

Discovering ways to be intercultural at Trinity Lutheran congregation, Cairns

Greg Schiller

There is a significant number of people from Papua New Guinea living in Cairns and our Trinity Lutheran Cairns church community are finding more and more ways to engage and connect between the different cultures.

We include PNG elements in our weekly worship services. Tok Pisin (one of the official languages of PNG and the most widely spoken) is incorporated into regular Sunday services. Everyone in our congregation has learned to respond to our PNG Tok Pisin blessing at every service. We regularly sing Tok Pisin songs in worship. Sometimes these are translated verses of hymns and songs the congregation already know. I have also translated some of the PNG songs (written by Papua New Guineans and with local tunes) to English. We all know ‘*Our gracious and loving God*’ which is a translation of ‘Long marimari bilong God’ which is in our PNG Tok Pisin Hymn book *Amamas wantaim na lotu long God*. The melody line of the song is available in that hymn book and the tune can be heard on the *Amamas ELCPNG* app. We are not sure of the origin of this song, but it is a popular Christian song, sung throughout PNG. I think congregations even without PNG members could learn to sing this song too. We think it is has a good message for all. Here is an English translation, with the Tok Pisin words to that song:

Long marimari bilong God (Amamas Wantaim #318)¹

1. Our gracious and loving God
Has sent us Jesus, his Son
He’s gathered us here
Under the cross of Christ

2. Even though I never knew you
And you, you never knew me
Jesus our Lord,
Has joined us in one family

Long marimari bilong God
I salim Jisas i kam
Bungim yumi
aninit long diwai kros

Yu no save long mi
Na mi no save long yu
Tasol nau,
Jisas i bungim yumi

Chorus:

Yes, yes, yes, yes,
He’s gathered us here right now
As one family

Chorus:

Yes, yes, yes, yes,
He’s gathered us here right now
As one family

¹ *Amamas wantaim na lotu long God* is the Lutheran hymn book of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea, published in 2004. Words (Tok Pisin) and music unknown. English translation added here is by Greg Schiller.

Family
One family of God

Yes, yes, yes, yes
Yumi kam bung wantaim
Na kamap family
Famili
Famili bilong God

Family
One family of God

Yes, yes, yes, yes
Yumi kam bung wantaim
Na kamap family
Famili
Famili bilong God

More could be done with learning songs from Papua New Guinea. We had a surge of doing this for a few months after Covid-19 lockdown eased in Cairns. Some of the PNG community at Trinity Lutheran Cairns would sing some songs they knew and several of our musicians picked up the tunes. I then translated them to English and they have been incorporated into our 10 am service where we usually sing them in both translations. Perhaps they could be shared beyond Cairns to the wider English speaking community?

PNG members at times hold fellowship purely in the Tok Pisin language. They meet together around food, song and bible sharing. There are special times to come together to support each other such as when in mourning.

PNG Christians at Trinity Lutheran are a retired pastor, pastoral assistants, congregation secretary, lesson readers and worship service leaders. They provide morning tea, clean the church, arrange flowers, and are Synod delegates. Papua New Guineans have special styles of celebrating—with processions and songs, and symbolic actions. Every year, there is a special worship service to thank God for the good news coming to PNG. At this service and at services like confirmation, we include the PNG style into our congregation's celebrations. Papua New Guineans decorate the church and prepare meals with that special PNG style and flavour, and sing PNG language songs. Covid-19 restrictions have caused some hesitation and some of these ways have had to be restrained.

We want to find ways to learn from each other and appreciate each other's gifts and blessings. With different cultures, different languages, and different perspectives, this increases the need to create tolerance, acceptance, and understanding. We began to think of ways to engage with each other around food as a way to encourage interaction between cultures. This seemed like a way to create an openness to and acceptance of the diversity in our congregation. Unfortunately, since Covid-19, food gatherings have been more difficult to arrange.

At the beginning of this year our congregation was led to see what its focus should be, and one of the areas we highlighted was: to be a congregation in worship, ministry, and service where there is a deep understanding and respect for all cultures, with mutual exchange of ideas, development of relationships across different cultures, where no-one is left unchanged because we all learn from one another and grow together.

The term for this is 'intercultural'. We got this term and its definition from Spring Institute.² It was interesting to me that we usually use the terms 'cross-cultural', and 'multicultural', and we use them as if they mean the same thing. 'Intercultural' was a newer term we had not encountered so much—'cross-cultural' and 'multicultural' being more widely used and known. Do they mean the same thing? Spring Institute proposes that the different words suggest different perspectives we take when interacting with people from other cultures. 'Multicultural' suggests the existence of different cultures without much interaction between the different cultures. 'Cross-cultural' suggests learning to understand and acknowledge cultural differences perhaps more from the perspective of the dominant culture.

Intercultural describes 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. In an intercultural society, no one is left unchanged because everyone learns from one another and grows together.³

This term 'intercultural' then really clarified for us the perspective we want to take at Trinity Lutheran Cairns. And we have a lot to learn yet from one another and so to grow together.

Greg Schiller served the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea as Vicar at Memorial Lutheran church, Madang, as District Missionary in the Jiwaka District, and as Lecturer at Martin Luther Seminary, Lae, and Lutheran Highlands Seminary, Ogelbeng, with his years of service beginning in 1984 and ending in 2016. Greg is currently pastor of the Cairns Lutheran parish, Queensland.

² Paula Schriefer, 'What's the difference between multicultural, intercultural, and cross-cultural communication?', *Spring Institute*, 18 April 2016, accessed 23 June 2021, <https://springinstitute.org/whats-difference-multicultural-intercultural-cross-cultural-communication/>.

³ Ibid.