

# THE WORLD ON OUR DOORSTEP

## Becoming a Multi-Ethnic Church



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Being the multi-ethnic church

## Chapter 1

### Where it all started and where it's led us

It was March 2003 and Forrest Hill had been vacant for two years. I was being interviewed by the Ministry Settlement Board. We'd had the usual round of polite investigations into my experience to date, my theological emphases; a number of questions about the family; and then it was my turn. My first question seemed to floor them at first. "What is your mission here at Forrest Hill? Who are you in mission for as God's people in this area?" The embarrassed silence was not entirely unexpected as this was a church that was still reeling from a disastrous, chaotic split. Eventually, an insightful elder, Jill, volunteered that she had been concerned about the ability of the new wave of Asian immigrants in our neighbourhoods to adjust to the language and life of our country and district, as a result Jill had wondered about how "we" might reach out to them. Further conversation offered the possibility of English Conversation Classes at Forrest Hill as a way of beginning helpful dialogue with our newer neighbours.

A month later we visited again to preach and meet the congregation. On the noticeboard was a large poster advertising the commencement of English Conversation classes and calling for volunteers to help. For us, that was a very positive and exciting sign of life in a demoralised and weakened community, and gave us cause to believe that the Lord was already at work, indicating the direction of mission at Forrest Hill for the next stage of its life.

#### **SpeakEzy**

I was inducted to Forrest Hill into June 2003 and the most important thing was rebuilding an environment of trust and acceptance within the congregation. But there was also the need to encourage the enthusiasm of Bill, Leigh and Jill as they introduced a mixed group of Asian people to English in the Kiwi-style. This early group included Indonesians and Koreans, some of whom were already beginning to ask about attending our morning worship, with their children participating in youth and children's ministries. For many, English was a serious struggle; the greatest need was confidence in both language and pronunciation.

At first the Indonesian people gathered after church in their own little groups, but with encouragement longer standing members of the church started conversations with our newcomers. They encouraged and challenged them to use their growing ability in English in discussions about life, the sermon (where they could follow it - more on that later), and church events. Some of the house group leaders started inviting the newer immigrants to their meetings and building relationships over a longer term, though some Indonesian people found it particularly exhausting to do that. However over time some became more adept in language, realising that if they were to engage in meaningful employment they had to master a certain standard of conversation at least to survive.

Some realised that while we could help them with conversation, they needed more formal, intensive help to gain better skills in vocabulary and grammar.

Over successive weeks and years the SpeakEzy team has made use of various formats and exercises to enable people to experience the language in a number of settings and in response to varying needs. In any particular period of time gave up the dominance of different cultures and language groups. So that for a while it was all east and southeast Asian (Indonesian, Korean, Chinese, Japanese). There have been seasons with participants from the subcontinent, and from the Middle East; often sprinkled with some from East Europe (Russia, Ukraine, Czech Republic) and more recently, Spanish speaking

people mostly from South America; however the majority of our current participants have come from east Asia.

SpeakEzy has also expanded to need both a morning and an evening session, often with a different team of volunteers, though all under the same excellent direction of Bill Pelan. The volunteers are not necessarily highly skilled educationally, but they are all very hospitable people, genuinely interested in and concerned for the regular participants, some of whom come for a few weeks, others of whom have been coming for several years. Some individual tutoring has resulted when participants have asked for some concentrated help, in other cases people have gone on to attend more formal English courses at a tertiary level provided by either the University of Auckland or the Auckland University of Technology. Most have realised that commercial language schools (of which there are many) can only do so much and place high demands on people with busy lives.

**A channel in or a channel out** *Does SpeakEzy actually bring people into the fellowship of the worshipping congregation?* Initially the fame of SpeakEzy spread through people in the congregation of the day, and as they discovered how it could help their grasp of English language they told their friends, who came both for Sunday worship and to Monday morning sessions of SpeakEzy. Then as we began to advertise locally, people started dropping into the church during the week asking if they could come and how much it would cost. To which our invariable response was, "Of course, come - and there are no fees just a small donation for morning tea." This has also resulted in some joining house groups and coming to social events which then progresses to often tentative attendance at morning worship. Basque participant Raoul, came to SpeakEzy because he saw the signs on the street, and then accepted the invitation to join one of our more "visitor-friendly" fellowship groups, which lead to his regular attendance at worship. Cun and Ita were new immigrants from Indonesia with indifferent skills in English who came to Forrest Hill to worship at the invitation of friends. They then found their way to SpeakEzy and thence to a fellowship group. As their tentative skills grew and their lagging confidence grew, they tried a formal language course. The test was when Cun filled in for our secretary for two weeks. His confidence was a little fragile such that he would often to check what he wanted to say to various enquiries before he committed himself. Ultimately that experience lead to both Cun and Ita seeking, and gaining full-time employment, and this has lead to greater confidence and involvement in the life of the congregation.

So some have come to the church through attendance at SpeakEzy and others have come to SpeakEzy as a part of the church's life that is reaching out to them.

**Gates of hospitality** SpeakEzy is however only one gate through which people may find their way into the warm acceptance of Forrest Hill Church. Previously mentioned are the fellowship groups, often home-based study and prayer groups, of which some are particularly sensitive to people for whom English is a struggle. In these groups people have been able to risk expressing life and faith issues in an environment of good-humoured patience and acceptance. They have also found group support for when some of the issues that confront new settlers in a land of foreign language and strange customs become a struggle. At present there are three in particular we could readily recommend to any seeking closer fellowship and Bible study. Not all fellowship group participants attend our church, some are members of other ethnic churches and others are still deciding about Christian faith.

Another gate is Mainly Music, a New Zealand based ministry that reaches out to preschoolers (babies to 4 years old) and their parents, grandparents or nannies through the medium of a programme of music and movement, with some overt Christian content to it. Our group is strongly supported by the grandma generation of our church, with a couple of grand-dads too; working alongside them are a small team of Chinese and Indonesian women, some from our congregation. Currently a very strong group of Chinese grandmas

have been coming and bringing about 8-10 children with them, and while they were very shy and withdrawn at first our women have made a real effort to meet and involve them. Some have even attended one of our annual social events.

For a few months we ran monthly services called "Dinner with U" which included a 40-45 minutes of worship and faith-sharing and then dinner in the church hall. These were held late in the afternoon, and while they did indeed attract a wider group of our Asian neighbours they were perceived as hard work by key volunteers, and slowly went from less frequently to only happening on special occasions - I hope to find a way to reinstitute something like this as it always seemed to attract a good proportion of our Asian people and they felt confident about bringing their unconnected friends.

Finally a more recent development has centred around the offer of two of the Korean members to translate my sermon notes into Korean. I had started producing notes to help those for whom English is not easy so they could at least follow the theme of the message and check up on it at home afterwards. Chris Lee and Chris Hwang presented me with this very generous offer, accompanied by a pre-service tutorial for those who would like to come to grips with the vocabulary and grammar of the sermon; this last especially since the notes are presented in a more informal spoken style of language. This has given confidence to more recently arrived Korean people that they will be able to follow something of the service - plus the growing assurance of our longer-standing Korean members that this is a place where they will be welcomed and loved.

**Not just pew-warmers** In the last five years the leaders of our congregation have made a very real effort to bring our Asian people into serving and leadership roles in the church. Many come from large churches in Korea and Indonesia where it's quite usual to just sit back and let others serve and lead, relating more closely through familial and more intimate fellowship contexts. However Forrester Hill is a community of about 150 people, and the opportunity for leadership comes as a higher proportion than in a larger church; and we felt that we would best serve our newer members if we had some participating in key ministries and leadership roles. The largest number have joined fellowship groups, and they have also joined our worship and welcoming teams.

As a leadership team, we then set out to bring some of the Asian members into our leadership structures; the first was James, an Indonesian real-estate agent, and then Chris, a Korean web-designer, who joined our Session (court of elders), later followed by Ita (an Indonesian woman who works in finance) and KC (a Malaysian-Chinese man, working in South-East Asia in mining exploration) who joined our equivalent of the Deacons Court. For the last couple of years our multi-ethnic Mainly Music team was led by Susan, an Indonesian lady

One of our worship teams is led by a young Indonesian woman, Miranti (daughter of Cun and Ita, mentioned above). Miranti has just graduated in business and law and was a key member of our youth group in earlier days.

I was told recently by the Asian Ministries Liaison Officer, Kyoung Gyun Han, that it was known that Asian people are encouraged to be involved and to lead at Forrester Hill and that it is a very good sign of our well-reputed welcoming attitude.

**Adjusting Attitudes** When I first arrived at Forrester Hill and the attendance of people of differing Asian backgrounds began to grow, a lot of the late-middle-aged people of British extraction found it hard to tell who was from where, either by names or appearance. They also struggled to pronounce names with any care or accuracy, and certainly found it hard to put names to faces and to discern who was connected to whom. Sometimes it was funny, sometimes it was embarrassing, other times it felt plain insulting. But a small group of us, including the SpeakEzy leadership, key elders, my wife and I made a consistent attempt to remember and affirm names, origins and family connections, and to make as

sure as we could that others showed that respect as well. We informally banned Asian jokes or the popular slurs about Asian driving and instead of waving the big stick of political correctness, just continually worked at affirming our newly immigrated members, trying hard to remember greetings in their languages, and important dates like Asian New Year, Independence days and important festivals. Some we even set as congregational celebrations; e.g.. we had an Independence Day lunch because Korean, Indian and Indonesian independence are all in the middle of August. That meant richly diverse food and happy faces all around, full of the recognition and shared celebrations, even a chance for some to tell their stories of what the independence of their home country meant to them.

It's now at the point where the host people, our tangata whenua, are proud of being able to tell you who is from which Asian country and even beginning to greet them in their home languages. A leading Korean Pastor told me that a way into the hearts of many Asian people is to invite them into our homes for meals and celebrations, and we have formalised an opportunity for this in a winter rolling event called "Dinners of 8" where a couple will invite 6 others to their home for lunch or dinner. In order to ensure a good mix of cultures and ages we've co-ordinated who goes where, giving especial attention to how we involve our members from other cultures, in this way many of our European people have come to a better understanding of the backgrounds and stories of our newer members. Which is all very biblical since Jesus often used hospitality as a motif for relationships with God and with each other, and of the Kingdom in which these transactions take place.

**Where are we now** It would be an ungrateful or culturally blind person who failed to recognise the contribution that a steady influx of different ethnicities among us has made to a season of growth over the last 8 years. On any Sunday morning 40% of our congregation will comprise people of any one of a number of Asian ethnicities - Korean, Indonesian, Chinese, Gujarati, Filipino, as well as Afrikaans, Zimbabwean, Basque, an assortment of UK migrants, and a small number of people from various Pasifikan backgrounds making up the other 60%. This means that people are continually being presented with the opportunity to discover and enjoy the rich diversity of human culture in their own community of faith.

We are still looking to expand the cultural balance of our leadership structures - including a gender balance that acknowledges women in leadership among us. Many lead, or are a part of the leadership, in various programmes, (house groups, Mainly Music, SpeakEzy, worship leading, hospitality, prayer teams, and pastoral care) but only two or three serve on our formal leadership groups (Session and Managers).

It seems we need to ask about the expectations that some of our groups have of Christian Education for children and teens, as experience shows that some do not seem to enjoy or value the way we do these. Korean young people sometimes stand off from the more boisterous and social aspects of these ministries; and some parents have questioned whether we're serious or intentional about Bible study and teaching for youth and young adults.

The Korean group in the church have organised the pastoral care in their own way, being especially concerned for those who are newer to NZ and our particular church culture. Their pastoral groups tend to be larger, and to meet together rather than arranging individual appointments, though some have arranged to meet with my wife and I as individual families. We felt constrained to do this to better involve this high proportion of our congregation in intentional pastoral care. (There are now 53 Korean people worshipping with us and participating in the life of Forrest Hill at various levels.)

## Chapter 2

### What's the Word on ethnicity and faith

first a disclaimer: these verses represent those that immediately came to mind rather than an exhaustive representation of every relevant reference in the witness of scripture.

#### *Genesis 1:26-30 (NRSV)*

*26 Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'*

*27 So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.*

*28 God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' 29 God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so.*

Humanity is made in the image and likeness of God, every one of us with the charge of stewardship for Creation. The only distinctive mentioned was gender - nothing about the future development of culture or ethnicity. Yet every ethnicity owes its existence, including its distinctive and shared identity, to the design of the Creator. (cf. Genesis 4.20-22; 11.1-9)

The warrant is to procreate, and "fill the earth" and to turn it to our own use.

Whatever view one takes of the creation of human beings, the persistent theology of this and other passages is that human beings are in and of themselves fashioned in the image and likeness of God, as Creator. That this is now realised in wonderful and astonishing diversity should not be seen as in any way negating or polluting that glorious reality, but rather illustrating the depth and wonderful diversity within in the Godhead. Thus each and every human being, regardless of their ethnic heritage, has their ultimate heritage in the design of the Creator - we each bear the Divine image *imago Dei*.

I am sure this *imago* has more to do with who we are than with how we look, though anthropomorphisms used in poetic and prophetic writing suggest an understanding of God that includes such attributes as seeing, reaching out, laughing, fighting, grieving and embracing.

**[Genesis 1.26-30]**

#### *Psalms 107:3 (NRSV)*

*3 and gathered in from the lands,  
from the east and from the west,  
from the north and from the south.*

#### *Luke 13:29 (NRSV)*

*29 Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.*

**Matthew 8:5-13 (NRSV)**

**5** When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him **6** and saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying at home paralysed, in terrible distress.' **7** And he said to him, 'I will come and cure him.' **8** The centurion answered, 'Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. **9** For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, "Go", and he goes, and to another, "Come", and he comes, and to my slave, "Do this", and the slave does it.' **10** When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, 'Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. **11** I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, **12** while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' **13** And to the centurion Jesus said, 'Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.' And the servant was healed in that hour.

Whatever ethnicity, culture, language or tradition we've come from or evolved into, all are invited to the feast, the festival gathering, of the Kingdom of God, of the Lamb. They shall gather, or rather, be gathered, from all points of the compass. There is a sense in the Old Testament, however that this invitation is extended to those who share in the covenant, so could be seen as exclusivist in that sense, but in New Testament terms can be seen as including all who have been draw into the New Covenant in Christ.

Jesus can be heard warning "the Jews" that their days of exclusive preference are over, and a new age that broadens the understanding of the reach of God's love is taking over, so that those who come from north, south, east and west, have come in response to the invitation inherent in the grace of God in Christ. In Christ a new era has begun; one world is ending and another is arriving in it's place.

**[Psalm 107.3; Luke 13.29; Matthew 8.5-13]**

**Isaiah 43:5-7 (NRSV)**

**5** Do not fear, for I am with you;  
I will bring your offspring from the east,  
and from the west I will gather you;  
**6** I will say to the north, 'Give them up',  
and to the south, 'Do not withhold;  
bring my sons from far away  
and my daughters from the end of the earth—  
**7** everyone who is called by my name,  
whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made.'

**Psalms 106:47 (NRSVA)**

**47** Save us, O Lord our God,  
and gather us from among the nations,  
that we may give thanks to your holy name  
and glory in your praise.

People are gathered as an inherent aspect of the salvation with which God welcomes His people back to their hearts' true home. All who are called by His name, whom He names as His daughters and sons will be found, and brought together in His grace and power as God's unique Servant. An implication of glorious ethnic inclusivity perhaps not envisioned by the writer of Isaiah nor by the psalmist poet. And yet there is that idea that those who belong under the covenant will be revealed in their presence at the eschatological feast of the Messiah.

**[Isaiah 43.5-7; Psalms 106.47]**

**Galatians 3:28-29 (NRSVA)**

*28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.*

The boundaries and distinctions that we draw and describe between ethnicities (as well as various states of life including gender) lose their significance in the universally redeeming work of Christ, in the faith to which He calls us and in the community into which He incorporates us. There is no longer any ethnic boundary remembered or stressed; rather all are God's children in a faith of the Abrahamic heritage. Recognition is not based in the old distinctions of culture, status, or gender, but on the basis of the faith to which we are called by the gospel of the One Saviour.

**[Galatians 3.28-29]**

**Romans 12:3-8 (NRSVA)**

*3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8 the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.*

**1 Corinthians 12:12-31 (NRSVA)**

*12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

*14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' 22 On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; 24 whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, 25 that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.*

*27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all*



*prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.*

The kind of diversity Paul talks about in these passages refers to particular God-given gifts, but may also be seen as referring to a wider diversity in humanity - particularly with reference to comparative strength or status, or to disability of varying kinds. Under the One Lord and in the environment created by the One Spirit the difference between people's gifts (and their position) is less about status or worth than it is about interdependence, and complementarity, saying we are incomplete without what we and others bring to the Body, wherever we've come from, whoever we are or were before Christ, and even now. Our giftedness is His gift to us and our gift to the church, to all the church. So maybe it's similar principle when applied to the complementarity of different ethnicities or cultures meeting in one place, in a particular community of faith. When a particular group seems weak in one area it will prove strong in others in which, for example, western european culture is weak.

**Romans 12.3-8; 1 Corinthians 12.(4-11) 12-31**

**Acts 10:15-28 (NRSVA)**

*15 The voice said to him again, a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.'*

*28 ...'You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.it.*

**Acts 11.12** *The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us.*

[**Acts 10** especially **vv.15, 28**; repeated in Peter's address in **Acts 11.9, 12a**]

**Revelation 5:9-10 (NRSVA)**

*9 They sing a new song:*

*'You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God  
saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;  
10  
you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God,  
and they will reign on earth.'*

**Revelation 7:9 (NRSVA)**

*9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.*

In this ultimate dimension, people of all ethnicities find their place in God, in the slaughtering of the Lamb and of His blood as the ransom that brings us home. By that virtue each and all have been made into a Kingdom and priests in God's service with authority in a now-and-not-yet sense on earth.

This eschatological dimension gives a strong view of the multi-ethnic nature of the Kingdom of God under the banner of it's Saving King, Jesus Christ.

*"Every tribe and language and people and nation"* [**Revelation 5.9-10**; reprised in **Revelation 7.9**]

For me the overwhelming picture presented in the Bible is one of many nations, languages, people groups and ethnicities being gathered into one family, one community, one Kingdom at the centre of which is the One who created all peoples displaying the act of astonishing grace and love in offering eternal hospitality to all, in the sacrifice of Jesus; Saviour, Lover, Shepherd, and King. Since human beings are the *imago Dei* the wider the cultural/ethnic diversity the clearer the image, as it would seem each ethnic group or tribe or language group brings or reveals a quite different or complementary aspect of the One whose creative genius and skill initiated the process that lead to that diversity. So no matter how difficult, inscrutable, or problematic we may find different cultures (even within our own language groups), this sense of each being a different aspect of the *imago Dei* calls us not only to treat each with respect, but also sustain a “holy curiosity” about different cultures as a way of knowing the Creator we have in common.

More than that, such understanding compels us to actively welcome and embrace people of the kind of diversity we find in our neighbourhoods and communities, bringing into reality the prophetic Messianic vision of people being drawn together from *every tribe and language and people and nation coming from the east and from the west from the north and from the south*. It is worth considering whether there is a complementarity comparable to that found in both Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 such that we not only tolerate and even welcome such diversity of ethnicities, recognising that we need that range and diversity of background as necessary for us to be complete as the *imago Dei* in our place and time.

## Chapter 3

### See I made a place for you

Chip Taylor (performed by Dave Dobbyn) "Welcome Home"

#### The Homogeneous Unit and Ethnic congregations

In his early book *How Churches Grow* (World Dominion Press 1959) Donald McGavran articulated as a principle of Church Growth something he had observed in the mission field that he calls the *homogeneous unit principle*. "People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers". (See *Understanding Church Growth* (Eerdmans 1970; 3rd edition 1990) p.x) He goes on to explain that conversion should occur with a minimum of social dislocation. C. Peter Wagner in the later edition of *UCG* refers to "ethclasses" - pieces of the church mosaic recognising by divisions around ethnic, educational and economic factors, declaring that "The Christian faith flows well within each piece of the mosaic, but tends to stop at linguistic and ethnic barriers. Most congregations are shut up to one language, one ethnic unit and frequently to one social or economic class." (and they say that Britain is a class divided society!) So the HUP is not just potentially racist, but can also be seen as reinforcing social and economic boundaries that represent the order of things in the "world" as opposed to the values of the Kingdom of God where people gather from east and west and north and south to sit at the table for the feast of the Lamb.

This seems to be a valid observation of how the gospel advances in the two thirds world, and even among high concentrations of particular ethnic groups in the one third world. But does such a principle have inherent theological validity? And should it be positively sustained in a neighbourhood like Forrest Hill that has a low density population, with many ethnicities.[30% or more residents have self-described as one Asian group or another in both recent census (2006 and 2013), a significant but smaller percentage from the Middle East, with a mere 6-8% claiming to be polynesian or Maori.] Attempts by several groups to form ethnically singular congregations have been difficult since there are a few massive ethnic congregations e.g. Onnuri Korean Church and a nearby Chinese Christian Church, and a high number of smaller groups based around a few families and with fierce loyalty to a pastor from the "home church", e.g.. Full Love Presbyterian. But some do provide important cultural links in the North Shore, e.g. Glenfield Pacific Island Presbyterian Church, the only one of it's kind on the North Shore, which ministers to a widely spread group of Samoan people. Many of the ethnic churches share similar origins with the first Presbyterian churches in Aotearoa-New Zealand which were planted by settlers for settlers (especially from the UK). These were often already strongly committed to Christian faith and concerned to bring children up as Christian in a familiar cultural environment. In this situation mission becomes less about reaching our own neighbourhoods than about growing our own community and sending out specifically selected individuals to fields of mission overseas.

The Homogeneous Unit Principle seems to have little to offer a local church trying to relate to the community in which it is planted and built, given the diversity of many New Zealand urban areas and suburban neighbourhoods. If it was applied in many of our neighbourhoods the negative result would be the fracturing of the body of Christ; in the process missing the opportunity to give expression to the wonderful cultural diversity in the Kingdom of God in it's local expression.

## **Assimilation: the other pole?**

In the 1950s and 1960s there was a widely accepted political goal of racial and cultural assimilation; often, in my experience, found on the left wing. Rather than promoting any particular cultural heritage, the stated goal was to produce New Zealanders, rather than an intentional holding together of the many cultures in their rich diversity beginning to give our fledgling nation its identity. Yet there are Scottish, Irish, Dutch, Greek and Scandinavian interest groups within NZ society they were often called names like the Dutch Kiwis. And while some found comfort in such happy reminders of “home” a growing number among successive generations found such groups to be embarrassing, seen as a sign of an unwillingness to accept the new country and to integrate with whichever New Zealanders they found themselves among. Some towns owed their foundation to a particular cultural settling group, thus the English at Christchurch, Scots at Waipu and Dunedin, Scandinavians at Dannevirke and Norsewood, others quickly became celebrations of our many settling cultures. Those holding on firmly to their cultural heritage are often connected to earlier settler communities, while the more recently arrived are often involved in trying to find their way in the “new land”.

Certain denominations also carry a cultural marker, Croatian Catholics in the far North, Scots Presbyterians in the deep south, English Anglicans in the Waikato, Midland Methodists in various settlements; a more recent attempt to make room for ethnic diversity has asserted itself in the Anglican and Presbyterian churches with the separate Anglican Tikanga for Pakeha, Maori and Pacific Island peoples, and the Presbyterian Synods for Maori and Pacific Islands, as well a growing and separate Asian Ministries group, each with their own councils, and each with their own leadership and resource groups.

Assimilation is no longer expressed or at least admitted to as a valid political goal, but is a default principle often clumsily embraced in the name of unity within a notional kind of diversity in name only. The vision of *“coffee-coloured people by the score”*<sup>1</sup> ignores the cultural memory that people can’t help bringing with them, whether they’ve emigrated from Korea, Tuvalu or the English Midlands; so instead of ignoring their heritage and leaving to them to remember it out of sight out of mind, there needs to be an attitude that respects and celebrates the joyous diversity to which each of them adds.

It has to be admitted that some of our Korean members seem to have started with a goal that looks something like assimilation, and some may have that agenda at heart, but most seem to want to preserve and celebrate important aspects of their culture while integrating more and more with NZ society as they find it at Forrest Hill. Further they are beginning to realise that we are interested in their Korean heritage, and not just out of politeness.

It is assumed, somewhat uneasily, that we need to respect and recognise other cultures but in our national and church culture this is still a work in progress, alongside the tumultuous journey toward biculturalism; even if we have declared ourselves to be multi-cultural church, it doesn’t establish that we are.

## **Co-existing in the same building**

The approach of many churches is to provide time and space for an ethnic congregation to carry out its ministry (and mission) from their buildings. This was our experience at St James Pukekohe, where for more than 30 years a Tokelauan congregation meet monthly, and a Korean congregation, since 1997, meet several times a week. The Korean congregation meet on Sunday afternoon for worship and fellowship, early weekday mornings for prayer (5:30) and Wednesday evening for Bible Study. The Pastor has been

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<sup>1</sup> “Melting Pot” Blue Mink (Cook and Greenaway) 169 on Philips BF 1818

given office space in the church buildings, and several members (including the Pastor's family) join the regular service of worship on Sunday morning with the host congregation. There is occasional social interaction, but little else happens together. The Korean church pay a rental for the use they have of church facilities, and generally have been good tenants. Nonetheless there is little effort expended in trying to relate more closely with the members of the Korean congregation, and little discussion of forming a common identity in which they would or could work. However this kind of cordial relationship has not been the case for every church that hosts a Korean church.

A lot of the churches in the Northern Presbytery host Korean congregations, and for some it is no more than a beneficial financial arrangement; some charging considerable sums for the privilege of using their buildings. Relationships are often quite difficult and seem to exhibit some of the prejudice about Asian immigrants that is quite common among residents in the Auckland region. Some of the Korean congregations are quite small, and struggle to preserve a viable identity, others are substantially bigger than their hosts. Even where prejudice is not present a hidden agenda of the hosts that hopes for a day when both will become one congregation puts a strain of expectation upon relationships creating an atmosphere of tension and mutual mistrust. Many host congregations, however, have little interest in, or impact with the people group represented by their tenant congregation, meaning there is minimal interaction between any more than the pastors or significant leaders. There is no way that this is either multi-cultural or intercultural in any meaningful or growing way, and it leads to nothing in the way of cultural understanding, missional activity or growth.

### **Recognition and Respect**

It seems to me that the way forward is in the context of a developing intercultural relationship within a single congregation that recognises either person's culture as being one of value from which I can learn, in a way that leads to the growth of mutual respect for each other's fullest humanity.

In one faith community of my acquaintance there is a practice of reading the Bible once a month in another of the strong language groups in the church, while keeping the English version of the passage on the screen behind. One wonders if on other Sundays a split screen could feature a translation in one of those languages alongside the English while scriptures are read in English. Some communities encourage people to say the Lord's Prayer and Creeds in their own languages together at the same time. Those who travel frequently also make a discipline of learning simple greetings in some of the languages present in their church communities, as well as asking for the names of people in their own languages. Many Asian people, in an attempt to identify with the found culture in NZ, take English names to replace or supplement their names in their home languages - so that Harrison Kim is also known by some as Hyo-Sung, though he is less comfortable with a member of the congregation using that name - and Hazel is also known to some as Hye Sook.

However for recognition and respect to be real and a growing, developing thing, it needs to come out of an attitude of heart thus shaped. This attitude then manifests itself in hospitality, acceptance, trust, befriending and valuing that transcends the superficial. Good hospitality allows a guest, visitor or sojourner to be who they are without trying to change them into the host's cultural image. Rather hospitality willingly risks that in such openness and generosity the host community may be the one who is changed, or that both are changed, and that the resulting community is shaped by this mutual transformation. e.g. I may remain truly Kiwi while loving and appreciating Korean culture, food, music, and custom. Intercultural respect has no need to assert that the way of the host is the only way, even in the setting of our accumulated, British-sourced, settler-developed, West European values. This can be true in both personal settings and communal settings - so that while

the practice of bowing may be foreign to a contemporary Kiwi mindset, but the respect inherent maybe something we can learn from.

Communally, the importance of eating together is a prime way of meeting cross-culturally and enjoying each other in a relaxed and leisurely way. Being a practice that has a lot in common with the stories of our Lord's encounters with, and teaching of, a wide range of people, it presents many opportunities for ministry, for offering recognition to the least, and for welcoming the unexpected. There is a sense that hospitality needs to be more natural - and that while we would want to make eating with us a pleasant experience, we also need to shape these events to express welcome, acceptance, and enfolding grace. So that such occasions are natural and truly self-revealing in that this is how we really are. I believe there is a key to growth among a wider group of our neighbours of many ethnicities - coming to sit at the table from all points of the compass to share in the love of the Lamb and the Kingdom into which He invites by His offering of Himself - in both a homely and a formal sense.

Simultaneously this raises the issue of ways in which we offer hospitality and demonstrate our recognition and respect. How do we say to people whose ease with our language is an early barrier or challenge, "Come in, join us, you're welcome here"? Learning to greet people in their own language, to pronounce their names with careful attention, being patient in making ourselves understood and in listening carefully to the strangers as they seek to make themselves understood and ultimately to make themselves known to us. Opening our homes to them, welcoming their children, celebrating their festivals e.g.. Asian New Year, major birthdays (100 day and 1 year for children), laughing with those who laugh, and crying with those who cry. In biblical terms we ought to be allowing the fruit of the Spirit to be the relational character that fills the opportunities and encounters that come our way.

Listening for their greatest challenges and giving time and resources, as a church and as individuals and families, to meeting those challenges with our new friends are important relational bridges with which any individual or community can engage. Either have people learn the language or bring in people who have greater skill in either the visitors' language or ours - whether by design or by welcoming them when they come. Create worship that intentionally includes, rather than leaves them with imponderable questions. Include people in events, in roles, in leadership as they gain confidence and experience. However respect reluctance and wait for the right time - persisting gently.

I don't believe that facilitating "language services" is a workable long-term strategy, especially for the 1.5 generation as they seek recognition for their growing dual identity, standing astride two cultures at once - not entirely belonging in either. The Asian members of the Forrest Hill community have expressed strong antagonism to any sustained introduction of alternative language services as minimising the likelihood of people learning to communicate in English.

## **Chapter 4: Doors open wide**

### **Encouraging belonging as a path to believing**

In the NW of Scotland the Presbyterian church culture often means that people will attend for some time what they regard as their church before ever committing themselves to faith.

The church is very important to them, and attracts their support and loyalty, but they are very careful about saying they believe quite yet.

This means accepting people as part of our life who have yet to come to faith in Christ, but being patient, trusting the Spirit of truth to bring them close to Himself - for opportunities to open up in which one may lead people in that situation to deliberate faith in Jesus as Lord.

It means we create a climate of welcome and acceptance, rather than one of judgement and pressure.

It means people are enabled to serve in areas that match their current state with respect to faith-commitment - so welcoming, morning tea, musician, but not, one would expect, in a teaching or pastoral care or a prayer-ministry role, or indeed the kind of leadership that presupposes an existing faith-commitment to Christ.

This does not mean forcing people into "membership classes" before we let them do anything or count them as being a part of us. It does mean, perhaps a two tier membership scheme; where some are accepted as being included in the congregation, and others as "members" of the church (as per Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12).

This may help with the Korean attitude that if one attends for a few weeks, "of course" one is a member.

### **So how do we do this?**

Rather than putting this under predictable headings like "worship", "study", "fellowship", "leadership", "serving" I will try to describe a number of practical values and how they affect or influence how we do, or could do certain parts of church life.

***Openly, warmly - Hospitality*** is a prime value that persists in the biblical story of both Jesus' ministry and the spread of the gospel (Acts 2.46) beyond the boundaries of the dominant culture of the day (Acts 10 et al) (i.e. to the Gentiles). In fact throughout the Bible, hospitality is often a sign and symbol of acceptance and welcome e.g. This includes Abraham's offering to Melchizedek (Gen. 14), and his welcome of the three strangers (Gen 18); and Rahab's welcome of the spies (Joshua 2).

So we do hospitality as a deliberate act of welcome and inclusion, quite intentionally crossing cultural fences, inviting people whose culture, language and experience is different to ours - to people we might normally regard as strangers. Thus people coming to our church could expect fairly soon after their arrival to find themselves invited to the home of one of the more settled members of Forrest Hill's faith family.

It is important to note the biblical model of hospitality often centres around food and eating together, and to note that many of the newer cultures among us also build many of their social events around preparing, sharing and eating food. This would be the case for both formal and less formal, and even intimate settings.

If we are to take seriously our role as a multi-ethnic church it seems that, drawing on biblical models, hospitality should become one of a new set of values<sup>2</sup> so that we keep it as something that directs and moderates our institutional energies and missional enterprises. Missional activities as well as fellowship events provide opportunities for giving expression to this value, even

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<sup>2</sup> note the importance of redrawing our values with both traditional values like Biblically directed, Spirit sensitive, Christ centred as well as hospitality, helping or aiding, ethnically inclusive....

discipleship events (e.g. Alpha) are built around hospitality these days. As a value it could be seen to provide some understanding and practice of what welcoming people to worship services is about and how it may be done. As surely as God welcomes us with extravagant love so we are called upon to welcome strays and strangers among us just as He showed us to do. (Luke 15 esp. 11-32)

In 1 Peter 4.8-11 we are encouraged to see hospitality as a both a gift and an imperative in giving expression to the love that is to characterise our community. Note how love covers over our difference in perceptions that in the past we may have dared to call wrong or misguided.

*Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.*

**Appropriately, sensitively - Helping** (or helps) is listed in some translations (ESV, REV, KJV, NASB, NLT, NASB) of 1 Corinthians 12.28 as one of the spiritual gifts, usefully rendered as “forms of assistance” in the NRSV. Too often we in the western church have taken on the role of a concerned but uninvolved observer when others are struggling with one issue of life or another believing that it is wrong to “interfere” or gauche to move in uninvited - preferring to tell ourselves that our praying for that person or group is likely to be more effective than my direct participation. And yet to some extent this is the category of ministry into which a ministry like SpeakEzy fits; helping people to begin to speak English in a way that is comprehensible to other New Zealanders and in the process helping the participant to master some rudimentary skills in spoken, conversational English. Thus it begs the question of what similar ministries we could venture into that would “help” new immigrants, or those struggling with integration, to access a better life in this country of their choice.

Some work could be done in asking what questions it is that we are not asking, or hearing from our friends from other cultures. What unseen (to us) obstacles are migrants encountering in their hard fought effort to make a life in NZ? Is it in relating to their children’s schools; is it in employment issues; navigating the Immigration, Internal Affairs or Justice Departments; or banks and lawyers; is it in conflict between the home culture and the dominant youth culture of our time?

This kind of value presupposes much of the fruit of the Spirit in the life of the helpers and in their relationship with those being helped; thus requiring patience, long suffering, gentleness and a lot of love. It also assumes a willingness to be present (sometimes people best understand the ever-present comfort of God’s care when it is incarnated in the life of a flesh and blood fellow-traveller in their trials). In the context of a church that is giving itself to being and living out a multi-ethnic identity, a church for people from many nations, helping becomes a high priority spiritual gift. As with hospitality there would be a need for some explanation of, and training in, the kind of help we are talking about as fulfilling our sense of mission in our neighbourhoods. It also is useful to note that one way to translate *paracletos* is *the helper* and thus reflect that in helping we are giving expression to an important part of the nature of the God by whom we have been won, loved and enfolded in the body of His eternal Son.<sup>3</sup>

**comprehensibly, lucidly - Proclaiming** the word through our preaching and teaching ministries and through our worshipping together is another way of communicating our value of God’s mission through us to reach the stranger and the “sojourner” in our streets, bus stops, cafes, schools and workplaces - and even more especially those who have come among us, perhaps out of sheer curiosity. So translated sermon notes, the use of graphics and various other aids to help people follow as much of the service and the message as they may become important. This is true of both the word preached and the word sung and treasured in the quietness of our hearts.

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<sup>3</sup>(Could include a discussion of what advocacy and becoming a prophetic church would look like in the context of our ministry and mission.)



Another form of proclamation is in the context of small groups, meeting in homes or even in Sunday school rooms to study the Bible and pray together, sharing concerns and struggles, bringing the perspective of God's revelation to bear on various trials encountered on the walk of faith in a new land.

So care and creativity need to be exercised in thinking about how to present congregational and small group teaching, as well as the words of God sung and spoken. How do we best facilitate an apprehending of what we're trying to say, of where we're trying to lead people on Sundays and Tuesdays and Wednesdays? How do we encourage growth? Is it time to listen to the customs of those who come from church traditions in other cultures and ask if there is that which would grow us and our church in unexpected and real ways?

What communicates inclusion rather than exclusion, what brings us closer rather than separating us? What words of God are His words for our place and time, and for the people He is gathering around us?

***boldly, passionately - Evangelising*** our communities and neighbourhoods requires a paradigm shift in the way we have understood ourselves and operated our mission to date - probably for the whole of our history. While a lot of people are coming from existing church backgrounds, often with a living faith, there are those who have heard that an English speaking church is a good way into Kiwi community and have come among us looking for help with language, or maybe they are looking for a community more diverse than they would encounter within their ethnic groups and communities. If people "just turn up" in that interest, it suggests that we have an opportunity staring us in the face, again begging the question, "at what point of need can we relate with our migrant neighbours?" It is happening among some of the ethnic groups in the church as people invite their friends to try the church they attend, expressing that there is a very real welcome and acceptance and the opportunity to improve language and enter into relationship with a wider ethnic group of people. This being so, are some of us being unnecessarily shy in telling ourselves where to find help and hope in a strange land? Are some of us just a little too shy in making ourselves known to neighbours of different ethnicities and offering ourselves and our church as a means of their finding a way into Kiwi society? Is it just possible that evangelism isn't as scary as many of us think and may start in very simple and practical ways? At the risk of being howled down, it is possible to say that our reluctance to tell the faith or even live the faith for our neighbours, our colleagues, our fellow-commuters may reveal a lack of passion in our faith; that boldness in approaching others is in fact fuelled by an indomitable passion for the One whose grace has changed our lives forever and for good.

However evangelising also needs and assumes structures and strategies for enfolding and training those thus reached; as a deliberate and planned, ongoing, relationship building change in both the newcomers lifestyle and ours, individual and communal. It also assumes that both our message and our communal being is too good to be kept to ourselves.

***recognising, respecting - Involving*** everybody in some order of service or ministry as a part of recognising their value and unique giftedness, disregarding struggles with immediate communication, in favour of inclusion. So we are giving every opportunity, using every means, to generate a sense that everyone's presence, participation and leadership at events and areas of ministry is expected, welcome and enjoyed. If part of being joined together is around our giftedness then we should be working on ways to ensure ethnically differing people experience that unity and inclusiveness.<sup>4</sup>

This may mean having invitations to serve translated into a number of languages, or even making very direct and intentional approaches - rather than waiting for responses to advertising. Sometimes approaches need to be repeated by different people in some role of authority before it gets through to people we're not just being nice - but rather that we value that person's gifts and

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4 etc

want them as a part of what we do and that their ethnicity is an asset rather than a barrier to that service.

As far as leadership is concerned, one does need to listen carefully to the people from a particular ethnic group before seeking out someone for a leadership role - what we value maybe different to what they perceive as an indication of leadership qualities; we need to trust the Holy Spirit in this process as well. We also need to listen to different perceptions of what a particular ministry or role looks like.<sup>5</sup>

I am beginning to see to that allowing people to tell us what looks like meaningful service or contribution to them may vary from our customary expectation of those values.

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<sup>5</sup> we noted that the Korean group had a different approach to pastoral care than our rather individualised model. Their model was more communal.