




# ORIENTATION TO CROSS-CULTURAL MINISTRY



**CROSS-CULTURAL MINISTRY**  
LOCAL MISSION



For the LORD your God is God of gods  
and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty  
and awesome, who is not partial and takes  
no bribe, who executes justice for the  
orphan and the widow, and who loves the  
strangers, providing them food and clothing.  
You shall also love the stranger, for you were  
strangers in the land of Egypt.

*Deuteronomy 10:17-19 (NRSV)*

for I was hungry and you gave me  
food, I was thirsty and you gave  
me something to drink, I was a  
stranger and you welcomed me

*Matthew 25:35 (NRSV)*

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	4
<b>The LCA NZ approach to cross-cultural ministry and mission</b>	5
<b>What shapes our worldview?</b>	6
<b>A biblical view of the nations</b>	6
<b>What is cross-cultural relating?</b>	7
<b>Bridge people</b>	8
<b>Cultural intelligence</b>	10
<b>The concept of acculturation</b>	10
<b>Insights into the world of a newcomer</b>	11
<b>Conclusion</b>	12
<b>Appendix A Cultural value dimensions</b>	13
<b>Appendix B A conversation with ...</b>	14

## **Acknowledgement**

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Special thanks to LCA Victoria–Tasmania District for contributing insights from their African Mission and Ministry Reference Group.

The primary focus of this booklet is on how the LCA NZ is engaging recent new arrivals from non-European cultures. As such, we don't specifically reference our many Aboriginal Lutheran brothers and sisters, but we do ask for your prayers and support as we build relationships with these newcomers.

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# Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide, and welcome to the fascinating world of cultures.

The leaders of the LCA NZ are increasingly aware of the rapidly changing society around us and the need to hear afresh from the Lord about how he wants us to act in the 21st century. One obvious change we grapple with is demographic.

If you are over forty, you have lived through a profound shift in the types of people who now call themselves Australians or New Zealanders. Previously, nearly all migrants came from Europe and had an understanding of Christianity. Now 1 in 4 claims Asian, African and Middle/Eastern heritage, and many of these latest arrivals haven't had the same exposure to Christianity. We have become truly multicultural, particularly in our cities (with rates significantly higher than countries like the USA or Britain).

Some find this uncomfortable and even threatening, while others see this change as a tremendous mission opportunity. Perhaps this great adventure is for you, and you feel called to 'love these new neighbours' as we do.

More than ever, we are looking at the biblical pattern for the church and praying for the day when our congregation membership reflects the ethnicities around us (Galatians 3:28).

The challenge to engage with people from other cultures plays out on two levels. Firstly, how will we make meaningful connections with newcomers from non-Christian backgrounds? Secondly, how will we shape our church life so that people of diverse cultures can worship together?

Anyone who engages with people of other ethnicities will quickly sense the complexity involved in the vast array of different languages and behaviours. Part of the appeal is that the journey to 'cultural competency' (CQ) is lifelong, and there is something new to learn around every corner.

Don't get overwhelmed with this complexity – the place to start is really very simple.

People, in general, respond to love, and they long to feel 'seen'. People in transition have a particular thirst to find friends in their new country. Your simple kindness towards them goes a long way.

Imagine if you suddenly relocated to a town in Japan and didn't know anybody or much Japanese. How would you feel if a neighbour came over with a meal, a friendly 'konichiwa' and offered to help you?

If your heart is open, any CQ you gain is just the icing on the cake, and if you remain humble, people will respond to you.

Our Lord longs for a bride from 'every tribe and tongue', and those of us who move towards these newcomers often speak of 'entering into his joy'. This ministry is not the only important thing, but we encourage you to find out 'what pleases the Lord' and join him (Ephesians 5:10).

# THE LCA NZ APPROACH TO CROSS-CULTURAL MINISTRY AND MISSION

Historically our Lutheran community formed on the back of waves of migrants from Northern Europe who became anglicised after a generation or two.

In more recent times, Lutherans from countries like China, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, India, Korea and South Sudan have found a home among us. Like our forebears, they often start by holding services in their mother tongue.

An LCA NZ strategy for some time has been to host these groups and train bilingual leaders through the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program. These leaders then offer word and sacrament to these new groups, and a contribution is made towards salaries through cross-cultural grants to help them get started.

This has enriched our wider church family and helped position us among the much larger worldwide Lutheran family.

In some quarters, this activity is synonymous with cross-cultural ministry.

Recently LCA Local Mission teams are reaffirming the need for a missional attitude.

The LCA 'Our Direction 2018–2024' declares major priorities that we grow and go.

Go as God's People (2.1) states:

Strengthen a missional culture where individuals, families and communities are inspired, passionate and active in sharing the gospel.

For some, this requires a shift in thinking, and it also implies that we open our eyes to the Lord's harvest field (Luke 10:2). We see how missional activity can happen locally as well as overseas.

In response to a growing desire to be missional, many congregations are looking closely at the mission opportunities among those of other ethnicities who have recently moved into their neighbourhoods.

The current thinking is that our mainstream congregations can become places where newcomers find a home, and our cross-cultural impact extends beyond starting a handful of language-specific groups.

**Can it become normal for Lutherans to make friends with ethnic newcomers?**



## WHAT SHAPES OUR WORLDVIEW?

As you read this booklet, you are looking through cultural glasses that affect what you see.

Our culture, the family we are raised in, our education, and our religious experiences shape our view. This is both conscious and unconscious and impacts the way we answer the big life questions like, 'Who is God and why am I here?'

Most of us in the LCANZ have a western mindset (or worldview). It is not necessarily wrong, but it is important to be aware of this as we approach scripture.

## A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE NATIONS

Is it biblical to focus on the different ethnic groups, and is this a priority to God?

God's interest in nations seems to be a theme that spans from Genesis through to Revelation.

You could say that God created the different ethnicities in Genesis 11 when he intervened at Babel to counter the pride of humankind by confusing their languages. This was an interim plan he used to divide people into smaller groups so that he could win them back to himself. The story of human history concludes with the wonderful examples in Revelation depicting 'all tribes and peoples and languages' in worship together around the throne (Revelation 7:9). Jesus has his bride.

How does the Lord win the people back to himself?

In Genesis 12, God revealed himself to Abraham, saying, 'I am blessing you, and all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you'. The idea that he was 'blessed to be a blessing' is a pivotal theme in Scripture and a way that God keeps dealing with the people he calls. The question is, will we embrace both halves of the equation?

The next big intervention was when God chose the people of Israel to be 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exodus 19:6). Priests to the nations!

Israel was blessed to be a blessing (and still is), but perhaps they liked being chosen more than being a blessing. Their attitude toward the Gentiles by the time Jesus arrived wasn't exactly inclusive.

Jesus revealed God's love for all the nations and paid the price so now 'many can come from east and west to take their places at the feast with Abraham'. He commanded his disciples to go out to the nations and launched the church speaking multiple languages at Pentecost. (the counterpoint to Babel). Peter was confronted with a heavenly vision to shift his thinking, then later we read in Acts how Paul and Barnabas helped the church to see God's plan for the Gentiles. The early church shifted from being a Jewish sect to becoming God's instrument to reach the nations.

The ball is in our court now! Does the 21st century church care about being a blessing?

Our answer to this question shapes our priorities.

# WHAT IS CROSS-CULTURAL RELATING?

Let's begin with a definition of the word 'culture'

a way of life of a group of people – the behaviours, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.<sup>1</sup>

Never before in history have so many people been on the move and the barriers between cultures been so porous. Newly arriving migrants and refugees are more connected to their countries of origin than before. No longer is cross-cultural ministry and mission something that only happens overseas.

Cross-cultural relating is the action of crossing over and can happen any time that a Christian person encounters someone from another cultural background and takes the opportunity to share the reason for the hope that they have (1 Peter 3:15,16).

It really does start by being friendly 'one to one' across the back fence or in the shopping mall, but our congregations can also be impactful. In a congregational setting, we can learn to welcome new arrivals into our midst. This is not a problem to be solved but rather presents us with the privilege to welcome a stranger. Jesus even says in Matthew 25:35 that when you welcome that stranger, you are welcoming me. That's something worth pondering.

An important insight we discover is that cross-cultural ministry and mission is as much about receiving as it is about giving. It is about receiving new insights about our own taken for granted ways of doing things and allowing our own cultural assumptions to be challenged. I also dignify the newcomer when I am prepared to receive from them.

The term 'intercultural' is a good one because it implies mutuality and has been defined as:

Communities in which there is a deep understanding and respect for all cultures. Intercultural communication focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms and the development of deep relationships – no one is left unchanged because everyone learns from one another and grows together.

This can only happen when we search our hearts and put aside a sense of superiority. Does God prefer to speak English? Does Jesus really have wavy blond/brown hair and blue eyes?

Perhaps if he appeared among us, we wouldn't recognise him (it's happened before).

Curiously, the tendency to feel a bit superior is fairly universal and not just limited to those from western cultures.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tamu.edu/faculty/choudhury/culture.html> (accessed 14/08/2017)



## BRIDGE PEOPLE

People of different cultures are separated by their life experience and language etc, and we need to 'cross over' towards each other.

The image here is a bridge of trust that allows us to connect. The bridge is organic, not highly engineered, and might even be just some stepping stones.

Jesus became the ultimate bridge, and when we lay down our lives so people can cross over, we are showing his love.

The term 'bridge person' has been coined to refer to someone who enters into this challenge. They are distinguished by their interest in bringing people together across the cultural divide. A true bridge person has an open heart towards 'the other' and steadily learns things about people on the other side of the divide. This is what is called cultural intelligence (CQ)<sup>2</sup>, but, remember, it starts with a heart change.<sup>3</sup>

There are several contexts where bridge people function.

### **(1) The host group bridge person**

If you are reading this, you are probably part of the host group, and you are thinking about how you can open up a way for people from other cultures. It is important to recognise your situation but hold the privilege lightly. Just because you were born in Australia or New Zealand doesn't give you the right to dictate affairs. The sense of being in the host group has to do with our national identity, but it is also a factor when we are long-term members of a congregation (group). Congregations have their own 'host' culture, which can be surprisingly difficult for the outsider to join.

Some groups deal with this by expecting the newcomer to assimilate if they want to join. If you are a host bridge person, you don't act like this. You open up a way for the newcomer to be valued, and you expect to be changed as well.

A key to doing this well is to intentionally shed some of your host privileges and try to learn some language and other things that can be inclusive.

Our prayer is that every congregation has host bridge people who express this on Sundays and out in society during the week.

<sup>2</sup> The term is relatively recent. See early definitions and studies of the concept given by P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang in the book *Cultural Intelligence: Individual Interactions Across Cultures* (2003) and a more fully developed later work by David Livermore in the book *Leading with Cultural Intelligence*.

<sup>3</sup> If our hearts haven't been impacted by God's love, the things we learn about other cultural groups can tend to feed our judgement of them.

## **(2) The newcomer bridge person**

This person is courageous in the way that they launch into the unknown and actively engage with the host group. Instead of being fearful or offended, they seek ways to build up relationships. They are not necessarily a formal leader, but they function as a leader because they go first. They may even be quite young, as we see in Appendix B 'Nyora's story'.

For cross-cultural life to grow in a congregation, these two types of bridge people link hearts and help the others from both sides to come closer together.

Note: It's not easy to be a newcomer bridge person, and we need to show them special care because:

- They straddle both cultures, which is an inherently stressful place to be.
- They can end up 'living on the bridge'. But bridges are not comfortable or easy places to live!
- They can be seen as being more adept at operating in the 'other' culture than they actually are. (This applies from both cultural directions.)
- They can be seen as now belonging to the dominant culture and so no longer be fully accepted as members of their culture of origin.
- Consideration needs to be given to their personal struggles and development, as well as spiritual and physical welfare.

These bridge people need advocates who are leaders operating out of the host (dominant) culture. Advocates are those, like parish pastors and key congregational lay leaders, who work closely with the bridge person. The advocacy role in this context involves helping balance expectations placed on the bridge person by both the dominant culture and their culture of origin. See Appendix B for an insight into the struggles of a bridge person.

## **(3) The person of peace**

Jesus describes a fascinating interaction recorded in Luke 10 of the 70 going out (taking nothing) and receiving hospitality from 'the person of peace'. This is someone that the Lord has already prepared to respond to when they are exposed to the gospel.

Much of what we have already described is what happens within a congregation (cross-cultural ministry). The person of peace is God's bridge person in a mission context and may not be a Christian. The distinguishing feature of this bridge person is not their theological knowledge, but their soft heart, thirst for the truth and love for others in their group. A great example of this is found in John 4 (the Samaritan woman at the well).

Those of us called to cross-cultural mission long to find these people of peace, and we highly value them. We know that it's nigh on impossible to make progress without them.



## CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

In Genesis 16, Hagar has an encounter with the Lord and says, 'You are the God who sees me'. Perhaps her statement sums up the longing in the human heart to be truly seen.

As we interact lovingly with people of other cultures, we begin to reflect God's love for the stranger, and our instinct is to learn more and remember important things. Cultural intelligence (CQ) is the way we are shaped as we go on this lifelong journey to understand what makes different people tick.

Our objective as we discover new things is not to judge but rather to find ways to relate well. People who are committed to becoming more culturally aware learn not to make quick judgements about things they don't understand and often come to an appreciation later of factors they couldn't see at the beginning.

All cultures have strengths and weaknesses, with each group having something to contribute, but at the end of the day, we are all being conformed to one group (Ephesians 2 v 11-21).

Many excellent books can help guide us to develop CQ. For examples, go to the resources section on the Cross-Cultural Ministry webpage. We have also included an article called 'Cultural value dimensions' as an appendix to give a taste of these materials.

## THE CONCEPT OF ACCULTURATION

The four terms below refer to ways to describe how people actually learn to live in a new culture. Berry (1997)<sup>4</sup> describes four kinds of acculturation strategies that individuals use to settle into a new homeland (host culture):

- a. assimilation (rejecting original culture in favour of host culture)
- b. separation (retaining original and rejecting host)
- c. integration (maintaining both the original culture and participating in the host)<sup>5</sup>
- d. marginalisation (no sense of belonging to either culture).

This concept assumes that individuals have the freedom to choose a strategy. But it is important to note that both integration and assimilation can only be successfully achieved if the dominant society is open and inclusive toward cultural diversity. These strategies can also be used to predict psychological health with integration the most successful, marginalisation the least, and assimilation and separation somewhere in between. A source of family stress can arise due to different generations adopting different strategies at different times (Berry 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Berry's approach has been applied to earlier studies of Sudanese refugees in Australia. Berry, J. W. (1997), Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation. *Applied Psychology*, 46:5-34. doi:10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x

<sup>5</sup> It could be said that the integration we achieve within the body of Christ goes further in that we humbly learn from each other and allow Christ to renew us. Our distinctions remain, but we start to merge and become one.

# INSIGHTS INTO THE WORLD OF A NEWCOMER

Some of you reading this booklet are aware that you haven't had much opportunity to really get to know people from other cultural backgrounds (even though you would like to). You might even think that your efforts to be friendly would be rebuffed. I'd like to offer some insights into things I've observed over the past 30 years to boost your confidence to reach out.

I've been privileged to spend countless hours with people from the Middle East, Asia and Africa. For much of this time, I was employed to assist ethnic leaders from dozens of different community groups. I got to observe people from a wide range of ethnic and religious backgrounds and came to love them (with the Lord's help).

These things particularly relate to the early years after people arrive, and we need to take care not to miss this window of opportunity.

Some of these comments are generalisations, but there are many similarities across the board among people of non-European backgrounds.

**1. People in transition are more open than those in settled populations.** Refugees and migrants expect to encounter change as they make a new life. Many have been abused in the name of religion and are evaluating what they believe. Others can freely ask questions for the first time. I have frequently watched Muslim people (and others) respond to kindness shown by Christians.

**2. Newcomers thirst for connection.** There is a real thirst in the heart of the newcomer to connect with the host people. They are almost always glad that we initiate something (unlike our Aussie neighbours). People would say, 'Now that I have finally made a friend in my new country, I feel that I belong'.

**3. People from Africa, the Middle East and Asia are innately hospitable.** This underpins their openness to building new relationships. For these people, a chance to share a meal is an honour, not a burden. This means their door is open.

**4. There are soft-hearted and hard-hearted people in every ethnic group** (in roughly the same proportions). There are no 'bad' ethnicities that are intrinsically further away from God than others. The soft-hearted ones in any culture are the ones who are 'close to the kingdom'.

Jesus shocked his audience by choosing a despised Samaritan as the one who best-loved his neighbour.

**5. There is respect for age.** Perhaps as Lutherans, we bemoan the fact that we are an ageing group, but in the multicultural sphere, people have deep respect for older people and a willingness to listen.

**6. Theology is less important.** While most non-Europeans believe in God, they don't frame it in theological terms as much as we Protestants do. My experience is that the average Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu does not really want to 'argue' doctrine. In fact, debating theology could be counterproductive as their faith is more cultural than doctrinal. They are more impressed by relationship and encountering Jesus. The best approach is love, not religious argument.

These are people who are wide open and primed ready to respond to the message of our lives if we live out the love of Christ.

Our Lord deserves to be honoured among the peoples!



# Conclusion

An old African proverb says: 'If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together'.

Without a doubt, the greatest 'resource' that we have for travelling together in cross-cultural ministry is the gospel itself. It reminds us that in Christ, and only in him, do we have a unity that transcends all cultural difference (Galatians 3:28).

This unity is no less radical than our new identity, our baptismal self, which is continually dying and rising in daily repentance. And there is, of course, a 'now' but 'not yet' aspect to all of this. We won't see this work fully finished until we finally see him, together, face to face.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands (Revelation 7:9).

We wish you well on your journey to know and to love strangers.

Craig Heidenreich, LCA Cross-Cultural Ministry Facilitator

## APPENDIX A: CULTURAL VALUE DIMENSIONS

Various authors have identified 'cultural value dimensions' that influence how persons of particular cultures relate to themselves and others.

One prominent example is the Dutch management researcher Geert Hofstede who conducted a study of more than 100,000 IBM employees across 40 countries (Hofstede, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1991, 1997, 2001). The goal of the study was to ascertain value dimensions that might vary across cultures. Hofstede proposed a model with 'cultural dimensions', namely individualism–collectivism, masculinity–femininity, power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Each dimension can be thought of as a continuum with two poles.

Individualism–collectivism measures how loosely structured or tightly integrated a particular culture is.

Masculinity–femininity measures how a culture's dominant values are assertive or nurturing.

Power distance considers the distribution of authority, power, and influence within a culture.

Uncertainty avoidance considers a culture's tolerance to ambiguity and acceptance of risk.

Subsequent authors have developed the concept of cultural dimensions and proposed alternative categories.

As an example, consider African vs Anglophone cultures. Three key value dimensions are as follows:

**a. Communal (African) versus individualistic (Anglo) approach to identity.** This is the degree to which personal identity is understood in terms of personal and individual characteristics versus group collective characteristics. This cultural dimension is probably the most significant and provides a foundational world view that interacts with all the others. An Anglo identity saying is: 'I think, therefore I am', Contrast this with an African identity saying: 'I am because we are'.

**b. Low (Anglo) versus high (African) power distance.** This is the way Anglo and African cultures view authority, power and status. Power structures are far more invisible in Australian cultures; nevertheless, they exist. This can be disorientating for Africans who come from a more explicitly hierarchical culture.<sup>2</sup>

**c. Punctuality (Anglo) versus relationship (African) approach to time (or 'clock time' versus 'event time').** Australian and African cultures use different timetables. In African culture, an event begins when everyone who needs to be there arrives. Behind this lies an assumption about the unpredictability of life. An African saying (paraphrased) is 'If you plan 12 months ahead, you may insult God'.

<sup>2</sup> Aparna Girish Hebbani, Levi Obijiofor and Helen Bristed have a good discussion on 'communal–individualistic' and 'low–high' power difference in their paper, 'Acculturation challenges that confront Sudanese former refugees in Australia', University of Queensland, Australia. They note that South Sudanese and Australian cultures are significantly distanced from each other in these dimensions.



## APPENDIX B: A CONVERSATION WITH . . .

*We'll call her Nyora.*

Nyora is a capable young lady in her early 20s. She is studying at university, having completed her high school studies in Australia. Nyora is the eldest daughter of a large migrant family. She remembers what it was like in Africa and knows the language. She is a child of both Africa and Australia, operating in and understanding both cultures and valuing aspects of each. She can operate appropriately in each setting.

### **At home**

She is not like the rest of her family. She is the in-between person.

Her parents struggle with English, and it is very hard for them to feel involved in their kids' lives. Despite wanting to engage, they find it hard to understand their kids' lives – without effective communication, understanding suffers. They don't understand what the schools their kids attend are wanting to achieve with their kids and don't have the language to ask or understand the explanations. They can't express concerns or query how their kids are going. They find this very hard and feel excluded from their own kids' lives. They rely on information passed via Nyora who can operate in both spheres and languages. They call on Nyora to 'be the parent representative' for her family, despite being one of the kids. In some ways, they also rely on her to be engaged and responsible for the younger kids, as she understands more than they do about the lives and expectations for kids in Australia. The parents resent being shut out of their kids' lives.

Nyora resents being stuck in the middle and overly responsible.

And for the younger kids (who don't understand the African language), respect for their parents is undermined due to the parents' limited understanding of and ability to access the knowledge of the real ins and outs of what is going on for them in their lives – in school and other organisations – or their inability to talk with them about it. The younger kids resent that their parents 'don't care enough' to come to things, sending their sister instead.

Nyora feels sorry for her parents, understanding their struggle and resentment at being shut out. She also feels sorry for her siblings, who feel that their parents don't care and aren't relevant and who they can't talk to anyhow. Nyora tries to be supportive of them all emotionally. She recognises the hurt and alienation running in both directions, but she is not sure how to fix it.

She struggles to find time to have her own life and is sad that the younger kids don't value African culture, having little experience with it other than it makes life harder in Australia, distancing them from their parents and excluding them from their parents' conversations with other adults and from church gatherings, which are in African they don't understand.

### **At church**

Nyora values and loves her church; however, she feels quite alone there.

Many of her peers and the younger generation of teens feel it isn't worth coming as a lot of the service is in African, and they don't understand it.

Nyora wishes that the church would do things that are more inclusive of teens, such as mixing up English and African songs. She wants to have a youth group and things in the service where teens are included and participating, forming connections and relationships. Nyora is attending leadership groups and trying to learn how to run a youth group, but these tend to be theoretical and discussion-based, and she doesn't know where to start with organising an event like a youth group night. She wishes there were people from any culture at church who would help her learn this. She has attended camps where there were really good games and programs, and she wants to do something like that with teens from her church.

I am so grateful for the understanding that listening to Nyora gave me of the struggles within her world. She is also grateful to have us hear her.

I look forward to sharing her experience, as I promised her I would, with representatives of the broader church in the hope of focusing our ministry to migrant families in an intergenerational and inclusively appropriate way.

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