

# WHY ENGAGE ACROSS CULTURES?

## *Biblical and missional mandates for the local church*

*Janet Scarlett*

As we look around at the variety of faces in our local shops, parks, schools and restaurants it is clear that people from all over the world call Australia home, and that we all benefit from the interaction of these many diverse cultures. But if you look around your church on Sunday, do their faces mirror those of your local neighbourhood? Have we really “come together [to] thank the Maker of us all”?

And if not, why not?

The vision of any local, evangelical church is to make and grow disciples. The questions for each are the same - Who will we make disciples of? How can we help them grow? But before the practicalities can be grappled with, each Christian must delve into the Word to see people the way God does. As we do, we will see several main themes woven throughout the Biblical narrative that are relevant for cross cultural ministry, as God works his plan for all creation throughout history.

### **ALL NEED RECONCILIATION**

At creation God created people to fill the earth and rule it (Gen 1:26-27, Gen 10:5).

- Created in God’s image, each person - regardless of age, gender or ethnicity - has dignity and is worthy of respect and honour (Ps 8:3-8, James 3:9).
- Christians, living in worship of their Creator, are therefore compelled to treat other people with profound respect before God.
- Throughout the story of the Bible, God works for all of humanity: by creating one, he created all (Gen 2:26-27, Acts 17:26).
- When man and woman rebelled against God, all rebelled (Rom 3:10-12, 5:12).
- When Jesus died and rose again, reconciliation became available to all (Rom 5:17-18, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:12-20, 2 Pet 3:9), which will reach ultimate fulfilment in the new creation when people from every nation and language will worship Jesus as their Lord (Dan 7:14, Rev 5:9, 7:9-10).

Christians realise that everyone, from every culture, is biased against God and apart from his grace, is destined for everlasting separation from him. We are motivated to reach out to people from every culture because through Jesus we have all been offered reconciliation with God, and are looking forward to a new, united creation at peace with God and each other.

### **CALLED TO LOVE**

Throughout its pages, the Bible outlines humanity’s mandate to honour and demonstrate love for God by loving and valuing others.

- Throughout the Torah and the Prophets God repeatedly commands justice, mercy and hospitality for the foreigner/sojourner (Lev 19:34, 23:22, 25:6; Deut 10:17-19; Ps 146:9, Zech 7:10, Micah 4:2).

- Jesus' most poignant lesson of love was a story about a foreigner lavishing care, mercy and money on his enemy when his compatriots had left him for dead (Lk 10:25-37).
- The New Testament writers entreat people to demonstrate God's love by caring for others' needs practically, living in the peace and unity given by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:2, 2 Cor 13:11, Gal 3:28, 6:2, James 2:8, 14-17).

## ARE WE WILLING TO CONNECT?

Once, cross cultural ministry was something done away from home - sharing Jesus with people of other nationalities was only possible for those willing to sacrifice everything and GO. Now, even a conversation about the weather with a neighbour is often an adventure in cross-cultural communication! Are we prepared for this, motivated by Christ's love, or are we held back by fear?

As faith without works is dead (James 2: 17), so knowledge of Biblical principles without a practical response is useless. Providing for the needs of our community is a practical outworking of Jesus' commands to love the people around us (Luke 10:25-37) and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20). As His dearly loved children, we follow Jesus example and make the most of every opportunity to demonstrate love to those around us (Eph 5), even when those opportunities make us feel uncomfortable or disoriented. So take a moment... Who has God placed around you - in your extended family, your neighbourhood, in your workplace and surrounding your church family? Pray for opportunities to practically demonstrate love to them. How amazing it will be when all believers are reconciled to Christ: when all nations and languages are gathered before God's throne, praising him in the new creation (Revelation 7:9-10)!

If you're interested in learning more about Cross-Cultural ministry within your local context, the following are a pretty good place to start...

- Andrew Schachtel, Choon-Hwa Lim, Michael K Wilson, *Changing Lanes, Crossing Cultures: Equipping Christians and Churches for Ministry in a Culturally Diverse Society*, (Sydney: Great Western. 2016) This one is FABULOUS! Easy to read, written for the Australian context, and in a workbook format with both the why and the how of local cross-cultural mission. If you only read one book on this topic, this is the one. Available direct from *Interserve*: <https://interserve.org.au/learn/resources/books/changing-lanes/>
- J.D. Payne, *Strangers Next Door; Immigration, Migration and Mission*, (Illinois: InterVarsity, 2012)
- James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalogue*, (Illinois: InterVarsity, 2009)
- John Dickson, *A Spectator's Guide to World Religions: An Introduction to the Big Five*, (Sydney: Blue Bottle, 2004)
- Duane H. Elmer, *Cross Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility*. (Illinois: InterVarsity, 2006),
- Ed Stetzer, "Getting the Small Church on Mission" in *Small Church, Excellent Ministry: A guidebook for Pastors*. Ed. Jeffery C. Farmer (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2017)



Healthy Churches is an initiative of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland (PCQ), Committee for Ministry & Resourcing (CMR).

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons license [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) and must be attributed appropriately: (Title, author, source, license.)