

Discussion Paper
on
Cross-Cultural Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia

The Committee on Ethnic Diversity meeting in May 1994 requested a taskgroup to review where the Uniting Church has been in "cross-cultural ministry" in the last decade.

On November 10, 1994 a group convened by Rev. Dr. John P. Brown met in Sydney with Rev. Inoke Nabulivou, Rev. Rex Fisher and Mrs. Seongja Yoo. The following is a summary of the discussion.

1. The Progress We have Achieved

1.1. The Assembly Policy achievements during the period

- * The 1985 Statement of the Assembly that the Uniting Church is a Multicultural Church.
- * The 1991 National Guidelines on Property
- * The 1993 Varied Regulations for the Korean Congregations.
- * The Review of the Reception of ministers from Asia and the Pacific.

1.2. General Achievements

- * Publication of an information booklet, "Handbook for the Newly Arrived" in five community languages.
- * The appointment of a National Ethnic Affairs Officer
- * The formation of the Committee on Ethnic Diversity in 1990.
- * The 1990 National Consultation on Ethnic Diversity.
- * Cross-cultural ministries field workers in Victoria, NSW, Queensland and South Australia.
- * Biennial national conferences for large migrant-ethnic communities.
- * Theological Colleges examining how migrant-ethnic candidates are trained with Victoria establishing a policy.
- * Multicultural education materials with more culturally diverse visuals and content being published by JBCE.
- * Participation of Ethnic representatives in the Assembly and Synods, with some committees having affirmative action policies for migrant-ethnic representation.
- * Provision of resource materials by NME helping the ministry of multicultural parishes.
- * Official worship services using a variety of languages, choirs, etc.
- * Migrant-ethnic congregations accepted as parishes of the UCA and owning their church buildings in the UCA.
- * Translation of five UCA documents including Basis of Union, Constitution into community languages.

2. Issues identified by the Taskgroup as those that appear not to be addressed

a). Understanding and education in the UCA of the changes occurring in our church/society

*Recent statistics show that 40% of the Australian population were born overseas. Our society is rapidly changing in many ways. It is difficult for everybody to adjust to these changes. We all suffer from them, but we are living together, sharing and creating a new culture.

How can we help each other? How can we become able to cope positively with these changes? How can we learn from one another?

b). A need for mission outreach and a different perception of evangelism :

*At present the whole world is represented within Australian society.

*The direction of mission and evangelism must turn as much towards people/church of different cultures living in Australia as towards such people/churches who live overseas.

c). Relationship with migrant-ethnic congregations in Australia from partner churches of other countries

* Can they be accepted as members in association ?

* We must keep open for them a door of love and welcome.

d). The need for a proactive response to migrant-ethnic people to join UCA.

* Many people such as Chinese and Japanese students, refugees from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe and others are arriving to Australia to reside temporarily or permanently. We acknowledge the fact that these people are in need of jobs, housing, language training, social links and community integration. We ask ourselves, how can we serve them and share our life in this multicultural society?

e). Insufficient pastoral oversight (care) of migrant-ethnic congregations and their ministers.

* Migrant-ethnic ministers are migrants themselves. It has been noted that they take up to three years to adapt to the society and provide effective ministry. They are lonely and have no friends to whom they can turn.

*Some of them who have been engaged in long-term settlement beyond 10 years are experiencing "burnout" at present.

* It seems urgent to establish a mentor system.

f). Reception of NESB ministers :

* Desirability of reception of ministers together with their congregations.

*Problem of brain drain from the Pacific to Australia

*Orientation and language courses on arrival,

*Fair criteria for assessment of qualification.

* Process of invitation - who should be responsible for corresponding with overseas churches?

- g). Status of NESB ministers :
- * The UCA does not honour the status that many cultures wish to give to a minister
 - * Difficult to be recognised as a minister especially when working part time.
 - * They are unfairly evaluated according to their ability to speak English.
- h). Finance :
- * To start a new congregation they have to go to presbytery, of which they are not yet a congregation. Finance has to come through presbytery.
 - * Not enough resources to develop the potential mission
 - * Establishment of new migrant-ethnic congregations is not a priority.
 - * The budget for the tasks at the Assembly and synods has to be reallocated to make it realistic and practical.
 - * Staffing for cross-cultural ministry must be extended and funding must be increased.
 - * Status of the cross-cultural ministry of the UCA : is it of secondary importance?
- i). Understanding and decision making of presbyteries in dealing with ethnic issues varies greatly.
- j). Confusion over the roles of staff in presbytery and synod.
- * Each synod appointed a Cross-cultural Ministries Field Worker from 1986. Their job description is not yet clear.
- k). Lack of cultural sensitivity in decision making.
- * Often decisions are made according to Anglo-value system
 - * Lack of consultation with migrant members
 - * Minority voices are not heard
 - * The agenda does not take up the concerns of the migrant-ethnic congregations.
- l). Feeling that "we want our own presbytery".
- * Possibility of multi-ethnic presbytery
 - * Mono-ethnic presbytery
 - * Regional and racial presbytery such as Pacific Presbytery
- m). Equal membership :
- * Feeling like a guest.
 - * Still paying rent for sharing a church property
 - * Equal contribution to the life of the Church and participation in decision making.
 - * A need for dual membership

n). Establishment of regular courses on multiculturalism in theological colleges of the UCA.

- * As many Anglo-Australian parishes are becoming multiracial and the number of multicultural parishes are increasing, we can see a need to train future candidates for ministry in multicultural settings. We know that education must be practical, closely linked to real life situation.

o). Concern for second migrant generation and the particular needs of migrant-ethnic youth.

- * The rate of juvenile delinquency of migrant youth is increasing.
- * They are the victims of racial discrimination and the side effects of immigration.
- * Programs we ought to develop : e.g. weekend outreach social programs, new styles of worship, training of bilingual youth workers and ministers. counselling services.

p). Stance of UCA on issues, such as inter-faith and homosexuality, needs to be clearly explained in consultation with migrant-ethnic members.

- * These are most controversial and confusing issues to members within the Church, whether they are Anglo-Australian, Aboriginal or migrant. They create troublesome divisions of opinion among members. It is hoped that migrant-ethnic members will be consulted about such issues before any doctrine or decision is finalised.

3. Options to address the Issues

- * To form mono-ethnic Presbyteries as required e.g. Korean Presbytery
- * To form multi-ethnic presbytery in some Synods - Capital cities.
- * To form liaison committees that report directly to the General Secretary of each Synod.
- * To appoint part/full-time cross-cultural ministry officers in Presbyteries and/or Synods.

4. Recommendation by the Taskgroup

The follow-up action is to recommend the NM & E Committee to request the Ethnic Affairs Officer to arrange in at least 3 or 4 Synods further discussions with the migrant-ethnic churches using this paper as a basis. These will need to be one or two day meetings.

November 18 1994

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