

The Multicultural Ministry of the Baptist Union of Victoria (BUV)

Migrant ethnic churches originally developed for first-generation migrants coping with a new culture and were largely monocultural. More recently, migrant ethnic churches have experienced tensions in the transition from the first to the second generation and have become aware of the need to build relationships between migrant churches and the dominant Anglo-Australian churches to meet the needs of the second generation. There is also a need for Anglo-Australian churches to become more inclusive, as their mission is not possible without people from different cultures.

The fast-growing migrant churches are finding that they are too large to fit into their church buildings for worship. We are encouraged that some churches have taken a distinctive multicultural approach to church life. Over the years we have worked in the areas of cross-cultural conflict resolution, hospitality, and unity, initiating an intentional approach to multicultural inclusive ministry and empowering Languages Other Than English-speaking (LOTE) church leaders. Our work extends to asylum seekers and refugees within the BUV.

Multicultural ministry in the Baptist Union of Victoria (BUV) has evolved over more than 25 years. It has been a time of significant change with the growth of migrant ethnic churches and multicultural congregations. Of the 257 faith groups, 106 are CALD (41%) and account for 65% of the membership. A total of 33 languages and dialects are represented in BUV churches.

The BUV has a sub-team of 3 Multicultural Consultants who focus on supporting and resourcing CALD churches in governance and leadership, as well as developing and facilitating a strong network across the churches.

Why We are Interested in this Review

We consider it apposite to make this submission for two main reasons. Firstly, Baptists have historically emerged as grassroots people committed to the pursuit of *shalom* - the well-being, cohesion and goodwill, progress, and prosperity of the community. Hence, this submission will buttress on the Baptist heritage. Secondly, both Whitley and BUV have a large membership of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. We believe this submission will contribute to a genuinely inclusive multicultural Australia for all members of immigrant communities.

The Principles Guiding this Submission and How our Ministry will contribute to them.

This joint submission is guided by three principles, and we have outlined how the mission of BUV and Whitley can contribute to them.

- **Promoting a Multicultural Australia**

Multiculturalism shapes our identity through our interactions with others. It is more than simply accepting different cultures like a mosaic of simple peaceful coexistence. It is a conscious choice to embrace the other. Change affects both sides through the consultation of churches that have partnerships and diverse multicultural congregations.

- **Supporting our cohesive and inclusive multicultural society**
Sharing resources and leadership training that reflects our multicultural contexts. We have cultural intelligence in our workplace so that all our leaders have the cultural intelligence to work with different cultural backgrounds.
- **Ensure environments are fit for purpose to harness the talents of all Australians.** Our change strategies reflect intercultural awareness and the different gifts to be valued. We listen to diverse voices through forums, meetings, and conferences. We share different ways of working, different gifts to share and different styles of leadership.

How our organisations have responded to the needs of recent migrants

We have embarked on activities with specific focus to CALD churches:

- RAALS (Refugee Airfare & Assistance Loan) Program – have assisted 72 people, over \$450,000+ loans.
- TransFormation Program, offering a Diploma in Theology in partnership with Whitley College (20 years)
- Leadership events such as Multicultural Pastors Retreats (over 10 years)
- Ignite Multicultural Youth & Young Adults Conferences (nearly 10 years)
- Theological and training opportunities such as Symposiums
- Various Intercultural Working Groups fostering ideas/resources and networks.
- Invested \$50,000 in advanced research investigating migrant integration in Victoria.
- Supervised and supported PhD research students engaged in multicultural research over a period of approximately 40 years.

Given the above principles and contributions of BUW and Whitley College, it is our considered view that the following would enable adequate support for migrant communities thereby fostering multiculturalism and social cohesion in Australia.

- ***Establishment of an apex body, such as a Commission on Religious/ Interfaith Issues among Migrant Communities.*** *The rationale for the establishment of this Commission is based on existing research elsewhere in Europe which suggests that religion and culture are an eccentric component of the life of migrant communities.¹ The proposed Commission will consider the promotion of multiculturalism in Australia through the instrumentality of religion and culture. This has been clearly demonstrated in Europe with the establishment of the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME). This commission is charged with the responsibility of "monitoring European policy developments in the areas of migration, asylum, integration and anti-discrimination and informing churches about these developments."² In Australia, such a Commission can complement the work of the Anti-Discrimination Commission and other related peak bodies, but with a particular emphasis on religion and culture as composite components of the lives of members of migrant communities.*

¹ Jackson, D. and Passarelli, A., *Mapping Migration: Mapping Churches' Responses in Europe* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2008, 2016, 2020). This research has been published three times with several revision and one of the persons signing this submission is directly involved in this research.

² [Mandate of the Commission - Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe \(ccme.eu\)](https://www.ccme.eu/)

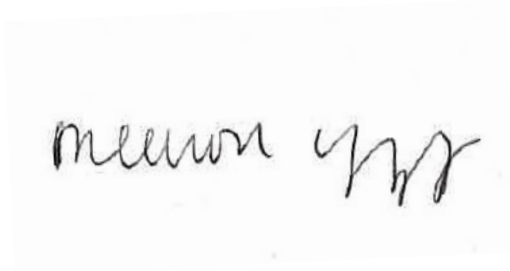
- **Empowering the voice of migrant community members through research and personal experience.** We propose that members of migrant communities need to tell their own stories and share their experiences as a process of building an inclusive community. One of the ways in which this can be achieved is through research dedicated to understanding aspects of the religious experience of migrant communities. The research in Europe mentioned above (Jackson and Passarelli 2008, 2016, 2020) clearly shows that religion is important to members of the migrant community and that it represents a coping mechanism through different migration experiences and settlement in a new country. Through our research and observations of our members, we have observed the same trend of members exploring religion as a coping agency. As religion is a unique element in the lives of migrants, it can be used to measure and promote integration.

The above will lead to the development of leadership training opportunities. The above will assist newly arrived migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to adjust to life in Australia. It will promote training opportunities through partnerships with organisations such as Whitley College and other relevant training providers.

We appreciate the opportunity to make this submission and are open to further discussion on the key issues raised.



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