

# UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT CULTURES REQUIRES AWARENESS AND WORK

“In Yap (a small island in the South Pacific), an invitation to chew betel nut is a cue to initiate conversation. This cue is equivalent to offering a cup of coffee in the United States. Here guests terminate the conversation by suggesting they must leave, whereas in Yap the host terminates the conversation by saying that it is all right for the guests to leave. A failure to grasp the meaning of such cues results in misunderstandings, confusion, and oftentimes interpersonal conflict.”\*

One common area of tension in many cultures is different perceptions of time. While I was a student at Howard University School of Divinity, our class on Afro-Caribbean Religion visited the Caribbean island of Barbados. On a visit to one of the indigenous religious services it was quite obvious that the announced time of 3:00 was not important to many of the latecomers. I couldn't understand this and asked my host why they did it this way. He replied, “In our culture, the most important people come late. It is a mark of status if people are willing to wait for you.”

In many cultures, relationships are more important than time. People don't mind waiting. We might not think this way, but knowing that our friends do can help us avoid frustration at our differences.

Cultures often differ in how they handle conflict. Westerners tend to be quite direct and value honest discussion of differences. However in many non-Western cultures people will go to great lengths to avoid confrontation. Mediators are often the key to resolving conflicts in a manner that “saves face” for all involved.

Though these cultural differences are mere illustrations of the various customs from many nationalities and races of people, the point must be clearly understood. To win persons from other cultures takes understanding and patience. But still the opportunities must be maximized. Consider these examples:

1. More Jews live in America than in Israel.
2. More persons of African descent live in America than any country except Nigeria.
3. More Samoans live in America than in Samoa.
4. More Hispanics will soon live in the U.S.A. than the entire population of Canada.
5. More Cubans live in Miami than any other place, except for Havana.
6. More Armenians live in Los Angeles than any city in the world.

**OPPORTUNITY EXISTS IN EVERY GEOGRAPHIC AREA OF AMERICA.**

---

\*Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1986).

# BEAUTY AND THE BEAST PROVIDE LESSONS FOR NEW CHURCH EVANGELISM

The old “Beauty and the Beast” story can help us reach across our confusion and fears about culture, language, and race.

The story of “Beauty and the Beast,” teaches that once one gets to know another person a lasting friendship could be established. In the story, Beauty, in order to save her father’s life, covenants to live in an enchanted castle with the Beast. Terrified of the Beast at first, Beauty is eventually able to see beyond the Beast’s frightening appearance.

Then Beast appears to be dying of a broken heart. Beauty reveals her love for him and the Beast is changed into a handsome prince. The entire household benefits from this gracious act by Beauty.

So it is with starting churches among cultural and minority groups. Once fears of the unknown, suspicions of strangers, and shyness about people who are different are overcome, the experience will kindle our passion for new church evangelism.

Another reason may be the cost factor. The dialogue that follows tells the story best.

“Bridgette and I have decided we just can’t afford kids,” Bill tells his close baseball associate Carl. “We’re struggling now to make ends meet.”

“Children sure are expensive,” Carl responds. “I hear it costs more than \$100,000 to raise a kid these days, including the cost of education.”

Bill shakes his head. “Why people would spend that kind of money on children, I just don’t know. Kids are such a pain!”

The honesty expressed by these two sports enthusiasts tells only one side of the story. When life moves on and the values of family develop over the years, parents and grandparents never say, “I just wish we hadn’t spent our hard-earned money on raising Jack and Jill.”

Of course, starting strong new churches the right way is more complex and complicated among people of a different culture or language.

But here’s the reality—no church can reach everyone in the entire community. The exciting thing about starting new culturally specific churches is that they are often able to reach people that have been unreached by all other existing established churches. Often the results are every bit as exciting as the soul-winning reports missionaries from overseas bring in their reports and messages to our local congregations.

# LESSONS FROM THE MARKETPLACE

Businesses in Canada and the United States are increasingly taking advantage of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. They see a growing market that seems to scream for their attention. Financial gain is the name of their game.

Consider these business initiatives to make ethnic populations their customers.

Estee Lauder produced a slickly packaged cosmetic brand, *All Skins*, aimed at urban women with all skin colors.

Mattel, Inc., has offered black Barbie dolls that, with the exception of their skin color, are identical to white Barbie dolls.

Chemical Bank has installed Russian-language automated teller machines at its branch in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, to capture the business of the Russian population.

A New York downtown hospital near Manhattan's Chinatown appeals to Chinese patients by serving dishes like congee, or rice gruel, and bean curd with black bean sauce.

But gains for the Kingdom give Christians a more compelling reason to respond to this diversity.

Here are some strategies the people of God can use from business strategies to reach new minority and cultural groups:

- ▷ **Research your market.** Recognize unique characteristics. Understand how to make your message relevant to a specific ethnic target group.
- ▷ **Use methods that are culturally relevant.** Use images, music, and preaching that connect with the target group.
- ▷ **Develop and use partnership strategies.** Form strategic alliances or cross-programming with established cultural groups in the community who can lend instant credibility and help establish your new church.
- ▷ **Participate in local cultural events.** These can include kids' fairs, special holiday celebrations, athletic events, and family events at theme parks, churches, ethnic street festivals, and street cleanup events.
- ▷ **Plan events around key ethnic holidays.** Develop programs around key ethnic holidays like African-American History Month, Cinco de Mayo, or Kwanza.

# HELP YOUR CONGREGATION DEVELOP A BURDEN FOR 25% OF CURRENT AMERICANS

***“The goal of missions is not just to build up a single congregation, but through many congregations to reach as many people as possible.”***  
—Tom Nees

For many years a silly man walked through the same door of a studio home, all smiles, and sang, *It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood*. Every day the man pulled off his sport jacket and donned a cardigan sweater and sat on a bench to remove his shoes, replaced them with canvas tennis shoes, and sang—*It's a neighborly day in this beauty wood, a neighborly day for a beauty—would you be mine? Could you be mine? Would you be my neighbor?*

That man, of course was Mr. Rogers. Residents in communities are asking the same questions of the church today. The relevant question is why should we become genuine neighbors, or should we? Here's why we must become evangelistically minded neighbors.

The 2000 Census revealed that 98 million Americans—25 percent of the U.S.A. population—claim African, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American ancestry.

The ethnic population is growing at 6 times the rate of the U.S. as a whole, and multiethnic students in most communities represent the majority at all grade levels.

People often prefer to worship with people like themselves. Starting a church for a particular cultural group can use this basic human need for advancing the gospel.

Starting a new church among a different cultural group is the most effective evangelism tool anywhere (Acts 6:7).

New Church Evangelism is the Great *Commission* at its best. Multiplication is the heart of NewStart. Replenishment is part of God's amazing vineyard. That which is watered ultimately becomes a source for future growth (Isaiah 55:10).

New churches tend to grow faster than older ones.

Lost people matter to God. New churches produce more ministry leaders (Acts 16:5).



***Shared facilities make such a new church possible immediately.***

# CROSS-CULTURAL ACTIVITIES TO HELP YOU GET STARTED DEVELOPING CHURCHES

Starting new churches within different cultural groups requires relationships be formed that ultimately leads to increased passion for cross-cultural ministry. Most congregations do not naturally enjoy relationships that are outside the comfort zone. These must be intentionally embraced if a new church is to be started. Here are several suggestions:

- ▷ Attend a program presented by ethnic people on their site.
- ▷ Invite an ethnic church or organization to present a program.
- ▷ Share a meal with an ethnic church.
- ▷ Do a physical work project in the community with members of the other cultural group.
- ▷ Offer to help recent immigrants with language issues or government red tape.
- ▷ Share a special event of your youth group, women's group, and men's group.
- ▷ Plan a picnic or outing together.
- ▷ Share a film series like the Focus on the Family series.
- ▷ Plan a special class in your Sunday School to study the books: *Churches Starting Churches* or *And Now Next Door and Down the Freeway* (books are available free from the USA/CANADA MISSION/EVANGELISM DEPARTMENT at Nazarene International Headquarters).
- ▷ Implement pulpit exchanges with a multicultural church.
- ▷ Encourage a teacher or worker exchange program.
- ▷ Plan a joint vacation Bible school, youth night, or other youth activity.
- ▷ Invite minorities when a missionary who has served in their homeland comes to your church.
- ▷ Share sports activities.
- ▷ Offer an ESL class at your church.

# BRIDGE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES THAT OPEN IMMIGRANT HEARTS

Basic help of offering food, clothing, and simple caring can become the cornerstone of credibility for starting churches among targeted minority groups. Responding to basic human needs within the community sends a message that the sponsoring congregation really cares about human need. Then the target group is more willing to become a part of the congregation you are about to start. These might include:

- ▷ Establishing a care fund for people who need initial help with bills.
- ▷ Driving people to doctor, dentist, social services
- ▷ Know good lawyers who can help with legalization of residency.
- ▷ Know location of welfare office and other social service agencies, and how to apply. Be willing to go and assist with application.
- ▷ Know the location and hours of clothing and food banks.
- ▷ Find out where jobs (without English-speaking requirement) are and help with completing job applications.
- ▷ Learn about ESL programs for those who wish to learn English.
- ▷ Know where bilingual child-care services are available.
- ▷ Find out where bilingual medical services and social services are.
- ▷ Know qualifications for low-income housing and where to apply; assist with follow-up with these agencies during the “waiting period.”
- ▷ Know where there is rental housing where minority groups are welcomed.
- ▷ Find out when and where the job fairs are.
- ▷ Know when and where free immunizations are available.

# EXERCISES FOR SMALL GROUPS

**QUESTIONNAIRE OBJECTIVE**—Ask each member of the group to reflect on the following questions and share their insights with the group.

Relationships are made and strengthened by appreciating another culture and by making an effort to engage groups on their own ground. How can your church build bridges?

---

---

---

---

Commitment to family and leadership in these cultures, personal referral, and word of mouth become an important strategy for spreading the message. Can you think of some events that could be planned in your church to which people of different cultures could be invited?

---

---

---

---

Smart marketers will put prejudice and disinterest aside and look carefully at the rising opportunities new cultural or language groups provide. What are some of the preconceived stereotypes your people must overcome? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

An understanding of cross-cultural values, taking an “inventory” of our own personal shortcomings and spiritual poverty, and recognizing the full impact of “spiritual value judgments” on effective communication of the gospel are all essential. Could you list some activities that might help your group overcome its prejudices and fear? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

# IDEAS FOR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

**QUESTIONNAIRE OBJECTIVE:** People from different cultural backgrounds come into this country as “misplaced” individuals in our community. They may be poor, unkempt, and untidy, or appear to us to be lazy or “unwilling” to get a job. Their inability to speak English may even cause them to become withdrawn and isolated. These exercises focus on breaking down the walls that have been constructed to deal with these symptoms.

1. Think of a person of a different culture that you know personally. What are some of the qualities that person possessed that surprised you?

---

---

---

2. Give some examples of how that person ministered to you.

---

---

---

3. Be ready to share in a small group some of your reflections.

---

---

---

4. How can a commitment to include people of all minority, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds motivate a congregation to start a new church among a different cultural group?

---

---

---

5. Question for discussion: “Why did Jesus deliberately concentrate His life upon comparatively so few people?”

---

---

---



# INVENTORY TO SEE WHAT WE BELIEVE AND WHAT WE CAN DO

Whenever the decision is made to explore the possibilities of starting a new church, a comprehensive survey should be formulated to construct a demographic profile of the targeted group. Different groups of peoples view church differently. Since the new church is intended to cater to them, a survey is appropriate. Here is a sample survey:

1. Are you currently attending a local church?
2. What do you think is the greatest need in this community?
3. Why do you think some people don't attend church?
4. If you were looking for a church in the area, what would you want?
5. What advice would you give to a new pastor?
6. Would you be interested in more information?

---

The exact source of this survey is unknown. Some credit Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, while others credit Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Valley Community Church.

# USEFUL BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR STARTING CHURCHES

- Apeh, John E. *Social Structure and Church Planting*, ed., Keith M. Bailey. Shippensburg, Pa.: Companion Press, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Church Planter's Manual*, ed. Ray Bakke. Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1981.
- Barna, George. *Marketing the Church: What They Never Taught You About Church Growth*. Colorado Springs, NavPress, 1988.
- Brock, Charles. *Indigenous Church Planting*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981.
- Conn, Harvie M., ed. *Planting and Growing Urban Churches: From Dream to Reality*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996.
- Evans, Tony. *Let's Get to Know Each Other*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995.
- Francis, Hozell C. *Church Planting in the African-American Context*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999.
- Hesselgrave, David J. *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980.
- Hiebert, Paul G., and Eloise Hiebert Meneses. *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing House, 1995.
- Livingstone, Greg. *Planting Churches in Muslim Cities: A Team Approach*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993.
- Malphurs, Aubrey. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998.
- Mitchell, Bo. *You Can Take It with You*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990.
- Reiland, Dan. *Starting Small Groups in Your Church*. Atlanta: Injoy Life Publishers, 1990.
- Ridley, Charles R. *How to Select Church Planters*. Pasadena, Calif.: Fuller Evangelistic Association, 1988.
- Schaller, Lyle E. *Activating the Passive Church: Diagnosis and Treatment*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1981.
- Shenk, David W., and Ervin R. Stutzman. *Creating Communities of the Kingdom: New Testament Models of Church Planting*. Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Planned Phase-out: A Checklist for Cross-Cultural Church Planters*. San Francisco: Austin and Winfield, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Passing the Baton: Church Planting That Empowers*. La Habra, Calif.: Center for Organization and Ministry Development (rev. ed.), 1997.
- Sullivan, Bill M. *Starting Strong New Churches*. Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1997.
- Wagner, C. Peter. *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*. Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1990.
- Warren, Rick. *The Purpose-Driven Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.