

“I don’t have the gift of languages!”

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, ESV)

Joe was alone in Canada. Having recently arrived from Taiwan, he needed friends. Although a qualified mechanical engineer in Taiwan, his credentials weren’t accepted by Canadian employers. When an acquaintance suggested they partner in a business, Joe accepted. But soon this “friend” proved false and Joe lost everything.

Like Joe, many new immigrants are lonely, vulnerable and depressed – and desperately seeking friendship and community. Providentially, Joe was introduced to Father Melvin Tai, a church planter in Toronto with Asian and Multicultural Ministries in Canada (AMMiC). Father Melvin, who is from Singaporean, was offering informal English classes with simple meals cooked by his daughters – and genuine friendship. Now, Joe is a baptised believer and being disciple in the faith.

Strategically located near the University of Toronto, Father Melvin’s ministry, The Quiet Place, eventually gained enough traction to form a small multicultural church plant, [Christ the Redeemer](#). The tiny congregation is comprised of Thai, Taiwanese, Caucasian, Japanese, Korean and Chinese – about two-thirds of whom are students.

After a stint in Thailand as a missionary sent by the Diocese of Singapore, Father Melvin and his family moved to Canada where he attended Wycliffe College in Toronto. He planned to leave after graduation, but when he saw the mission field, the nations gathered in Toronto, his heart was moved. After joining AMMiC, he began The Quiet Place ministry in September 2012 by standing on the sidewalk handing out flyers.

Initially there were seven students. This fall 31 came – almost more than Father Melvin can minister to without more help. As the participants learn English, they also form strong relationships and the doors open to discuss spiritual things. For those who wish to go further, the Bible becomes the textbook, and a catechism class is offered for any wishing to study Christianity.

[AMMiC](#)

AMMiC, under [Bishop Stephen Leung](#), is a ministry of the Anglican Network in Canada, one of ACNA’s northern dioceses. When God first called him to form AMMiC, Bishop Stephen remembers responding *“You’ve called the wrong guy. I don’t have the gift of languages!”*

But even with “the wrong guy” leading, since it was formed in late 2009 AMMiC has planted and helped nurture churches for Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Persian, South Asian and Sudanese immigrants. In the last six months, the pace has been furious, with six new churches planted.

Noting the changing demographic in North America Bishop Stephen feels a growing sense of urgency. Visible minorities now comprise almost 20 per cent of Canada’s population.

“When God speaks to me,” says Bishop Stephen, “He speaks in Cantonese.” So he is convinced that for first generation immigrants to flourish, they need a church community that worships in their mother tongue and provides a safe spiritual home, an oasis where they aren’t strangers.

When Joe was studying English with Father Melvin, they used an English language Bible. But when Joe wanted to go deeper spiritually, he needed a Bible that spoke to him in his own language.

Bishop Stephen has found over years of ministry that when the first generation immigrants are not firmly anchored in a spiritual community, the second generation drifts.

Taste of Life Fellowship

New immigrants very often end up in low-paying service industries. Four years ago, Good Shepherd Vancouver, where Bishop Stephen is rector, began an outreach to restaurant workers in the nearby community of Richmond, BC where over 60 per cent of the population is Asian. Because of their work shifts people can’t attend church, so the ministry holds services, Bible Studies and fellowship times after the evening shift ends – at 10:30pm. Despite the problems of finding suitable meeting space and restaurants extending their hours to 11:30pm, the ministry, known as Taste of Life Fellowship, continues.

To date ten people have been baptized and 12 confirmed – and lives have been dramatically changed. Eric, a top chef, had been known for his quick temper. At his baptism, in front of a crowd of 70, Eric apologized to his wife and son for his angry outbursts. A Chinese father humbling himself to ask his son’s forgiveness is almost unheard of in the Chinese culture – but is evidence of the profound transforming work of the Gospel.

Good Shepherd, South Asian (Calgary, AB)

AMMiC’s most recent church plant is Good Shepherd South Asian in Calgary, Alberta – which worships in Urdu, Panjabi and Hindi. Lay leader Rajiv Singh and his wife Anita, come from a strong Punjabi Anglican background. Moving to Canada was a shock to their spiritual life. Prior to the move, they worked in Muscat, Oman (in the Middle East) and had been active in a vibrant, busy church. The church the Singhs first attended in Calgary was spiritually tepid and theologically shaky – and soon shut down.

They found Calgary’s South Asian community had pretty much given up on church – in Canada at least. However, since holy days are deeply meaningful to South Asian Anglicans, many took their entire vacation allotment to return home each December so they could be part of the busy church-centred Christmas season in South Asia.

When Anita’s father, an Anglican priest, visited to meet his new grandson, he was deeply concerned at the lack of suitable churches in this presumably Christian country. Upon his return home, he contacted Bishop Azad Marshall (Iran), who in turn introduced Rajiv to Bishop Stephen and the work of AMMiC. That happened in early 2013 and within months a church was planted, meeting in the Singh’s home.

Worship music – the sung Psalms, “zaboors”, and hymns, “geet” – are deeply meaningful. But the priest is central to the South Asian Christian community. Without an esteemed priest, a congregation can’t grow. Thank God this fall Good Shepherd is welcoming its first priest who is coming from Bishop Azad’s diocese. And the search is on for a rental facility to accommodate the anticipated congregation.

Flying back to Calgary from the April 2013 AMMiC Assembly in Vancouver, Rajiv told Anita, *“We are making history. God is at work – and He is using us. Our community is asleep. This church will be a testimony for years to come.”* After three spiritually frustrating years in Canada, the Lord had answered their prayer for a theologically sound church in an Anglican diocese. They are counting on God to continue performing miracles.

Holy Trinity Filipino, Edmonton, AB

When the Rev Robert Gomowad came to Canada, he began a Bible study in his home. The study grew. Through his Episcopal bishop in the Philippines, Robert heard about and contacted Bishop Stephen. In October 2012, the Filipino Bible study became a church. At first they met in a chapel in the West Edmonton Mall. When they outgrew that, they were offered the use of a church building.

Worshipping in their Filipino dialect binds the church in community and opens their hearts to God. As Robert+ says, *“When we worship and study the Word in our own language, we understand better, we worship more fully, and we communicate with God at a deeper level.”* Traditional Filipino liturgical dance also is a source of much joy and a draw for non-church-goers.

God is at work, says Robert+. People have come to faith and a confirmation service is planned. But the definitive evidence that God is working, Robert+ says, has been the recent spate of persecution. *“When God is working, the enemy is also working.”*

Already Robert+ has heard from Filipinos in Red Deer (100 miles south) and Calgary (200 miles south) eager for a Bible-believing liturgical churches in their communities. The vision of planting more churches energizes Robert, but the reality is that his income now comes from his day job welding.

Tithing is hard for immigrants often earning minimum wage, whose professional credentials mean nothing in North America, and who must start over at the bottom. Others do not even have the status of immigrants; as temporary workers, they have had to leave their spouses and families back in the Philippines so they save every penny to send back home. Still Robert believes that the Lord is leading to plant more churches. He is teaching about tithing and praying that one day he can devote full time to ministry.

Church of All Nations (Japanese)

The Rev Shihoko Warren is a rarity. Born in Tokyo, she is a third generation Christian, the daughter of lay church planters. For ten years she and her husband, Ken, were involved in a church plant in Japan. Three years ago they moved to Vancouver. When she found many Japanese Canadians had fallen away from church, she knew God was calling her to *“bring them back to the Body of Christ”*.

Shihoko+ began services and Bible study at a Japanese nursing home where she says she is so blessed by her older congregation who, like the dry bones in Ezekiel, are coming back to life through study of God’s Word. Because many Japanese seekers are nervous about going to a church, seeing it as too big a commitment, a home Bible study has drawn both seekers and former church members.

Surprisingly, some non-believing husbands regularly accompany their Christian wives to the monthly church services – an anomaly in Japanese churches, where congregations are mostly female. One high hurdle for Japanese considering following Jesus is that, if they were to become Christians, they cannot be buried in the ancestral grave.

In answer to prayer, people have been healed. Two have been baptised, including an 87-year-old lady in the nursing home. Many are returning to their first love for God.

As an outreach, ESL classes are offered, as well as gardening. Yes, gardening. Shihoko's husband Ken is a horticulturalist and, since the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Japanese have become concerned about food production and the environment. Monthly work bees start with Bible reading, discussion and prayer, then six hours of tending the soil and plants. The joyous fall harvest celebration in early October drew 40 participants. The vision is to grow relationships and introduce budding gardeners to the Creator – and, maybe one day, develop a Christian environmental centre where people can learn about creation, stewardship and the Creator.

Good Shepherd (Cantonese) Calgary, AB

Last year, a Cantonese evangelist began monthly outreach potlucks in his home. Within four months these drew up to 30 people, half seekers. Now after seven months of regular Sunday services, eight adults have been baptised and the Holy Spirit is clearly at work.

Future

New immigrants from Anglican backgrounds are seldom aware of the Anglican Church in North America and look to their priests and bishops back home for guidance in finding a church community. Building relationships with global Anglican leaders is a priority for Bishop Stephen. Through multiple trips overseas, bringing bishops to Canada to minister to their ethnic community, and partnering with Asian dioceses in ministry, AMMiC's work is becoming known.

God willing, AMMiC anticipates working with another ACNA diocese to support a young couple who are preparing to plant a Chinese congregation in New England. God also seems to be opening doors for additional Sudanese and Chinese congregations in Canada.

At times Bishop Stephen finds the ministry opportunities God is unfolding almost overwhelming. Even though he doesn't have the gift of languages, he is comforted to remember that it is God's ministry and God's power is most clearly seen in our weakness.

For more information:

See the ANiC website: www.anglicannetwork.ca

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