

PARTNERS

A Resource for Church Leaders from Diaconal Ministries Canada



Re-imagine the image of your church

By Katie Karsten

As a way to encourage more relationships into their lives, my friends Rose and Angeline accepted my invitation to a women's Bible study. They were greeted regularly by those who walked near them. Yet on the last evening of the 10-week session, as I waited in line for some delightful baked goods, I looked over to my table and noted with deep regret that in the midst of many conversations taking place throughout the room, they waited quietly and alone for my return.

God said "Let us make human beings in our image." It is an amazing truth to embrace—each aboriginal or Asian, underemployed or financier, seminary student or panhandler—each of us are broken (often lost in the messiness of purpose-filled potential)

Each of us are broken yet made in God's image.

and, yet, immeasurably precious, made in His image. Let this be our solemn and miraculous reminder during Lent.

Diversity reflects the imagination of Christ for His church. Note Isaiah's words: "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth". At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit empowered a one language and one culture group of disciples to minister and to establish this

multi-cultural church. As we continue to witness and experience the mass migration movements into Canada over the past century, influenced, of course with the aboriginal culture already present, how is the Church doing in carrying out God's vision for a Church of all nations? How does it reflect the acceptance and embrace of Christ?

These are not times when there needs to be debate on the strengths and weaknesses of homogeneous or het-

erogeneous bodies of believers. John's vision in Revelations 7:9 of all nations and tribes gathered around the throne of God, must emerge through Christ's body during this present age. Indeed as Jesus modelled room for all in the sphere of his relationships - His body, the church can do no less.

At a recent gathering of energetic Diaconal Ministry Developers from across Canada, there was a conversation on the theme "Who is my neighbour in the Canadian context?". Facilitated by Chris Pullenayegem, it was an attempt to unpack some of the social-economic, religious and cultural changes that are becoming part of Canada's demography and how this relates to our ministry as "sent" people. We shared together a long list of external challenges to ministry that we face as a church community to embrace others. Some of the many were varying roles of male and female,

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TAKE NOTE

1. Click www.crcna.org/pages/racerelations for more resources about diversity in the church.

2. Celebrate Operation Manna in your church on Sunday, May 3. Materials have already been sent to your church.

3. A mini-workshop accompanies this issue of *Partners* online, providing a venue for further learning on this topic with other deacons.

Diversity in the church

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different work ethics, language barriers, distinct customs, diverse traditions and dissimilar religious backgrounds. Suggestions for internal constraints to “being” a neighbour were also noted. Remarks at times were offered with obvious sadness and regret: busyness, apathy, arrogance, unwillingness to change, distrust, desire for (their) assimilation, fear of being vulnerable, “it’s our church!”, and protecting the heritage.

After serving a five-year term as General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches, Dr. Janet Somerville writes that “racism is deep, deep in the ways of the world, always to the advantage of the privileged...and many Canadian congregations, in world-wide terms are privileged. The protection of privilege runs so deep that we find ourselves helpless to change what racism has wrought in ourselves, our relationships, our society and in our churches...helpless to change...unless we let ourselves be truly transformed.”

Fred Witteveen, who ministered 17 years in one of Canada’s most ethnically and racially diverse communities in Toronto, says “I have learned that sharing of hearts, give and take (reciprocity), real power-sharing, courage to change, practicing



reconciliation, and even facing the question of reparations for the sins of racism are crucial actions for knocking down walls of hostility. It is not easy work and never done perfectly, but it is possible if there is willingness to submit to Gospel instruction.”

I believe and hope that over time Rose—from the Sudan—and Angeline—from Burundi—may become valued members of my church community. They have moved from refugee status to permanent citizens in Canada. However, their status in my church is still marginal!

Diversity is part of God’s creative delight. God gave His beloved Son in order that the world may be saved through him, with all of us invited to be one family of God! May we welcome that hope of Easter in and through our churches!

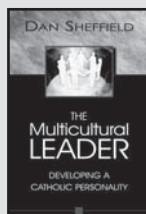
Alleluia!

Katie Karsten is Regional Diaconal Ministry Developer for Diaconal Ministries Canada.

For Further Reading:

In “The Multicultural Leader,” author Dan Sheffield describes the following significant catalysts for growth in multicultural congregations:

- Meaningful intercultural relationships (that causes reflection on attitudes regarding difference)
- Cultural knowledge, experience and resources (that develops understanding and sensitivity)
- Reflective input for alternative theology (that challenges status quo thought and practice)
- Collaborative learning processes (that affirms, empowers and resources ministry through dialogue with other multicultural leaders)



Widening the circle in mind and action

In June 2008, my pastor asked me to help facilitate Widening the Circle, a program from the CRC’s Office of Race Relations, in my church. We needed to broaden our understanding of racism and prejudice both within the church and beyond.

For five weeks, 12 to 15 people came together to discuss our perceptions of racism and prejudices and how we need to recognize that we are all united in Christ. We didn’t realize how entrenched racism was in Canada. Watching the DVD “Journey to Justice” and reading the book *The Hanging of Angelique* by Afua Cooper, it became more obvious that racism and prejudice were prevalent in Canadian history and still remain strong today.

The final session of Widening the Circle focused on “Steps to Wholeness: Building relationships and taking action steps.” This session challenged me to practice hospitality, build relationships, and risk friendships outside my culture. I thought this may be easy because I work with a very diverse community as Director of The Lighthouse. The Lighthouse is a multi-cultural Christian Outreach and Community Centre in Toronto that demonstrates God’s love by offering unconditional hospitality, by sharing resources and by helping people in need. Although this context provides opportunities to take the action steps, it is sometimes my lack of understanding of cultural differences that challenges these steps to wholeness. I continue to see how I need to welcome diversity and try to undo issues of racism and prejudices within myself. As a Christian, I need to acknowledge and understand that everyone who walks through the doors of the Lighthouse is made in the image of God.

Widening the Circle helped me to realize, as the program expresses, that “to be in Christ is not only to be reconciled to God but also to be reconciled to one another as a community of racially and ethnically diverse people of God.” Widening the Circle is a brilliant tool to help people in our churches to step outside of comfort zones and begin to overcome prejudices by engaging with other cultures.

By Rob Datema, a member of Willowdale CRC, Toronto.

www.DiaconalMinistries.com