

Migration: An Opportunity for the Gospel

Phillip Scheepers

1. Introduction

Australia is experiencing a significant flow of inward migration. According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship a total of 146,610 people moved to Australia during the 2009-2010 financial year with a view to permanently settling here.¹ A similar number of people will make the move during this financial year. To put these numbers in perspective: The urban area of Geelong had a population of 137,220 at the time of the 2006 Census. You could therefore say that enough migrants to populate a substantial regional city come to Australia every year.

There are, of course, many different opinions on the issue of migration. The purpose of this article is not to participate in this debate but rather to state the case that the current level of inward migration presents the Christian church with the opportunity to share the Gospel with people who might have had very little exposure to the message of Jesus Christ in their countries of origin and who may be quite open to new ideas and influences.

Many Christians and churches recognize the fact that migration presents us with a Gospel opportunity but are unsure of where to start and how to go about attempting to reach migrant communities. The material presented below is not a comprehensive answer to this question but it does represent some of the first basic steps that a church can take in attempting to take the Gospel to a migrant community.

¹ For a discussion of Australian Migration Statistics see the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's *Migration Update 2009-2010*. Available online at: <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/immigration-update/update-2009-10.pdf> (Accessed on 2 October 2010)

2. A Brief Biblical Survey

You cannot read very far into the Bible without becoming aware of the fact that the biblical message is not exclusively addressed to settled people, nor does the Bible only describe settled lives. In fact, even the foundational event in the coming into existence of the people of Israel presupposes movement and migration as God tells Abraham to *'leave your country and people'* (Genesis 12:1-3).² There is also a rich vein of teaching in the Old Testament about the treatment of people who have been made 'strangers and aliens' through movement to places far away from their ancestral homes (e.g. Exodus 23:9). This theme is picked up in the New Testament where Jesus makes it clear that concern for, and action on behalf of, outsiders should be a key part of our response to His message (cf. Matthew 25:35-40). It is also made clear that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is an 'international Gospel'. A message that should go out to the 'ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). This, once again, presupposes movement as Christians cross boundaries of language, culture and ethnicity to share their faith in Jesus Christ. We can, finally, also point to the many statements describing believers as *'strangers in this world'* (cf. 1 Peter 1:1). One possible implication of this teaching is that we should have special concern and empathy with 'aliens and strangers' of all stripes. This very brief survey should leave us with the distinct impression that the Bible has much to say about the kinds of issues that will invariably arise when we think about migration and the sharing of the Gospel with those who live far away from their countries of origin.

3. Types of Migration

Before we can begin our discussion on ministry to migrants it might be useful to briefly discuss the different types of migration in our world today.

Controlled Migration: Controlled migration is based on government programs to attract skilled migrants to (primarily) developed economies.

²Christopher Wright says the following about the key part that Genesis 12:1-3 plays in God's redemptive purposes and the spread of his message all around the world: "*Blessing for the nations is the bottom line, textually, and theologically of God's promise to Abraham*", Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God - Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, Nottingham: IVP, 2006, 194.

Examples of this include work permit programs, the American ‘Green Card’ lottery and the Australian ‘Skilled Migrant’ visa program.³ People who migrate through these official channels tend to be from higher socio-economic groups and are often highly educated.

Uncontrolled/Semi Controlled Population Shifts: In some parts of the world there are such significant ‘push and pull’ factors (see below for a fuller description of the concept) that are exerted upon entire populations that mass movements across borders result. Two current examples of this trend are: Millions of Zimbabweans moving to South Africa since the late 1990’s (mainly due to push factors) and the even larger migration of Mexicans into the United States (mainly due to pull factors). This type of migration is often very socially disruptive both in the country of origin and in the host country.⁴

Refugees and Asylum Seekers: War, revolution, persecution and famine are all powerful push factors causing people to leave their countries in order to seek safety elsewhere. Most refugees simply cross porous borders in some of the world’s trouble spots in order to get to the nearest safe country and they often end up in refugee camps in the process. A minority will pursue the opportunity to formally seek asylum in countries that take in refugees under conventions administered by the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (UNHCR).⁵ Some will also pursue a ‘private’ route to asylum by making their own way to (mostly) Western countries and claiming asylum

³For an overview of Australia’s skilled migration system see the factsheet entitled ‘*Australian Immigration Factsheet Number 24*’. Published in 2011 by the Australian Department for Immigration and Citizenship. Available at http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/24overview_skilled.htm (Accessed on 4 October 2011)

⁴This is true to the extent that people in ‘host’ countries may feel culturally threatened by the massive influx of people from different cultures. Samuel Huntington argues, for example, that Hispanic migration is bringing the United States to the point where the majority culture will be fundamentally and irrevocably changed over the next few decades. (See: Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004)

⁵Australia takes in a significant number of refugees and Asylum seekers every year. According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship: “*In the 2009–10 program year, the Humanitarian Program delivered 13 770 visas. This number included 9236 visas granted to persons offshore and 4534 program countable visas granted to people seeking protection in Australia.*” (*Australian Immigration Factsheet Number 61*, published in 2011 by the Australian Department for Immigration and Citizenship; available at <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/>, accessed on 4 October 2011).

upon arrival. Ministering to this group can obviously be very challenging as refugees and asylum seekers will often still be dealing with the negative emotional fallout from their experiences long after making it to safety.

Internally Displaced People: Many people who flee difficult circumstances (famine, war, persecution etc.) do not make it across an international border but, instead, become refugees in their own countries. There are millions of such ‘displaced people’ around the world.⁶ Their migration may not have been across borders but internally displaced people may still find themselves in places where the language, culture and customs differ markedly from their own. Add to this the fact that they had to flee their homes and it becomes clear that many of the traumas and challenges of migration will also be part of their experience.

‘Global Nomads’: This term refers to people who see themselves as long term travellers (e.g. ‘backpackers’) or who may refer to themselves as ‘working their way around the world’ (e.g. international staff members of multinational companies). ‘Global Nomads’ may not be migrants in the strict sense of the word but they still often form a distinct community of ‘strangers’ with very specific needs. This group is often ministered to by the ‘international churches’ that can be found in many large cities across the world.

It should be clear from the above that migration is ‘alive and well’ in our world today and that different groups of migrants might have different needs and different levels of responsiveness to the Gospel.

4. Initial thoughts on the Gospel Implications of Worldwide Migration

Before we discuss the different ways in which we can reach migrants with the Gospel it might be worthwhile to briefly take a broader look and ask the

⁶According to the UNCHR: “About two-thirds of the world’s forcibly uprooted people are displaced within their own country. They are known as internally displaced people (IDP) and UNHCR has been playing an increasingly important role in recent years in assisting them. According to the latest figures released by the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), there were 26 million IDPs around the world in 2008, unchanged from 2007”, UNHCR, *Internally Displaced Figures*; available at <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c23.html>, accessed on 4 October 2011.

question on what some of the Gospel implications of worldwide migration might be. I believe that as Christians we should think deeply about the following migration related issues:

Migration waves may include a significant proportion of Christians:

Christians also participate in, or get caught up in, worldwide waves of migration. In some cases this seems like an obvious statement (e.g. Zimbabwean mass migration to South Africa). We should, however, also take careful note of the fact that Christian migrants may also be significantly represented in migration waves from mostly non-Christian societies. Christians are, for example, disproportionately represented among migrants from the Arab World.⁷ The fact that there are often many Christians among migration waves has significant Gospel implications and we shall discuss some of these in a later section. Suffice it to say for the moment that we should adopt strategies that are specifically directed at Christian migrants instead of simply approaching them in the same way as we would unbelieving migrants.

Migration often brings Christians from closed societies into contact with the Gospel for the first time:

There are many parts of the world where the Gospel is not freely available through public witness and preaching. It is, for example, illegal to engage in public Christian worship in Saudi Arabia. It is, therefore, often the case that people from countries where high levels of Christian persecution take place can be much more effectively reached outside their own countries. To put it in another way, it is easier (humanly speaking at least) to reach Afghans in Australia than would be the case in Afghanistan itself. This means that migration presents us with a key strategic opportunity to reach almost completely unreached people groups. Christian witness to such communities might even have very positive ramifications ‘back home’ as new believers take the Gospel back to their own people.

⁷ This is also the case in Australia. There are thriving Evangelical Arabic speaking churches in all of Australia’s major cities. Traditional non-Protestant forms of Arab Christianity are also very well represented with the largest Arab church being the Coptic (Egyptian) Orthodox Church, claiming more than 100 000 Australian adherents. For more information about Coptic Christianity in Australia see the website of the Melbourne diocese of the Coptic Orthodox church; available at <http://www.melbcopts.org/>, accessed on 4 October 2011.

The disruption associated with migration can lead to increased openness, or the exact opposite: Leaving home and everything that is familiar for a completely new context will almost necessarily have significant psychological, emotional and spiritual impacts on the lives of those who take (or who are forced to take) this step. Some people respond to this by becoming more open to outside influences. In other cases disruption and dislocation may lead to an almost desperate clinging to all that is familiar, with an accompanying shutting out of ‘strange’ ideas and people.⁸ Migrants will therefore (depending on their background, personality and experiences) display a wide variety of responses to the presentation of the Gospel.

Ministry to migrants will require clear Biblical thinking in the areas of social justice, the law and politics: Ministry never takes place in a vacuum and ministry to migrants is no exception. Christians who minister to migrants may meet people who are in the country illegally or who are experiencing significant physical and/or emotional suffering. Hard questions will have to be answered from the Bible. Questions like: *What does the Bible teach about the relationship between sharing the Gospel and alleviating physical need?; Should we associate with, or provide assistance to, people who are breaking the law by their mere presence? and Should we as Christians lobby for migration policies that reflect Biblical principles?*

One implication of the issues raised above is the fact that we should pursue different strategies for reaching out to Christian and non-Christian migrants. I will attempt, in the following two sections, to outline a possible outreach strategy to each of these groups.

5. Sharing the Gospel with non-Christian Migrants

Non-Christian migration presents us with a significant opportunity to present the Gospel to people who may have had very little contact with it in their previous contexts. The following are the basic elements of a strategy to reach such a group.

⁸For a discussion of these reactions to the ‘outside’ see Anthony Giddens, *Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity, 1989, 245.

Research migrant communities: Migrants obviously come from all over the world and bring with them a vast array of experiences, cultures, worldviews and pre-existing religious commitments. Any church attempting to reach out to a specific migrant community should work hard to find out as much as possible about that community. A high level of understanding of ‘what makes a community tick’ will greatly assist such a church in the development of an evangelistic strategy.⁹ Research can take the form of reading up on the country of origin, attending community events and especially interviewing Christians from that community.

Understand that there are different motivations for migration: People who research migration make a broad distinction between migrants who are *pushed* and those who are *pulled*. Most individuals and communities find themselves somewhere on the continuum between these two extremes. Where they are on this continuum will have a significant impact on the way in which the Gospel is shared. *Pushed* migrants are those who felt that they had no choice but to leave their home countries (e.g. they had to flee due to war or persecution). They often perceive their presence in their host countries as a form of exile and therefore are not always keen to integrate. *Pushed* migrants will often require material and emotional assistance as they grieve the physical and psychological losses associated with leaving their homelands. *Pulled* migrants are those who came to the host country to pursue opportunities (economic, educational, lifestyle, cultural etc.). Migration was an active choice for them and they are often highly motivated to integrate. *Pulled* migrants often have to deal with disillusionment (e.g. when migration did not deliver all that they hoped for) and may also experience negative fallouts from the overzealous pursuit of professional and lifestyle goals.¹⁰

Take the stages of culture shock seriously: According to the culture shock theory proposed by Finnish-Canadian anthropologist Kaverlo Oberg (1901-

⁹A classic resource for helping Christians and churches to understand cultures in relation to the Gospel is Paul G. Hiebert’s work *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985. It was written with career missionaries in mind but the principles that Hiebert introduces are equally applicable in the area of ministry to migrants.

¹⁰For a fuller description on pull and push factors as motivators for migration see: Örn Bodvar Bodvarsson and Hendrik Van den Berg, *The Economics of Immigration: Theory and Policy*, New York: Springer Publishing, 2009, 7.

1973)¹¹ any person who moves to a new culture goes through certain clearly defined stages, although not everyone experience all the stages with equal intensity. Taking note of these stages and determining where an individual (or even an entire community) is at, could have a significant impact on the way in which we reach out with the Gospel. The stages are:

- *Honeymoon* (Initial Euphoria) – Everything is new and exciting. The migrant feels as if he/she is on holiday.
- *Crisis* (Frustration) – Reality kicks in, this often leads to an almost desperate clinging to what is familiar (i.e. own culture, people, religion, etc.).
- *Adjustment* (Recovery) – The migrant gradually becomes more familiar with the host culture and is less defensive and more open.
- *Biculturalism* (Mastery) – This is the ideal end stage of culture shock; it is the ability to move in and out of two different cultures at will. Not all migrants will reach this stage. In fact, many will get stuck at ‘Crisis’ (never accepting the need to integrate) or ‘Adjustment’ (never fully reaching a state of integration).

Take the issue of cultural distance seriously: Migrants bring their culture with them when they move to a new society. Churches and Christians will have to take the way in which such migrant cultures differ from their own seriously when they attempt to share the Gospel. They will also have to understand the fact that not all cultures are equally far removed from (or close to) each other. It may in some cases be possible to interact with migrants without having to pay too much interest to cross-cultural issues (e.g. Australians sharing the Gospel with Britons). In other contexts, the attention paid to cultural issues will have to be more or less constant (e.g. Australians sharing the Gospel with Somalis). There have been many efforts to quantify and describe relative cultural distance.¹² This is obviously a difficult and

¹¹Oberg’s ideas on this issue were most clearly expounded in: Kalervo Oberg, *Culture Shock*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1954.

¹²One of the most famous (and controversial) examples of an attempt to define cultural distance is Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World*

sometimes controversial exercise. Suffice it to say here that every effort should be undertaken to determine the cultural distance between our own cultures and the cultures that we reach into. Ways in which communication can occur across this divide should form an integral part of our research.

Remember that religion and culture can often be deeply intertwined: Westerners often struggle to understand the way in which religion and culture can be viewed as essentially the same thing in some societies. This has several implications for the integration of migrant communities in new societies. When it comes to the sharing of the Gospel the most important application that we would need to consider is the way in which conversion is viewed in specific societies. It is very common for members of Islamic cultures to believe that they will cease to be a member of that culture and society if they leave Islam.¹³ This can obviously present a significant stumbling block when it comes to evangelism. Churches and Christians reaching into cultures such as this will have to work hard, under the direction of the Spirit, to formulate strategies for effective witness. A major part of such a strategy will have to be the positioning of the church as an alternative community and ‘family’ for those who may be rejected by the members of their original culture because of their Christian faith.

Be willing to cross ‘borders’: Many migrant communities are separated from mainstream society by culture, language and religion. This can inevitably lead to a great deal of mutual suspicion and to migrants living in essentially separate communities with very little meaningful interaction with

Order, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986. Huntington divides the world into several major civilizations and states that migration across his proposed civilizational lines will always be more complex and difficult than migration within a specific civilization.

¹³ “It is a sad fact that in spite of its tolerant attitudes in many areas, Islam does not find it easy to accept the idea of Muslims becoming Christians. Conversion to Christianity (or to any other religion) is generally regarded as a betrayal of family and community, and as apostasy which deserves the severest punishment. Muslims who express an interest in the Christian faith are often subject to strong pressures, and those who take the step of being baptized frequently experience opposition and hostility in the home, at work and in the wider community. Many converts in the past have had to leave their homes for safety, and some have been killed.” (Colin Chapman, *The Cross and the Crescent: Responding to the challenge of Islam*, Leicester: IVP, 1996, 270).

the wider society.¹⁴ When this is the case Gospel ministry by ‘outsiders’ will obviously be very difficult. Churches and Christians will therefore have to work very hard at respectfully and lovingly scaling the high walls that many migrant communities erect around themselves. This can take many forms. Perhaps it might be necessary for one or two people to learn at least a bit of the language of the migrant community. Perhaps many cups of tea to break down suspicious attitudes will be required. At the heart of all such efforts should be a willingness to meet members of the migrant community on their own terms. This may require real sacrifices and many years of sustained effort.

Recruit ‘bridge builders’ if possible: Sometimes there is such a wide cultural and religious gap between the members of a local church and the culture of a migrant community that meaningful contact seems like an unattainable goal. This is where making use of the services of a Christian from that community can prove very valuable. Such a person can interpret that culture to church members and may also be effective in equipping them to reach members of that community with the message of the Gospel. A ‘bridge builder’ will also be able to advise a local church on what will be required to provide a truly welcoming atmosphere and space to members of his/her community of origin.

Make use of ‘neutral spaces’ if necessary and practical: Members of many migrant cultures will be very reluctant to set foot in a Christian church. An outreach strategy focused on using the facilities of a local church will therefore not be the best idea from a strategic perspective. ‘Neutral spaces’ (e.g. community halls, coffee shops, homes etc.) will therefore have to be found. This is not to say that migrants should be kept away from the church indefinitely. Neutral spaces can, instead, be used as places where barriers of

¹⁴ Anthony Giddens’s description of typical trends in the behaviour of many minority communities is often all too accurate when it comes to migrant communities in the West: “Minority groups are usually to some degree physically and socially isolated from the larger community. They tend to be concentrated in certain neighbourhoods, cities or regions of a country. There is little intermarriage between those in the majority and members of the minority group” - *Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity, 1989, 245.

mistrust are broken down and Christ is proclaimed in respectful and ‘irenic’,¹⁵ ways. In this sense neutral spaces can be seen as launching pads from where people can be gently nudged in the direction of the church and Christian worship.

Minister to human needs: Many migrant communities, but especially those who are primarily made up of refugees and asylum seekers, have to deal with real deprivation and social exclusion. Responding to the call of Christ to respond to the needs of a variety of outsiders (the poor, the hungry, the outcast, etc.) should therefore be an essential part of Christian interaction with such communities. Some possible areas of involvement include: English teaching, academic tutoring, practical help, counselling to help migrants deal with violent backgrounds,¹⁶ advocacy on behalf of communities and life skills training. These are obviously activities that are worth doing in their own right,¹⁷ but when they are undertaken by Christians they bring with them the possibility that members of migrant communities will enter into meaningful contact with followers of Christ.

Draw up detailed plans for how new believers will be welcomed into the church and Christian community: In some cases conversion to the Christian faith is something that may be perceived in an extremely negative

¹⁵ George Brunk describes ‘irenic witness’ as follows: “*Irenic witness to the claims of Christ is one that takes its strong unapologetic stand on the stage of history to be seen and heard. It is strong in commitment and conviction without resorting to psychological manipulation or external coercion. Just as in instances of suffering evil we defer the retribution to God, so in our mission, once we have shared the story of God’s grace to us in Jesus, we defer to the visitation of God’s Spirit in the listener to persuade. An irenic witness can afford to exercise great patience while the Lord works.*” – “The Exclusiveness of Jesus Christ”, in James Scherer and Stephen Bevans (eds.) *New Direction in Mission and Evangelization: Theological Foundations*, New York: Orbis, 1999, 52.

¹⁶ A significant resource for those ministering to people who have been the victims of violence is Keith Eitel (ed.) *Missions in Contexts of Violence*, Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2008.

¹⁷ Ott and Strauss say the following about caring for the poor and marginalized in the Name of Christ: “*God’s concern for the plight of the poor and the disenfranchised is well attested in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and in the early church. “The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no concern.” (Prov. 29:7). The question is not whether the church should be concerned about the poor and the economic systems that contribute to poverty and oppression; rather, the question is how such issues should be addressed and how such concerns relate to the overall task of missions.*” - *Encountering Theology of Mission*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010, 132.

light, to the extent that a new Christian may be completely shunned by his/her family, friends and acquaintances. A church seeking to reach migrants will have to be very aware of this and will have to be ready to enfold and care for new believers who have gone through the traumatic experience of rejection by their communities. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized. If a migrant community observes a new believer being left to fend for him/herself with little help from the Christian community it will send a powerful negative message to those who might still be considering the claims of Christ. The opposite is also true. A caring Christian community that truly seeks to be the 'Body of Christ' can act as a powerful reassurance and witness to those who are perhaps on the cusp of declaring their faith.¹⁸

6. Welcoming Christian Migrants

We often tend to think of migration as diluting the Christian presence in traditionally Christian societies. We have already noted, however, that many migration waves, including those from largely non-Christian societies, contain significant numbers of Christians. It is therefore possible that new migrants may significantly bolster the Christian presence in their new societies. For this to have a long term impact Christians in 'host' societies should do their utmost to reach out to fellow believers who are new in their societies.¹⁹ In this case the primary focus will not so much be on sharing the Gospel (although it will have to remain on the radar, supposedly Christian

¹⁸ The veteran missionary to Muslims, Temple Gairdner, made the following statement about the crucial importance of creating welcoming communities for converts from Islam (his words can certainly be extended to people from other faiths as well): "*If any church desires to be a spiritual home for those who come to Christ from Islam, a brotherhood, a spiritual garden, then it must have a well thought out plan for teaching and training them in the Christian faith; and it must also, having responsibility with regard to their human needs be ready to shoulder the same. A church that makes this preparation in thoughtful love, is already more than half-way to the ideal of being a home. A church who makes no such preparation, or whose preparation is ill-thought out, is making it much harder for itself to be a home, indeed has not declared unmistakably that it thinks of itself as such.*" - quoted in John Gilchrist *The Christian Witness to the Muslim*, Benoni: Jesus to the Muslims, 1988, 112.

¹⁹ For a stimulating discussion on how Christian migration can strengthen and build the church in 'host' societies see Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu 'African-led Christianity in Europe: Migration and Diaspora Evangelism' in Lausanne World Pulse Electronic Edition: <http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles.php/973>, accessed on 4 October 2011.

communities may contain significant numbers of unconverted people). The primary focus should, instead, be on welcoming such migrants and enfolded them into the larger Christian community. The following issues and challenges should be considered when this kind of ‘welcoming ministry’ is planned:

Remember that Christian migrants may be experiencing many of the same challenges as non-Christian migrants: Much of what was said about some of the issues raised by migration (‘push and pull factors, culture shock etc.) will be just as applicable to Christian migrants. We should never assume that they will simply sail through the difficulties associated with migration simply because they are Christians. Welcoming ministries should therefore take these difficulties seriously and work hard at helping Christian migrants as they work towards adjustment and integration.

Take cultural and theological differences seriously: It is, once again, easy to assume that migrant Christians will simply be able to fit into church communities without too much of a hassle. The fact is, however, that Christianity has found expression in many cultures across the world and it is likely that many of these cultures will be very distant from the general culture of the host nation. It is also the case that many Christians will come from theological traditions that might be very different from that of the church that is striving to welcome them.²⁰ Working towards understanding and interacting with these differences can be a powerful way to build Christian communities where migrant Christians can feel welcome, and from where they can be commissioned as missionaries to their own people. This process may include intense debates and determined efforts to present a clear understanding of biblical truth in cases where this has been clouded by tradition or syncretism.

Minister to human need: Christian migrants, especially those who are refugees and asylum seekers, may be attempting to cope with real deprivation and need. Areas of need may be *physical* (e.g. lack of adequate food, shelter and clothing), *emotional* (e.g. loneliness, coping with the after-effects of trauma), *inter-personal* (e.g. generational differences between non-integrated

²⁰The Coptic Orthodox Church mentioned above is an excellent case in point.

parents and integrated children, feelings of alienation from mainstream society) or in the *area of life-skills* (e.g. lack of English language abilities, lack of knowledge about how the host society works). Addressing these needs in the name of Christ (will, of necessity, have to be an integral part of attempts to welcome migrant Christians into the church and into the wider community (cf. Galatians 6:10).

Mobilise Christian migrants for ministry: The best people to reach migrants with the Gospel are other migrants from the same community. They already understand the language, they know the culture and they are often able to articulate the Gospel in ways that will be easily understood within that community. Churches working towards welcoming Christian migrants should, therefore, place a great deal of emphasis on mobilizing and training such migrants for Gospel ministry among their own people. This principle does not only apply to other migrants in the host country but can even be extended to the original country of origin. Many migrants would perhaps be reluctant to move back permanently to their home countries for the sake of missions but that does not prevent them from being involved in ministry there. They can still become involved in online ministry, short term mission, financial support and (in situations where there is severe persecution) advocacy on behalf of Christians in their countries of origin.

Carefully assess the impact of ministry to migrants on ministry to the majority community: It is possible, in some cases, that ministry to migrants might have a detrimental effect on ministry to members of the majority community. For example, if a church is particularly effective in reaching members of a specific migrant community, members of this community may in time come to dominate that church. This may mean that people who are not members of the migrant community feel less and less welcome. It is not difficult to work out that an unbelieving ‘true blue Aussie’ walking into a church where most people do not speak English over coffee after the service will probably not be rushing back the next week. Migrants would therefore have to be encouraged to understand the calling of their church to the entire community (and not just their own) and to adjust their behaviour accordingly. This may, for example, lead to asking members of the migrant community to only speak English before or after services (as far as this is possible).

7. Conclusion

There are obviously much more that could be said about reaching migrants with the Gospel but I trust that this has at least served as an introduction to some of the issues that are relevant to ministry across cultural, linguistic and worldview divides. Engaging in this type of ministry is an opportunity to participate, right here in Australasia, in our Lord calling people from '*every tribe, language and people and nation*' (Revelation 5:9) to Himself.