



DEVELOPING & MAINTAINING A MULTI-ETHNIC CHURCH MINISTRY

A. Timothy Heijermans
SGI Conference, 4-6 January 2010

Introduction: Stand to your feet if you can “yes” to one or more of the following questions:

- I speak at least one other language besides English
- In the church of which I am a member there are three or more distinct ethnic groups (WASPs, Hispanics, African Americans, etc.)
- I have a personal friend who comes from a country other than the USA
- I come from a city or town with at least one rather distinct ethnic neighborhood
- I have read a book in the last year about a country or people group outside the USA (Canada doesn't count!)

How do you think the answers to these questions would relate to the theme of this seminar?

Our context in Luxembourg

Meet Christian Community Church of Luxembourg. How many nations have been represented in the past few years? Take three minutes, chat with your neighbor and jot down a few special problems and challenges this ethnic and cultural variety would likely create in a church...

.....

.....

.....

Biblical models for multi-ethnicity

1. The Church in Antioch is a NT model of multi-ethnic ministry

Note the striking ethnic and cultural mixture in the church in Antioch indicated in Acts 11.19-26; 13:1. Every one of the prophets and teachers in Antioch had roots outside Israel.

- Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus (Acts 4.36)
- Simeon called Niger (Latin surname “black”), doubtless a black African Jew. Some have speculated that this Simeon was the one who carried the cross of Christ (Matthew 27.32=Mark 15.21=Luke 23.26). If so he was from Lybia and was the father of Alexander and Rufus (perhaps mentioned in Romans 16.13?). But it is probably significant that Luke does not say he was from Cyrene, so this can only be speculation.
- Lucius of Cyrene, a Greek city on the Lybian coast, to where many Jews had dispersed. He was perhaps one of the men of Cyrene, mentioned in Acts 11.20, who had founded the church in Antioch. Some have speculated that this Lucius was the same person as the author of Luke and Acts, but this is doubtless an error.
- Manaen brought up with (σύντροφος, “one who eats together with or nurses with” or “courtier”) Herod the Tetrarch. The name is the Greek form of the Jewish name Menahem (“comforter”). He had received his education beside Herod and Archelaus in Rome. We know nothing of the reasons why.
- Saul of Tarsus, the capital city of Cilicia in the south east side of modern Turkey.

2. Paul's missionary team is a NT model

Note the nationality mix in Paul's missionary teams. They must all have spoken Koine Greek, the lingua franca of the Roman empire at the time.

- Barnabas (Acts 4.36)
- Silas, a prominent member of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15.22)
- Timothy, half Jew and half Gentile from Derbe/Lystra, circumcised by Paul to facilitate his entrance into the synagogues (Acts 16.1-4)
- Aquila and Prisca, Jews from Pontus who had recently come to Corinth from Rome (Acts 18.1-2; Romans 16.3)
- Titus, a Greek won to Christ by Paul but not circumcised (2 Corinthians 2.13; Galatians 2.1-3; Titus 1.4)
- Luke a Gentile physician (Colossians 4.14)
- Demas (Colossians 4.14; 2 Timothy 4.10)
- Apollos, an Alexandrian-born Jew (Acts 18.24)
- Erastus (Acts 19.22)
- Sopater from Berea (Acts 20.4)
- Aristarchus from Thessalonica in Greece (Acts 20.4)
- Secundus from Thessalonica in Greece, whose name ("Mr. Two") suggests he had been a slave (Acts 20.4)
- Gaius from Derbe in Galatia (Acts 20.4)
- Tychicus from Asia on the west coast of Asia Minor (Acts 20.4)
- Trophimus from Asia on the west coast of Asia Minor (Acts 20.4)
- Epaphroditus (Philippians 2.25-30)
- Epaphras, an evangelist from Colossae trained by Paul (Colossians 1.7; 4.12-13)

Common problems to expect in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual church

- Language issues.
Examples:
- Non-verbal communication issues
Examples:
- Nationalism
Examples:
- Prejudice and racism
Examples:
- Training and education styles
Examples:
- Assumptions about leadership, gender roles, family
Examples:
- The role of emotion versus intellect
Examples:

How do you develop a multi-ethnic church?

- **Develop an attitude:** Ask God to teach you to see people different from yourself through His eyes and with the servant attitude of Jesus Christ. Learn to put Philippians 2.3-11 into practice.
- **Get information:** Choose a country you're interested in. Read about it. Get regular news feeds about what's happening there. Investigate who from that country might live near you and where. Try to learn a few words and phrases in that language. Find out what might be the concerns might be of people from that country in your community.
- **Make contact:** Try to meet people from that country in your own community. They may live in a neighborhood or

attend a local university. Seek them out. Take a walk around where they live. Go up to them and introduce yourself. Tell them you are interested in learning more about their country and their culture. Take a genuine interest. Be creative and resourceful in making contacts and building relationships. This is what church planters have to do every day. Learn these skills now where you are so God can use you elsewhere later. Don't expect to learn this to when you go abroad. Multi-cultural ministry starts today where you are!

- **Disciple others:** Teach other believers to reach across ethnic divisions, not only by giving an example, but by discipling others to follow it. Introduce people you are discipling to people from other ethnic backgrounds. Get into a language club together or learn from a native speaker. Have visiting missionaries explain how they cross these barriers abroad and learn from them. Read about cross-cultural communication.

For each of these rubrics, try to come up with at least one concrete thing you could do where you now live or go to school. Write it down. Pray about bringing these into your schedule...

- Develop an attitude
- Get information
- Make contact
- Disciple others

How do you maintain the momentum and navigate the turbulence?

- Lead people to pray side by side.
- Keep the Bible central to all standards and conflicts.
- Teach different ethnic groups who come together in the church to understand and appreciate their differences. This is essentially what Paul did in Romans 14.
- Gain skill in listening carefully to what is said ... and discerning what isn't said!
- Train emerging leadership to cross cultural barriers with you. You may find that local church leaders are not overly excited about bringing in new ethnic minorities into their church. Humbly help them to see the importance of "missions at home" by your example and ask them to get involved with you.

Roeser, November 2009



A. Timothy Heijermans
 Church planting in Luxembourg (Europe) with Biblical Ministries Worldwide
 9, rue de l'Alzette, L-3396 Roeser, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg
 Tel. (+352) 36 95 83, Email: ath@pt.lu



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, Roland. *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001.

Allen, Roland. *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church.* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997.

Farber, Barry. *How to Learn Any Language Quickly, Easily, Inexpensively, Enjoyably and On Your Own.* Secaucus, N.J., 1991.

Green, Michael. *Evangelism in the Early Church.* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970.

Harris, Nigel. *The New Untouchables: Immigration and the New World Worker.* London: Penguin Books, 1995.

Hesselgrave, David J. *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978.

_____. *Planting Church Cross-Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions.* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980.

_____. *Counseling Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Theory and Practice for Christians.* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984.

Lane, Patty. *A Beginner's Guide to Crossing Cultures.* Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

Lukasse, John. *Churches with Roots: Planting Churches in Post-Christian Europe.* Bromley, Kent, UK: Send the Light, 1990.

McNamara, Roger N. *A Practical Guide to Church Planting.* Cleveland, OH: Baptist Mid-Missions, 1985

Piper, John. "The Legacy of Antioch" October 25, 2009, http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/2009/4353_The_Legacy_of_Antioch/

Roces, Alfredo & Grace. *Culture Shock! Philippines.* Portland Oregon: Graphic Arts Center Publishing Co., 1998.

Steffen, Tom A. *Passing the Baton: Church Planting that Empowers.* La Habra, CA: Center for Organizational & Ministry Development, 1997.

Walmsley, Jane. *Brit-Think, Ameri-Think: A Transatlantic Survival Guide.* Edinburgh: Harrap Books Ltd., 1986.