

A 10/40 Twist

By Brian Seim—SIM Ethnic Focus Ministries

'No. I will not pastor this church. It just is not ready to accept all the people in our neighbourhood,' said John Mahafey eleven years ago. He had been a missionary and was being asked to return and pastor the church that had led him to Christ. Nine months later, the leaders were unified in their conviction that God was calling them to reach their entire community. Again, they asked him to lead Churchill Heights Baptist Church. This time he accepted. One outreach they initiated was World Fest—a party *for* their diverse community, *from* their diverse church.

After a recent World Fest at which a couple of thousand neighbours came, I was travelling by plane to a conference. A very gregarious Arab immigrant sat down next to me. For the next hour and a half, he talked—about his family, his business and his mosque. Finally, he turned to me and asked what I did. Realizing I might only get in one sentence, I prayed for the right words and said, 'I am going to share with some churches how they can care about all the people in their community, not just those who are like them.' Without missing a beat, he told me about a party that his daughter and son-in-law had gone to, at a church where people from all over the world went and were welcome. I smiled and asked if it was Churchill Heights. He said yes, and ended that part of the conversation saying, *'If there was a*

church like that in my neighbourhood, that's where I would go.'

My Village is Global

Forty languages are spoken in the hundred homes on a crescent near Toronto where I live. My Afghani friend didn't know that Christians prayed. My neighbour from the United Arab Emirates is comfortable talking about God, but not Christ. The doctor from India is a high-caste Hindu and suspicious of anything colonial. The Quebecoise is doing her best to compete in an Anglo society. People, whose cultures are without an ethnic church in Canada, and who rarely have another Christian from their background living within five kilometres of them, surround me. The 10/40 window is part of the fabric and texture of the 21st Century city. In order for Christians to reach people in cities, especially those from a Muslim background, churches will have to reach their whole communities, not just the people who remind them of themselves.

Post-World-War-II immigration in Northern Europe and North America initially came mostly from Europe. Later it came from the Americas, then in the '70s, from the Pacific Rim. During the 80s and 90s, immigration began to include South Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

Islam and Hinduism are penetrating the North. Some 1.6 million residents of the UK claim affiliation with

Islam, and another 0.9 million link themselves to a Hindu-Sikh faith. Some 580,000 Canadians associate themselves with Islam and 560,000 with a Hindu-Sikh faith. US statistics indicate 1.7 million Muslim adherents, while a Catholic study shows about one million Hindu-Sikhs within America.

Major receiving countries also have animistic shamans, tribal rites and Buddhist priests. Four million immigrants from 204 nations arrived in Canada in the last 15 years (12 per cent of the population). The US has ten times as many people, and immigration has altered the country by only 3 per cent during that same time—a smaller percentage, but a greater number of immigrants, hidden by cultural walls, untouched by the Gospel. In the UK, a population of 56 million includes 4.8 million immigrants, about 9 per cent of the total population (not divided by relocation period). Diversity is the name of the game.

Newcomers used to live in *their* communities, but cultures now converge into *our* neighbourhoods within a generation. Their jobs are usually in cities. They can, and do, move next door.

Governments have sought immigrants with technical skills that are essential for competing in a world market. Our birth rates are low, and governments feel that immigration maintains critical mass. We have set up social safety nets for seniors and healthcare, and they have to be funded by someone's taxes. So the diversity we face is going to continue. The 'Global

Village' is taking on a completely new character; my village is global.

Diversity — A Divine Plan?

Many of us complain about this shift. It's easy to blame government policy, but as Christians, we need to think deeply before we place blame for these changes, especially in light of the Apostle Paul's address in Athens.

From one man God made every nation of men, in order that they might inhabit the whole earth. *He determined the time set for them, the exact places where they should live.* He did this in order that they might reach out for Him and perhaps find Him, for in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:26-28).

God is no less sovereign today than He was when that was written. He has brought these people to our countries. Here is the very best place for them to find Him. It is God's doing—not an administrative or political mistake. Paul's words indicate that God had our role in mind as they search. Yet, how can we reach them with current ministry models?

A denomination may have churches among forty-two language groups. Those churches are extensions of their successful mission programs. Those churches can't reach immigrants speaking the other five hundred languages in cities like Toronto, London, Los Angeles, New York, Vancouver and Berlin. There are simply not an additional five hundred missionaries in each of these cities. Ethnic churches are limited by two aims—to preach the Gospel among *their* people, and, unintentionally, to protect their culture.

Before we blame *them* for silly, un-Christian behaviour, let us examine *ourselves*. Evangelical movements developed out of felt needs but proceeded along cultural lines. Those of us from European backgrounds tended to reach others from our same culture. That past error in unity fragmented the church and rebuilt walls that Christ tore down at Calvary. We find ourselves defending cultural values that we have confused for Christian values. Ethnic churches may be repeating this error.

Our diverse cities challenge us. To reach these people, we will have to accept the nations into our own church. After all, Christ does.

The New Urban Church

Intercultural churches began to grow in the seventies in New Jersey and New York. In the nineties, I visited a multicultural church in London's East Side. The Spirit of God has continued to move people to this kind of church. In Calgary, several leaders merged their churches to become Gateway International Church, ministering to a gang-infested community fragmented by sixty different nation-based groups. Today, church growth leaders estimate that there are over 1,000 intercultural churches across the US. Over the last five years in Canada, 150 churches are in the process of becoming intercultural. 'It's the only way an Iranian Muslim, a late-stage AIDS patient and a Japanese Buddhist can find Christ in the same community,' said Ken Shigematsu of Tenth Avenue Church in Vancouver.

A few years ago, I invited several intercultural church pastors to a dinner in my home. As we conversed, they told me that opening their churches to the nations has brought renewed meaning to several important Christian values:

Welcome only begins with the greeting committee. It is supposed to characterise the whole church. **Love** isn't just a hug. It's **real Friendship**. **Encouragement** is essential to immigrants facing the loss of their professional status, cultural safety network and often, even their families. There is a need for **recognition of difference without judgment**. There is a need to **see other people like themselves, a church with colour & accent**.

They learned they had to have **representative (ethnic) leaders in staff & lay positions** who shared a common spiritual maturity and an ability to evaluate their own, as well as each other's, cultural values. Churches began to develop **language pods** where the pastor selected capable people to **translate** to small groups for those without adequate language skills (usually a two to three-year process for older adults). Most of all, the churches recognised that they had to **act as extended family** to people who were leaving their own national and religious cultures in order to become followers of Christ.

New immigrants, especially from the Middle East or South Asia, are cautious of colonial attitudes, especially when connected to the church. On the outside, at least, their religions require solidarity of brotherhood. They seek

not only acceptance, but also inclusion. They may never again practice medicine, but they would like to have some respect for their twelve years of training and seven years of practice before they arrived. They believe that, within religion, they are not to be second-class citizens.

If immigrants are attracted to a church, it is only because they seek a truly Christian culture, one that lives

out warmth, welcome, justice; one in which an intense love for God pervades everything that is done or said—the kind of church that breaks through cultural bias. Being a part of this kind of church is what Christ invites each of us to do. To touch the nations with His message, I suppose we will have to do what Jesus commanded: Make disciples of every nation—by loving our neighbours.



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