passage, ask everyone to listen for what it teaches about sharing resources.

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Before reading the Galatians passage, ask everyone to listen for what it teaches about sharing resources.
Talk about the Bible passages:

What does the story of Isaac in Gerar teach us about sharing resources? What verses from Galatians 6: 1 - 10 could be guidelines for us now about sharing our resources? Allow time for translations, paraphrases and silent thought.

Teachings for us today:

• Beersheba (Genesis 26: 33) means “Peace Treaty Well”. We need landmarks like this.

• Rev. Kil Bock Hong recalls this Korean proverb: “When ten people share one bowl of rice, there will be rice left over; when one person has one bowl of rice, it is never enough”.

• “Forward Together”, the vision of the UCA, can only happen when we first put into action “Living Together” and “Sharing Together”.

• Ravu Henao, Bishop in the United Church of PNG, wrote in a commentary on Galatians 6: 7 - 10 - “If all our time on earth we have lived lives that are for ourselves alone, we shall be unhappy when we go to heaven; because in heaven we cannot live only for ourselves”.

What will we do?

Are there landmarks of peacemaking or reconciliation or sharing that we know about? How can we set up more, in this country? Are there proverbs from other cultures about sharing? How can we share their wisdom more widely in our Church?

God is the owner of all resources; we are God’s stewards. If we have deceived ourselves, thinking we are the owners, let’s take time to confess this wrongdoing.

How can we change? What resources will “Anglo” churches share with migrant-ethnic churches? What resources will migrant-ethnic churches share with “Anglo” churches?

Close with a prayer.
4. Equal Participation in Decision Making

How can everyone have a voice?

Begin with a prayer:

Risen Lord Jesus, come and walk with us, 
talk with us, open the Scriptures to us, 
warm our hearts with the fire of your love. 
Open our eyes to see your vision for each of us, 
and for all of us together as one body in Christ. Amen.

Talk about our differences:

In churches today, who has the say? Who keeps quiet? Who is left out? (Keep this light and breezy, not more than a minute or two, to introduce the question - we will discuss it at greater length later.)

Read the Bible passage: Acts 6: 1 - 7

A suggestion: Ask people to imagine they are part of the story. While we read it, each of us can ask themselves, Which person/s do I identify with? How do I feel about what is happening?

Read the passage aloud, around the circle. Then discuss those questions.

Talk about the Bible passage:

Different languages in that Jewish-Christian congregation may point to a difference of attitude. Greek-speaking Jews were adopting or exploring a new global culture, while Hebrew/Aramaic speakers were traditionalists in language and practice.

Ask the whole group to imagine they are part of the new committee. Now, have the first meeting, to decide what is the best way forward. For example, Where do the funds come from? Can we get more? Should each group raise its own funds? Should everyone raise funds for both groups of widows? Who decides where the money goes? What factors need to be taken into account?

Teachings for us today:

Our discussion is about decision-making in the church. Our aim is equal participation. Rev. Isobel Bishop reminds us that this should apply to our discussion too! Are our quiet friends able to speak out? Are our talkative friends able to hold themselves just a little bit in check?

We shall discover some Bible teachings for us today when we try to answer these questions:

- In our church, what groups are neglected, overlooked or left out? Why are they left out? What do they say about themselves? Do these people talk and act the same when on their own as when they are with others? Who are the other groups in the church? Are they dominant? hostile? indifferent? What do they say about the neglected groups?

- What does it feel like to be a member of a neglected group? Of a dominant group?
How would our action to deal with a group complaint in our church be modelled on the Acts story? How would it be different, these days?

What words of encouragement, or of warning, would we give to people who may in future find themselves in a church where some people are neglected?

Close with a reading, a comment and a prayer:

Ask someone to read Acts 6: 7 again.

And read this comment:

In this story, they heard the complaint and God helped them respond. They left the problem-solving to the committee of seven. The mood changed to openess, trust and happiness. The power was shared and the church was strong. May it be so among us too.
5. Inclusive

Who are still strangers here?

Begin with a prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, honoured above all,
at your name everyone will bow down.
So help us to honour you in our relationships with everyone.
Open our eyes to see your vision for each of us,
and for all of us together as one body in Christ. Amen.

Talk about our differences:

Share some personal experiences: Who remembers times when they felt left out, shut out, unwelcome or just lonely? Share some stories about such experiences.

Read the Bible passages: Luke 9: 49 - 56; Ephesians 2: 14 - 22

Before reading, note these questions and ask everyone to listen for answers to them:

1. How should disciples of Jesus treat strangers?

2. How should disciples of Jesus treat people who refuse to accept their Lord?

3. How did our Lord Jesus Christ bring together people who hated each other?

Talk about the Bible passages:

Share answers to those three questions. What do you think Jesus said to the disciples when he “rebuked them” (RSV, NIV, GNB) or “corrected them” (CEV) in Luke 9: 55? (A footnote in most Bibles tells us the words that are added in some manuscripts, but we may imagine more.)

There was a real wall between Jews and Gentiles when the Letter to the Ephesians was written. Foreigners were forbidden to go beyond the wall that separated the outer part of the Temple in Jerusalem from the inner courts, closer to the presence of God. But we humans have built many walls between one group and another since then. There is a story from a time of war in France, about soldiers who brought the body of a dead comrade to a churchyard to request burial. The priest asked them if their friend had been a baptised Christian; they did not know. The priest said he was sorry, but in that case he could not approve burial in the churchyard. So they buried their friend just outside the fence. Next day they came back to check the grave, and could not find it - until the priest came and told them that during the night he had felt so sad about his decision that he had got up early and moved the fence to include the grave of the soldier who had died for France.

What walls or fences, and what rules or customs, do we have that exclude people? How can they be broken down or moved? Are there stories of walls broken down in our cultures?

Teachings for us today:

- Never shut out anyone whom Jesus would invite in.
• “As God accepts us in all our differences through Christ, so we are to accept one another, without first requiring everyone else to become like us and without us having to become like them.” - Gordon S. Dicker, “A Theological Perspective on Multiculturalism”, 1.3

What will we do?

Think of the congregations we belong to. How well do they welcome people who are different? For example, in ethnic origin; wealth; social class; age; clothing; beliefs; language; education... Can we suggest some ways to be more welcoming?

Sometimes people perceive Christians to be judgmental - they think we exclude them because they don’t do things our way, or we reject them because they reject our Lord. What can we do to correct this impression?

Close with a prayer.
6. Being a Sign of Hope and Reconciliation

Where are hope and reconciliation visible in our lives?

Begin with a prayer:

Holy Spirit of God,
Dove bearing the sign of new life and hope
Breeze bringing the freshness of friendship restored,
Open our eyes to see your vision for each of us,
and for all of us together as one body in Christ. Amen.

Talk about our differences:

Tell each other about the hopes we have for our congregations; what do we hope will flourish? What do we hope will change? What will be different about them, five years from now?

Read the Bible passage: 2 Corinthians 5: 16 - 21

It would be helpful to read these verses in several versions so as to gain wider understanding of the words reconcile, reconciliation (in verses 18, 19, 20) and righteousness (in verse 21). The same words are used in NRSV and NIV. In GNB “reconciled” becomes “changed us from enemies into his friends”. In CEV, it is “to make peace between God and us”, and “righteousness” is “acceptable to God”. Phillips expresses this as “made good with the goodness of God”. In Neo-Melanesian, “reconciled” is “i mekim mipela i kamap wanbel wantaim em”, and “righteousness” is “kamap stretpela man bilong God”.

Talk about the Bible passage:

Invite people to explain how these words are translated in their own languages; explore some of the new insights into their meaning we gain by finding out how other cultures express them.

Teachings for us today:

- The church must show the friendliness of God.
- The church must demonstrate the forgiveness of God.
- The church must be “a community which is a sign of God’s promises for the world”, as one UCA Assembly task group said in its report.

What will we do?

Reconciliation has a special meaning for us in Australia. The special task for our church, and for each of us, is to be signs of reconciliation with the Aboriginal people of Australia. We must find the particular meaning this has for us in our various situations, and the particular ways we can express it.

For Robert Stringer, UCA National Secretary for Social Justice, and 40 other people, it meant standing outside Kirribilli House on 16 April 1998 to protest against the Jabiluka uranium mine, and writing to the Prime Minister to say why. “The Mirrar people, the traditional owners of the Jabiluka land, do not
support the mine”, Mr Stringer said. “As an act of reconciliation we must support them in their total opposition to the mine”.

Sometimes it seems as if there isn't much hope of achieving reconciliation in Australia. But people who stand up for the rights of others are a sign of hope; and people who build friendships across cultural divisions are a sign of hope.

What particular opportunities for acts of reconciliation are to be found in your congregation's region? in your work situations? in your school? in your street? And why should we take such opportunities, even at considerable personal risk or cost? - Because as Christians, our life takes its meaning from the act of reconciliation that cost Jesus his life.

Close with a prayer.
7. Growing in Mission and Evangelism

What is the secret of growth?

Begin with a prayer:

Holy Spirit of God,
wind of change, fire that never goes out,
where you take control there are surprises.
Open our eyes to see your vision for each of us,
and for all of us together as one body in Christ. Amen.

Talk about our differences:

Which congregations of our church are growing? Which are declining? Why is this so?

Read the Bible passage: Acts 2: 38 - 47

A suggestion: Introduce the passage by looking together at its context. Chapter 2 begins with the story of the Day of Pentecost. “The Holy Spirit took control of everyone...” (Acts 2: 4 CEV) - people were surprised, excited and confused. Then Peter preached (Acts 2: 14 - 36) and they were very upset. They asked “What shall we do?” This is the answer to that question! - Read together Acts 2: 38 - 47.

Talk about the Bible passage:

First, read this comment from Rev. Lalomilo Lima:

“Our vision of growth in mission and evangelism in a multicultural church is an ongoing process of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. On the Day of Pentecost, we witness the birth of the church with the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon 120 believers, whose numbers grew with another 3,000 that day.”

“This was the agenda set in motion by the Holy Spirit for the church. The church grew in mission and evangelism very quickly and never looked back. What was the secret of its success? It was a church made up of people whose lives were filled with the Holy Spirit, and whenever the Holy Spirit of God is present so powerfully in his church, it will always be blessed with the same results.”

Invite people to say what strikes them most forcibly in the passage. Sharing may involve quoting, translating or explaining particular words or phrases from different versions. For example, “They were like family to each other” (Acts 2: 42 CEV); and, “Mereka bertekun...” (Acts 2: 42 Indonesian Bible) - they didn’t give up when it got tough.

Teachings for us today:

• Three basic aspects of church life mentioned in verse 42 must be developed in our church.

• Amazement at the wonders worked by the Holy Spirit must be part of our attitude (verse 43).

• “Everyone liked them” (verse 47 CEV). We must try to achieve this too!
What will we do?

Is our congregation/parish growing? Why, or why not? How can we share with the members of our church the secrets of successful mission and effective evangelism that we have discovered in the life of our congregation and in the Bible?

Close with a prayer.
8. Accepting and Preparing for Changes

Why give up our security?

Begin with a prayer:

God our Guide, you are always going before us, leading us to new life, but you never leave us alone without companions on the way, nor ask us to go beyond our God-given capacity.
Open our eyes to see your vision for each of us, and for all of us together as one body in Christ. Amen.

Talk about our differences:

Recall a time when you moved into a new situation or significant change in your life. How did you feel? Was the experience exciting, difficult or painful for you? Did you discover something new about yourself through the experience? Briefly brainstorm changes that have occurred in Australian society over the last few years. Then discuss briefly: How is Australian culture now different from others we know? How do we feel about it?

Read the Bible passage: Mark 4: 35 to 5: 1

A suggestion: Read the passage together and ask everyone what they find of special interest in it. Listen to answers (each of them might lead to a useful study!). Then go on...

Talk about the Bible passage:

Of special interest here is where the event occurred - on Lake Galilee as Jesus and his friends crossed over from familiar Jewish territory on the west bank into the foreign region called the ‘Decapolis’, a group of ten Greek cities on the eastern shore.

“Venturing out into uncharted territory of another culture can involve storms, but can also deepen our understanding of the gospel and ourselves. Rev. Don Carrington, who has developed this theme through a number of studies including some with the Pacific Conference of Churches, writes:

“In Mark’s Gospel, transitions to foreign cultures encounter storms, whereas by contrast it’s smooth sailing on the way home. Pacific Island Christians with whom I shared some of these insights loved the boating imagery and commented: ‘At this point, one can’t be a disciple and not get in the boat with Jesus to make the crossing.’”

Teachings for us today:

Jesus invites his friends to get into the boat with him to “cross over to the other side”.

- Can you think of any times when Christ has invited you, or your church community, to do some “crossing over”, especially in a multicultural context?

- Did you meet any “stormy waters”?

What will we do?
What might Christ’s invitation to “cross over to the other side” mean for you at this time?

What might be the risks for you or for your church community in “crossing over”?

What opportunities may open up for you when you “cross over”?

Close with a prayer:

Loving God, enable us to put aside our love of security, to cross over to the other side with Jesus, and to enter together the new life of the Spirit. Open our eyes to see your vision for each of us, and enable us to live by your vision. So may we become, all of us, whatever our origins, one body in Christ, serving and praising you together for Jesus’ sake. Amen.