

# ***FAITHFUL TRANSITION***

CAPACITY BUILDING  
KAREN ANGLICAN COMMUNITIES  
IN THE DIOCESE OF MELBOURNE  
The Rev'd Ron Browning  
Perry Institute Project  
October 2015



Karen Anglican Youth Werribee -  
Sung Prayer around the Cross (Taize style) 2015

A presentation emphasising potential recommendations regarding ethnic congregations in the diocese - based on the local recommendations which were for the two Karen congregations in the diocese.

Capacity building focuses on pastoral, spiritual and structural concerns as well as cultural. The research did not focus much on socio-economic concerns – these were taken up with a research paper by Dr Ree Bodde, 2012.

Approach - participant research model: 10 years working with the Karen people  
- with two congregations: Werribee – 600, Corio - 70

- Reflective Writing A
- Data Collection B
- Thematic Explorations C

## A. Reflective Writing

Face of Karen Anglicanism: long-term incarceration, sacramental, home thanksgivings, a gentle people, traditional, deep spirituality.

Structures and Decision Making: Werribee - passionate to have land/church; a fund for this purpose, hospitality of St Thomas Church Werribee, four attempts over 10 years to purchase land - difficulties in working with the diocese; Corio – impressive homework club.

My Experience: immersion but not a lot in the Karen language; bottomless pit of culture! alongside role grew as trusted adviser.

The Pillars: M.U., Men's Soc., Youth, Sunday School - all large with committees: "if one fall the whole falls."

Christian Character: thanksgiving for life, fear of the Lord, communal and hierarchical, cross-cultural interest and orientation.

## B. Collection Data : 8 individuals, 8 focus groups - Outcomes –

- Developing structures At Werribee, an authorised congregation established in 2017: "St Stephen's Karen Church"
- Sunday School facilities, Werribee, urgent need
- Leadership training
- Australian adviser/cross-cultural enabler: preaching, teaching, young adult counsellor, training, adviser to leaders especially on structural issues
- Karen Anglican Network/ East Aust
  - Volunteering Thai Burma Border
- Diocesan Multicultural Workshops
- Exploration of faith- culture on all levels of diocesan life: Karen mixture of faith and culture



Karen men donating tools to the Black Saturday Appeal

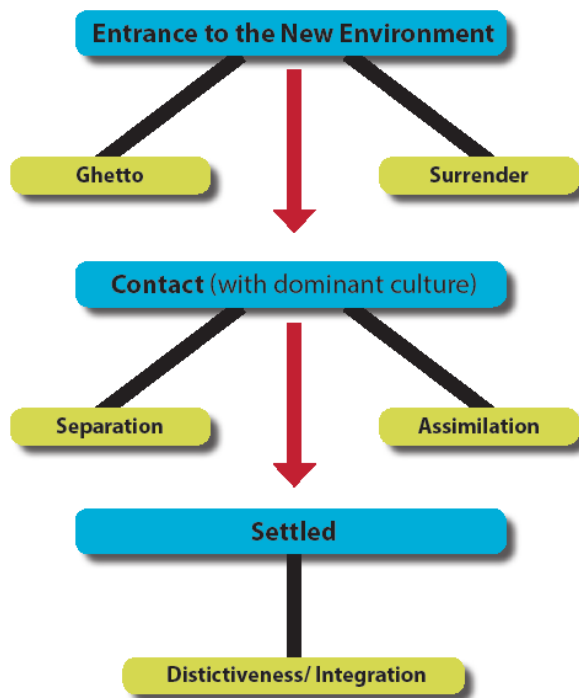
C. Thematic Explorations

- Faith and Culture...cross cultural observation & engagement, language 'Using the language of the native tongue in worship is necessary as it is the language of the soul and spirit'. (after Jarrod Diamond) cf. assimilationist attitudes.
- Sustained Welcome ... semi-ghettoism - a danger in Werribee, diocesan welcome, welcome does not always include valuing culture. Only one parish has partnered the Werribee Congregation.
- Trauma and its Legacy ....the body, the Eucharist

## A Schematic Outcome of the Research:

Pathway of progress as community - two stages in order to reach settled life:

### **Migrant/Refugee Community**



## Recommendations

LOCAL – not included in this presentation

WIDER – cross cultural appraisal of ministry

- audits of ethnic youth ministry and training
- on-going English learning for adults
- advisor, enabler in local contexts

- healing of memories programs
- bi-lingual liturgical resources (available)
- support and training for parishes with ethnic congregations
- cross-cultural Christian Education & Theological Education initiatives

## **CONCLUSION**

### Valuing Culture:

if our churches in many places in the diocese are decreasing in numbers we have a golden opportunity to learn from the faith and common life of larger new-arrival congregations.

‘Affirmation’      ‘Engagement’      ‘Equipping’

### Returning to Fundamental Questions

To which this research is a beginning to answer these questions:

- With 26 ethnic large congregations in the diocese (and increasing) – how do we enhance their future ministry in the diocese as vehicles of renewal?
- What can we Anglo-Australians learn from them (community, faith, suffering...)?
- What are the issues in leadership and ordination training?

*Christ, set in the midst of every culture,  
is himself the pearl, beyond price.  
He does not take over or dominate local culture or custom  
but fills it with his own life and power.  
+ David Penman*