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Connecting to belonging: a cross-disciplinary inquiry into rural Australian Anglican Church engagements with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

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Abstract

People from diverse backgrounds enrich the rural, regional, and remote communities where they relocate and settle. Research about rural diversity tends to focus on demographics (age, gender, country of origin) while ignoring personal narratives of integration, for example, engagements with religious institutions (such as the local Christian church). This article presents the research themes from an investigation using co-operative inquiry into rural diversity and the Anglican Church, with specific reference to the Australian experience. It is a cross-disciplinary dialogic exchange between social workers and theologians. Positive narratives about connection, welcome, participation, and belonging are shared.

Keywords: Church of England, engagement, diversity, rural communities, co-operative inquiry, Australia

In this article

Introduction

This article is a co-operative inquiry into Anglican Church engagement with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) in rural, regional, and remote localities, with specific reference to Australian experiences. Through conversation, this inquiry draws out themes about church and migration. Migration is a worldwide phenomenon which results in diversity in rural, regional, and remote communities. The diversity due to migration is described in the literature but rarely appears to be narrated and existing research tends to be urban focused (Dumont ▤ 2003; McAreavey ▤ 2012).

Social research into this field may focus on demographic characteristics such as population, income, and employment but does not always consider the role of religion (including the role of Christian Churches) (Kanagy, Firebaugh, and Nelsen ▤ 1994; Stonawski et al. ▤ 2014). Thoughtful investigations into themes such as social relations and engagement, social institutions, identity, social reality or culture in rural societies (e.g. Grace and Lennie ▤ 1998; Herbertcheshire ▤ 2003, 460) could be extended to include narratives about religion. Furthermore, relocation to rural areas also appears to be under-represented in existing research on migration.

The present inquiry seeks partly to address these gaps. Its purpose is to highlight positive narratives and themes collected from a cross-disciplinary dialogue between social workers and theologians about this social phenomenon. It aims to answer the following question: What are the co-inquirers' perceptions about the Anglican Church of Australia's engagements with people from diverse cultural backgrounds in rural, regional, and remote Australia?

Background information and literature search

Multiculturalism and culturally and linguistic diversity are significant themes for this research. Multiculturalism is a "structural and comprehensive response to cultural and ethnic diversity" (UNESCO 1995) that promotes equality (Macionis and Plummer 2005, 127). It is a—controversial—movement away from defining cultures or norms by European or colonial links (Macionis and Plummer 2005; Muse 2011; Kaur 2014). Multiculturalism is a theory which argues that it benefits a society, including its institutions, to contain multiple cultures within it (UNESCO 1995). There has been continuous critique of this theory in developed countries (UNESCO 1995). This questioning of multiculturalism occurs partly because a number of people perceive multiculturalism as threatening job stability, security, and national culture (Giddens 2006, 498; Kurti 2013).

The present research focuses on people from CALD backgrounds in rural, regional, and remote locations, also known as minority groups (United Nations 2012) or people from diverse backgrounds. CALD people are defined by the United Nations as groups of people who are in a non-dominant position, who differ from the majority of the population, and who are "endowed with ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics" (2012, 7, 10). In 2013, 232 million international migrants existed globally (United Nations 2013, 1). Most international migrants (over 51%) in that year lived in the following ten countries: the United States, Russia, Germany, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Australia, and Spain (United Nations, 2013, 3–5). Due to the differences in definitions between countries, it is not easy to know what percentage of international migrants relocate annually to rural, regional, and remote locations.

Australia is a "postmodern, secular and multicultural society" (Bouma 2006, 3). In 2011, 1.15 million people in Australia who were born overseas lived outside the major cities (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011a). [1] The authors of this particle perceive contemporary rural Australia to be an ideal social field in which to explore connections between the Anglican Church of Australia (a Christian denomination formally known as the Church of England) and rural diversity.

'Rural', 'regional', and 'remote' are ambiguous terms. Internationally, there exist various definitions, based on individual country needs (United Nations Statistics Division, n.d.). In industrialised countries, for example, the concept 'rural' is based on the concentration of a population and is often compared to 'urban', which is generally associated with a different way of life and a higher standard of living (United Nations Statistics Division, n.d.). The *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Report* describes the task of defining rural and remote areas as 'challenging' because of the diversity that exists outside the capital cities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008, 81).

For the Australian context, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines a 'major urban' population as one counting 100,000 or more people, 'other urban' as referring to urban centres with a population of 1,000–99,999, a 'bounded locality' as having a population of 200–999, and 'rural' as designating populations below 200 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011b). According to the ABS, the word 'regional' is related to major metropolitan labour market numbers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011b, 2011d, 2011e) and the terms 'remote' and 'remoteness' are determined by a geographical measure called the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011b). Some researchers deem the ABS's criteria to be "unnecessarily restrictive" (Cheers 1998, 12), while others like those conducting the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) are known to use other definitions at times (e.g. Powell et al. 2009).

For the purposes of this article, the term 'rural' combined with 'regional and remote' includes all localities outside capital cities, which have a population equal to or less than 99,999 (that is any population size not included within the notion of 'major urban', as defined by the ABS's definition discussed above). This recognizes that rural, regional, and remote areas have unique challenges and opportunities that are different to major urban settings or capital cities. [2]

The Australian Bureau of Statistics identifies cultural diversity as self-perceived and groups it under the heading of ethnicity (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011b). [3]

Within Australia, some advocate that diversity be celebrated as it enhances Australian culture and social well-being and extends Australia's economic productivity through the skills of people from different backgrounds (Henslin, Possamai, and Possamai-Inesedy ▤ 2014, 285–286; UNESCO ▤ 1995). Conversely, others consider homogeneity to be important (UNESCO ▤ 1995; Bouma ▤ 2011).

Australia appears to be experiencing a shift in the political discourse away from promoting multiculturalism (Kaur ▤ 2014). The focus seems to be moving to overseas business and investment; funding of services for programmes that support multicultural communities is being redirected; the Racial Discrimination Act is currently in question and Australia has recently adopted a more 'hard-line' approach to asylum seekers and refugees (Kaur ▤ 2014).

Australia contains diverse groups of people, many of whom are from relatively small ethnic groups (UNESCO ▤ 1995). The percentage of people in rural areas who were born overseas remains fairly constant as remoteness increases. This trend is illustrated in Table 1 (birthplace of person completing census 2011). The same pattern emerges with 'language spoken at home' (the exception being very remote locations where many people speak an Australian Indigenous language) (see Table 2: language spoken at home 2011).

Table 1. Birthplace of person completing census (%) 2011.
CSV   Display Table

Table 2. Language spoken at home (2011).
CSV   Display Table

These statistics, however, only tell a small part of the story of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds living in rural Australia (Australian Institute of Family Studies ▤ 2011) and are unable fully to capture the religious experience of CALD people, which necessitates further qualitiative research in this field. With small numbers of CALD residents in any one rural location, people often lack immediate support networks. Distance from major centres means it can be difficult to access government and non-government support services. The role of other community-based organisations such as local churches becomes increasingly significant. Table 3 shows that, in 2011, identification with the Christian faith in general—and Anglicanism in particular—was higher in rural areas than in major cities.

Table 3. Religious identification (2011).
CSV   Display Table

Although most Australians think of 'church' in terms of a building or denomination, the earliest use of the word 'church' simply meant 'gathering' (Dickson ▤ 2011, 152). Geoff Broughton defines church as "the earthly gathering of God's people called his body" (2014, 138). Christian people from the beginning came together geographically in mutual love to pray, sing, support each other, learn about Christ, and eat together (Frame ▤ 2000, 19–20; Dickson ▤ 2011, 152). From their inception, the members of those gatherings were culturally and linguistically diverse (Banks ▤ 1995, 115). These early gatherings also engaged with their local communities through visiting programmes, food distribution, hospitals, and orphanages (Dickson ▤ 2011, 161). Authors like Howard Snyder argue that identification and concern for the poor are key signs of the church being faithful to God's kingdom (▤ 1996, 18).

Teachings in the Bible concern the church's role in modelling an alternative social reality, for example, Galatians 5:13: "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love." This teaching led the researchers of the present study to wonder about the extent to which this vision is reflected in the Anglican churches' engagement with CALD people.

Given its origins in the English Reformation, the Anglican Church in contemporary Australia has a disproportionate number of members from an English-speaking background (Frame 2000; King et al. 2010, 27; Anglicare Diocese of Sydney 2010, 23). Against the tendency towards homogeneity, church leaders and agencies have drawn on the origins of Christianity as the Church reflects on implications for Christian ministry and mission in a diverse Australia (e.g. Anglicare Diocese of Sydney 2010). An example is a review of multicultural ministry in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, Australia, in which Jim Houston seeks to ground such ministry in the Christian doctrine of 'the image of God' and Jesus' practice of shattering the barriers that divide people from each other (Anglicare Diocese of Sydney 2010, 53; Houston 1993). Priorities for the contemporary Anglican Church in Australia include: welcoming parishioners from culturally diverse backgrounds; programmes of education on multiculturalism; the support of ethnic-specific ministries such as worship services in a particular language (Houston 1993, 55–56).

Evidence from outside Australia indicates that the practice of churches with respect to racial and cultural diversity often falls short of their rhetoric (Emerson and Smith 2000). Despite this, the authors of this article—as theologians and social workers—believe that a number of Australian Anglican churches located in rural, regional, and remote areas engage with people from CALD backgrounds and that this is a significant phenomenon worth researching. Churches in small Australian farming communities make significant contributions to social cohesion and the building of social capital within and between different groups (e.g. Mitchell 2005, 213–217).

Community engagement can be seen as part of community development (e.g. Velander and Schineanu 2014). Such engagement is informed by concepts of community development, including social justice, participation, collective action, and partnership (Cheers 1998, 142). Community engagement is concerned with human rights which acknowledge all people as members of the human family and include solidarity between them (Mungai 2014, 229). It is not the sole province of social work and it is undertaken by a variety of professionals (Cheers 1998, 146) and organisations or institutions.

For the present research, we define engagement as a

> two way process: by which the aspirations, concerns, needs and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and in all sectors … and by which … organisations involve citizens, clients, communities and other stakeholders in these processes… Engagement seeks to address barriers and build the capacity and confidence of people to participate in, negotiate and partner with, institutions that affect their lives. (United Nations 2005)

Religious institutions like the Anglican Church of Australia regularly engage with local people at all levels and have the potential to embody justice, love, and gentleness (Frame 2000, 330). As an example of Church engagement, Ndungi Mungai points to churches engaging with young Sudanese men through sport (2014, 227). The authors' awareness of other examples of the rural Anglican Church engaging with people from diverse backgrounds inspired further research into this topic.

The present qualitative research into engagements between Anglican churches in rural Australia and CALD communities adopted a methodology which facilitated dialogic exchange, which is consistent with the values of action research, including participation and respect (Alston and Bowles 2013, 198). The authors deemed co-operative inquiry the most suitable method, as it has been successfully used in other research about social phenomena (e.g. Hearn, Short, and Healy 2014; Baldwin 2006; Chan and Pruitt 2006; Jones-Mutton et al. 2015).

Co-operative inquiry is qualitative and participatory research. It is occasionally referred to as a collaborative, co-operative relationship or a reflective approach to research (Oates 2002, 27–28; Heron and Reason 2014, 2). This methodology is research 'with' people rather than 'about' people (Reason and Heron 2014). Everyone is involved in the design and management of the research or inquiry (Heron and Reason 2014, 2) as

co-researchers, co-subjects, co-inquirers (Oates 2002, 27), and co-authors.

Unlike quantitative research, co-operative inquiry does not label people as subjects or use similar terms for people and participants are not selected to join the research. According to this methodology, co-inquirers with a mutual interest or concern join together to form an inquiry group, share, and critically reflect on their experience (Research Centre for Leadership in Action 2013; Reason and Heron 2014). Co-operative inquiry recognizes that the experiences may be professional or personal and it respects the wisdom and practice of all involved (Bray et al. 2000, 42). The inquiry group generates meaning about the area of mutual concern, which develops ideas that can inform practice (Reason and Heron 2014). This ensures that the produced knowledge is experientially grounded and avoids members of the research being disempowered or misrepresented (Oates 2002, 28).

Co-operative inquiry research cycles through phases (Reason and Bradbury, 2006, 145). In phase one, the co-researchers come together to inquire into an agreed area. They agree on the propositions that are to be explored and on the process of the exploration. In phase two, the co-researchers become the co-subjects of the inquiry and record its outcomes. (Reason and Bradbury 2006, 145) In phase three, the co-subjects actively engage with the inquiry, openly sharing experiences and evolving inquiry themes. In phase four, the co-subjects resume the co-researchers' role and begin to formulate, reflect upon, and refine the themes. (Reason and Bradbury 2006, 146) The inquiry repeatedly goes through this process of reflection–action–reflection until the themes are finalised and a rounded inquiry is created (Heron 1996, 95; Reason and Bradbury 2006, 146) and a paper providing transformative ideas has been developed (Heron 1996, 101).

There are a number of criticisms of this method from both theological and sociological perspectives. In having a collective focus, the research risks missing the reflections of individual researchers/inquirers (for example, the potential of group consensus also known as 'groupthink' may dominate individual voices) and minimising the personal side of the reflective process, for example, people's personal spirituality (Green 2009, 154). Furthermore, it could be argued that in following a structured circular process, there is the risk that the research focuses on the works of the inquirers rather than on the grace they experience (Green 2009, 155). Lastly, it could be argued that researchers are often encouraged to be suspicious of the motives of inquirers and if these motives have a spiritual element, the research risks being undervalued (Green 2009, 154).

Methodology

The five authors shared a common interest in this social field and notably two are from CALD backgrounds. They decided to join together for a co-operative inquiry and to research 'with' each other about this topic. Two are ordained in the Anglican Church of Australia: Geoff Broughton describes himself as an activist scholar who lectures in practical theology and prepares students—including students from a CALD background —to minister in rural Australia; Mark Short is the National Director of an Anglican mission organisation for rural Australia, which resources a number of multicultural rural congregations, and was previously the pastor of a multi-ethnic, regionally located church which included a culture-specific non-English speaking congregation. The other three authors are social workers: Bill Anscombe is a lecturer at a regional university and a former member of a refugee resettlement group; Monica Short is a lecturer at a regional university, has CALD heritage, and previously taught and co-ordinated a multicultural Sunday School; Yangi Ochala is an experienced social worker in a rural-based non-government organisation, who migrated to Australia as an adult through a refugee resettlement programme. Each of the authors is an active member of the Anglican

Church. Each acknowledges his or her own unique cultural background and professional and personal experiences related to this topic.

Due to the distance between them, the authors agreed to weekly virtual meetings for three months, depending on their availability. Initially, they spent time getting to know each other and sharing their interest in the topic. At each meeting, ideas related to the topic were discussed; rich themes were generated and recorded. Between meetings, these themes were reflected upon and developed, allowing each of the co-operative inquiry phases to take its turn. This facilitated vibrant connections between social work and theological critical thinking. The transformative themes which developed from the discussions are presented below.

Findings and discussions

All involved in this inquiry reflected upon theoretical and biblical concepts and upon related theological and sociological literature. In doing this, each author identified the elusiveness of the topic at times, which was partly due to the variety of definitions for key themes such as 'church', as seen through the co-operative inquiry conversation exchange outlined below.

> **Bill:** Church is where two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus and that God's people go out into the world as His representatives.
>
> **Mark:** To me the Church is a community that gathers, serves, and is sent.
>
> **Geoff**: It transcends cultural distinctiveness.

The variety of ideas highlighted for everyone the importance of respectful cross-disciplinary conversations about the topic in accordance with an informed methodology. It also showed the need to converse across disciplines, allowing a more complete picture to emerge about the engagements of the rural Anglican Church of Australia with people from CALD backgrounds. This can be seen in the following conversation about the question of what culture is within a church context according to individual, Christian theological, and social work perspectives:

> **Mark**: Culture to me is discovered and articulated in the encounters between cultures. I become aware of my culture when I share with others with a different culture.
>
> **Yangi**: For me, culture is the way you understand yourself and that understanding determines what you do, how you dress, your family life... It changes depending on your understanding and where you are at. Something I did in Uganda or Sudan I do not do now in Australia because things have changed in my new setting.

Ongoing engagement with the topic concepts, including culture, a desire to reflect with wonder on the Christian Church through a multicultural lens, the dialogic exchanges of experiences between the authors, and the continual cycling through the reflection–action–reflection process allowed themes to formulate. The following phases of engagement emerged from the inquiry conversations: connection, welcome, participation, belonging. These themes are presented in more detail in the following sections.

Connection

When moving from one country to a rural, regional or remote location in another country, people may not have the connections many take for granted. They may not know where the shops are, how to drive or who to telephone when a pipe leaks. They may not have the language skills required to advocate their needs or the knowledge of

how rurally located institutions work. The church, because it pre-exists within a location, can be a rich source of knowledge about community linkage or integration (Dumont 📖 2003) and can thus make opportunities available that would otherwise not occur. This is shown in the following comment about resettlement:

> **Bill**: Our first group of refugees re-settled by the local Anglican Church were from a war-torn country. The boys, young children, had very bad teeth requiring extraction, largely due to having been given sugar cubes as a comforter. I was enormously grateful for a number of people in the Church who crossed ethnic and religious divides and who genuinely showed the love of Christ and helped these people have their needs met—even when it was not reciprocated in any way.

Various catalysts initiate connections between churches and people from CALD backgrounds. The churches' responses to these initial connections can reflect the values of a Christian community, including the demonstration of its commitment to forming relationships. The following extract from our co-operative inquiry conversations is an example of this:

> **Mark:** The leadership team of our church (parish council) were approached by a particular group who wished to start a worship service in their own language. The initiative challenged the parish council. Some felt the church service would isolate church members from each other while others affirmed the right of believers to do church in the language and form that was most meaningful to them. The service started and over time the service became a valued and important part of the church life.

Connections may start with a single isolated contact, such as the one mentioned above. These contacts may or may not develop into relationships. Welcome goes beyond contact and implies the hope of ongoing and inclusive relations. This is the topic of the next section.

Welcome

Biblical texts like Matthew 8:11–12 [4] encourage Christians to provide a warm welcome to all people. John Koenig (📖 2001) argues that New Testament Christian hospitality is about establishing relationships between people and the church, where unexpected levels of mutual welcoming occur. The theme of welcome is explored in the following discussion about contact after church and the inclusion of international flags within a church building.

> **Yangi**: If a person is new and, regardless of their background, is warmly welcomed, and is contacted again after the church; then I believe the Church has a welcoming culture. It creates engagement.

> **Mark**: That reminds me of an Anglican Church located in an outback mining town. Individual locations can have a much higher percentage of people from a CALD background. Almost 40% of the population of this town were born overseas. In this Anglican congregation of about 60 people, there were over a dozen nationalities represented. The walls of the church building were decorated with the flags of different nations and it was clear that the church celebrated its multicultural identity. CALD people attending the church were generally skilled mining workers with excellent English, but they were nevertheless appreciative of the 'home away from home' they experienced there.

For Koenig, 'Sharing the Feast of the Kingdom' involves being ready to welcome others, especially people from diverse backgrounds, daring to build bridges of understanding—including bridges with alienated people—and opening doors for compassionate sharing (📖 2001, 15, 85, 127–128). This may mean sharing meals, reading the Bible together,

praying with someone about concerns, helping with governmental and administrative paperwork or assisting someone to learn English. This example from our inquiry conversations demonstrates this:

> **Mark**: A man moved from overseas to Australia. On arrival he was feeling sad and lonely and went to an Anglican church and talked to the minister about his situation. The minister listened kindly and then shared with the man about God and how to have a relationship with Him. The man moved on to a small rural town for work and his wife eventually joined him there. They were warmly welcomed by the local church. They have been experiencing ongoing racism in their workplace, which is understandably upsetting. The rural based Anglican church has been actively caring for them, accepting them, praying for them, and supporting them in regards to this.

We as inquirers (who are also the authors and the researchers) note that narratives such as the one above demonstrate that a warm and supportive welcome by the congregation towards people from diverse backgrounds can be embodied within local Anglican churches. Individuals from diverse backgrounds wish to be accepted and valued for the persons that they are and to have others share time and experiences with them. They may wish to have societal norms, including Church norms, explained to them so they can understand, respond appropriately, and feel included. Such actions allow people to participate and fully engage in church and their surroundings in a meaningful way. This leads to the next theme: participation.

Participation

People from diverse backgrounds who choose to connect with a church are not always dependent on their church—they often contribute to it. This occurs in structured ways through people being on morning tea rosters, teaching Sunday School, being part of the leadership team, leading church music, leading services, preaching, reading the Bible to the community or praying. This contribution can also occur in unstructured ways, through people visiting someone who is sick in hospital, spontaneously dropping around a meal to someone who is 'time poor' or praying with someone at the school gate. This is shown in Yangi's experience:

> Getting involved in Sunday School has been a blessing. It has been wonderful assisting the young people in their Christian walk by helping them to understand more of God's love for them and learn how they can show this love to others. It has also helped me to become a part of the church and have opportunity to participate in a number of activities.

Additionally, as CALD people continually adapt to their communities, they appreciate the sense that they can move from one level of participation to another, as illustrated by the following comment from Monica:

> Participation changes, for example, someone who receives instruction from people in the church on how to learn to drive to becoming the person who teaches others to drive; or the person who has received help in learning English to the person who reads an English Bible [at] the front of the church.

The researchers also considered the question why people from diverse backgrounds may not be encouraged fully to participate within rural, regional, and remote Anglican churches. For example, churches may present themselves on the surface as appreciating the inclusion of diverse cultures. However, hierarchies of power and privilege can still exist. The clergy and powerful lay leadership and congregation members may seek to preserve educated, white, male (and increasingly female) privilege. Another example of partial inclusion is when churches do not adapt to cultural diversity, with people from diverse backgrounds who join the church being expected to learn to fit into the church. Yangi shares her experience of this:

Coming from an African background where going to church is a 'big deal' and everyone is excited for Sunday, I was initially very disappointed at my first experience of an Anglican church in a Western regional location. The service was 'quiet'. Songs were sung during the service but there was no vibrancy to it. I felt no joy. I was used to singing, dancing, sharing of testimonies as part of the services and a fellowship that went on for hours... The culture of doing things in this church may be different to my past experiences and indeed it may be even difficult to change, but I can now say one thing is clear: the JOY of the LORD is evident [though expressed differently].

This research recognized that church is a place where people can both participate and experience a sense of belonging—the theme of the next section.

Belonging

We as authors experience the Anglican Church as an international, diverse, and evolving community which is part of the people whom God has called from 'every tribe, language, people and nation'. [5] Church has the opportunity to transcend and embrace diversity, for every person who is a 'new creation in Christ' [6] belongs. At times this may mean overcoming the desire to hold on to labels or heritage that previously affirmed the congregation, but such labels and heritage are exclusionary and cause barriers to the Christian worship of God. Communities and people need a sense of identity and a sense of solidarity. The Church has the potential to provide both. For the Church is called to keep in tension such dualities as faith and works, being perfect and being sinful, judgement and mercy, truth and love—identity, solidarity, and belonging. This is explained further in the following inquiry conversation:

> **Yangi**: If you see a picture of everyone who is on the parish council and if you see people from different backgrounds, not the same ... that says something about diversity ... it means the Church is inclusive. It is also about who is standing upfront. That in itself is a clear picture of the Church including people as part of the members. Give all people from all backgrounds the chance to participate and belong. Having women from all backgrounds leading is important. Including all children is important, for example, in prayers.

In this multicultural context, the Church has the potential to play a vital role in removing social labels about people and in helping people overcome social barriers to belonging, as seen in the following comments by Yangi:

> When one has sought and found refuge, one ceases to be a 'refugee'. I have known many people ... who have stopped going to particular places, including church, because this label is being used to identify them, even after they have been living in Australia for many years and are citizens.

The Church is called to engage with different cultures and in doing so to bring people together in Christian community—without labels. We (the authors) shared stories, such as the one below, about how we, as church members, were positively challenged through such engagements.

> **Bill**: At the graduation party of three Australian citizens from a diverse background, I was impressed with the centrality of God, prayer and celebration... Each graduate spoke for at least 20 minutes. They identified individuals ... who had helped them achieve an education... Credit was shared with the whole community.

We (the authors) also shared stories and ideas about hospitality and how over time it opened up the opportunity for people to belong to a church. This led to the following perception:

> **Geoff**: Churches do not become good at hospitality in an instant, but learn it

in small increments of daily faithfulness.

In summary, people from CALD backgrounds may appreciate being welcomed through hospitality, opportunities to experience both connection with Anglican churches and a sense of belonging, the encouragement to flourish in their faith, and the ability to participate in activities.

Comments

This research contains a number of limitations as it provides details of the positive experiences of a small number of inquirers. Like much qualitative research, this inquiry does not claim to represent the diversity of thinking and religious experience that exists within all rural, regional, and remote localities. Nor does it describe the full spectrum of problems that can be associated with church engagements. We consider, however, that there is room in the current discourses about community engagement and rurality to value cross-disciplinary exchanges about religion and religious communities. In undertaking this research we did not attempt to speak on behalf of all residents in rural, regional, and remote communities or to deny people's abilities to represent their own religious experiences. We look forward to exchanges with other interested parties about this topic.

Overall, this investigation affirmed for the inquiring theologians and social workers that people from CALD backgrounds have significant formal and informal community roles, abilities, and faith. If given the opportunity to participate, CALD people can enrich a church and a community. Our joint inquiry also highlighted for us that there is a place for privileging cross-disciplinary narratives of positive examples of connection, welcome, participation, and belonging, as these themes provide a platform for engagement that invites others to join in.

This co-operative inquiry also reminded the inquirers that the Anglican Church is a presence within their localities with the potential to support the transition of people from diverse backgrounds into rural, regional, and remote communities. We personally found their experiences of fully engaging through church with others from diverse backgrounds valuable, transforming, and renewing.

Recommendations

This inquiry recommends that conversations about rurality and religion, including church, community, engagement, and diversity, continue to occur across disciplines and with the hope of furthering mutual learning and understanding. We recommend that churches proactively connect with and listen to the voices of people from diverse backgrounds within their local communities. We further recommend that these churches, which connect with and welcome people from diverse backgrounds, assume that their mutual relationships will change over time.

Conclusion

The Anglican Church is an international Christian community transcending cultural distinctiveness, which gathers people and serves and sends people out in the name of Jesus. It includes people from CALD backgrounds residing in rural, regional, and remote locations in Australia. Inquiring into this social field allowed the authors to reflect on the cultural and linguistic diversity within the Anglican Church of Australia. This research

recognizes that a warm hospitable welcome by an Anglican Church which is associated with a sense of connection can lead to positive, mutual, and participatory relationships and a sense of belonging for people from a CALD background. As authors, theologians, and social workers, we perceive that a cross-disciplinary approach to this social field provides a richer understanding of church engagement. There is also the realisation that barriers to Christian church engagements are not insurmountable and the acknowledgement that, when these barriers are overcome, the outcome can result in wonderful stories about connection, welcoming, participation, and belonging being exchanged.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

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Geoff Broughton is Lecturer in Practical Theology at Charles Sturt University and an ordained Anglican minister in the inner city of Sydney, Australia. His research interests include the connections between Christian teachings and justice. He also teaches a Graduate Certificate in Professional Supervision at St Marks National Theological Centre and is involved in clergy training and formation for rural and remote Anglican dioceses across Australia.

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Bill Anscombe is adjunct Associate Professor at Charles Sturt University, Australia. He is a social worker, with qualifications in Social Work, Management, Theology, Policy and a doctoral degree. He has 20 years of practice in areas of corrections and child protection in both field and management positions, with academic research projects running alongside. He is currently a Chief Investigator with an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant.

Notes

1. Australian major cities are defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) as all Australian capital cities except for Darwin, plus the locations Wollongong and Newcastle.

2. In 2011, 7.59 million (34%) of Australians resided outside Australian capital cities (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011c, 2012). Organisations, however, like the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2011, 2) indicate that "little is known" about people/families and their experiences of living in the bush compared to those living in Australian cities.

3. The Bureau draws on the Macquarie Dictionary definition of ethnicity, which is: 1. relating to or peculiar to a human population or group, especially one with a common ancestry, language, etc.; 2. relating to the origin, classification, characteristics, etc., of such groups; 3. of or relating to members of the Australian community who are migrants or the descendants of migrants and whose first language is not English; 4. recognisable as coming from an identifiable culture. (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011b, 4; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016, paragraphs 8–10)

4. Matthew 8:11–12 states: "When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 'Lord', he said, 'my servant lies at home paralysed, suffering terribly.' Jesus said to him, 'Shall I come and heal him?' The centurion replied, 'Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go', and he goes; and that one, 'Come', and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this', and he does it.' When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, 'Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Then Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.' And his servant was healed at that moment."

5. Revelation 7:9–10 in the Bible states: "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."

6. 2 Corinthians 5:17 in the Bible states: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"