

Prayers for a Multicultural Church

Mission Prayer Handbook (1991-2003)
Uniting Church National Assembly



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GOD OF MANY NAMES

L God of a thousand names,
 You come to us in many forms - manna to the hungry
 R water to the parched

L embrace to the grieving
 R rainbow to the despairing

L champion of the oppressed
 R defender of the exploited

L friend to the lonely
 R rescuer to the lost

L rest for the weary
 R shock to the comfortable

L peace to the restless
 R gift to the joyful

L mystery to the knowing
 R revelation to the seeking

L manna, water, embrace, rainbow, champion, defender, friend, rescuer,
 rest, shock, peace, gift, mystery, revelation...
 In silence, let us reflect on what God's name is for
 us at this moment...

(Silent reflection)

Let us give thanks to God.

ALL God of many names. and still the one, true God,
 You reveal Your name to us in our need,
 yet remain beyond our control or understanding.
 You are God. and we are Your people.
 In trust and love. we commit ourselves to exploring and discovering
 who You are and whose we are.

Written by: *Revs Norma and John Brown*
 (*Mission Prayer Handbook 1991, page 6*)

ETHNIC DIVERSITY

"God of a Thousand Faces"

My father was an Aramean wanderer..."

From the time of Abraham and Sarah, migration and resettlement has assured ethnic diversity in communities worldwide. Today the uniting Church reflects through its forty languages in weekly worship the diverse reality of Australia's approximately 140 cultural groupings: Aboriginal and Koorie, fifth generation and recent arrivals, convicts, free settlers and refugees.

This plurality reveals the God of a thousand faces. It opens to us the possibility of seeing many new dimensions of the gospel as we share our insights with each other.

Prayer

God of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar,

God of Djinyini, Mario and Tinh.

Thank you for the beauty and uniqueness of this southern land which we share.

Grant your protection and grace to all who shelter here.

Forgive the racism and destruction that have been part of our history,
and our disregard for the pain and oppression within the Australian community today.

Help us shed our provincial expectations. Take away our cultural tunnel vision.

Open our hearts to be caring neighbours to each other.

Direct our lives to just and peaceful action.

God of a thousand faces, help us also to acknowledge You are worshipped in many languages, in different songs and rhythms of life from our own.

May we respect these religious insights in each other and assist each faithful expression of You.

We rejoice in You, GOD, in whose image we are brothers and sisters.
and by whose example in Jesus Christ we know the breadth and depth of Your universal love. Amen

(Mission Prayer Handbook 1991, page 7)

RACISM

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream. Amos. 5: 24

"As the Indigenous people of this land, we fight for our rights such as: to be heard; to have access to our Sacred sites; to maintain and participate in our cultural ceremonies and to have our spirituality recognised; and for the survival of the many generations which are to follow. We the Aboriginals of Australia lift up our voices and cry: "We have survived."

Racism thrives on dominance and control. It demeans the oppressor and destroys the oppressed. It goes against the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It renders the oppressor and the oppressed into a state of spiritual disability. Lilla Watson, an Australian Aborigine writes:

"If you have come to help me you are wasting your time.
But

If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine
then let us work together."

Working together commits us into taking risks for each other;
recognising the dignity of every human being;
accepting the interconnectedness of justice and righteousness for all peoples.

Prayer

God of Justice, give us ears to hear with You the cries of
Your children held captive by race and colour;
God of Justice, give us eyes to see with You beyond race
and colour to dignity and identity;
God of Love, give us hearts to love with You beyond the
structures and systems we have created to keep Your
children in bondage;
God of Love, give us courage to seek reconciliation and to
be mediators for peace and freedom for all. Amen

Written by: *Ranjini Rebera*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 1992, page 26*)

WORK WITH ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN THE PILBARA

The mining communities of the Pilbara have attracted people from all over the world. Many young Australian families who leave relatives and friends to work in the Pilbara experience a sense of isolation. The isolation is even more intense for those who have recently come from overseas and who cannot speak much English.

Frontier Services community workers, Carolyn Reeve at Port Hedland and Shirley Parravicini at Karratha work with ethnic communities in the Pilbara. They enable people from these communities to cope with the particular challenges of living in a remote area, to understand and use available services and to celebrate their culture and the unique contribution they make to this country.

Prayer

L God of Isaac and Ishmael, of Hagar and Joshua, Your love toward humanity is not bound by race, colour or creed.

R We pray that Your church may express this love to all who have migrated to this land.

L We pray for the ethnic communities of the Pilbara.

R May the strangers, the isolated and the lonely experience welcome, friendship and a sense of belonging.

L We pray for those who work with ethnic communities in Port Hedland and Karratha.

R May their work empower those they serve and convey Your love and grace.

(Mission Prayer Handbook 1993, page 31)

"And one called to another and said:
 "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts,
 the whole earth is full of God's glory."
 (Isaiah 6: 3)

IN THE MANY FACES

L We thought we knew Your face, O God.
 It was the face of the strong father watching over us and holding us like a rock.
 R Praise to You, God who is like a father.

L Then we saw You as a mother, bending over to feed us
 and rocking us gently against Your warm breasts.
 R Praise to You, God who is like a mother.

L And then we found You as a friend treading the road of life before us
 laughing in our joy, crying in our grief.
 R Praise to You, God who is like a friend.

L And then our life spread out in myriads of moments.
 We found You as source, as healer, as energy.
 We found You as liberator, as warmth and encourager .
 And then the names were all too small, the images too few.
 Your grace encompassed all the earth
 spreading far beyond our naming or defining.
 Great God, unnameable and glorious:
 R Holy. Holy, Holy.
 We thank You that our names will never be enough.
 Amen

Written by: *Rev Dorothy McRae-McMahon*
 (*Mission Prayer Handbook 1993, page 62*)

"When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." (John 20: 19)

IN THE MOVING

Prayer

It is a fearful thing to move, O gracious God.
The ones who wait for us may not be kind.
We may never know what to say and what we do may be misunderstood.
Our faith may fail and justice may keep traveling into the distance before we reach it.
Be present in our moving, O God of the human and the small ones,
flow through our life in freedom, fill our hearts with Your courage
and breathe into our souls Your wisdom and love. Amen

Written by: *Rev Dorothy McRae-McMahon*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 1993, page 78*)

IT'S HARD TO FEEL WE BELONG

Voice of a newly arrived migrant.

It's hard to feel we belong,
we've been uprooted and replanted in foreign soil.
Our roots are shallow and sometimes it feels like
a strong and gusty wind will blow us away.

In a borrowed language it is hard to share the pain and hope
or whisper our fears and prayers.

It's hard to find our way
It's hard to feel we can have a say in the way things are done around here.

We learn your language. You don't know ours.
If you take the trouble to sit with us, long enough,
we will open our hearts to you,
then we may belong to you and this church that has accepted us,
but not yet opened its heart to us.

Response:

God may Your Church have, ears to listen and hearts to feel,
that together we might find ways to cross the divide that lies between us,
that bridges of justice, understanding and love can be built.

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Written by: *Rev Helen Richmond*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 1996, page 60*)

POLYNESIA

Creator of all creations.

You created Australia and all the small islands where we come from.

We thank You for missionaries who brought the Gospel to our islands.

We know that You stood among them.

Now we bring the Gospel back, we pray that you stand among us
as we share the Good News with people of different
cultures, races and faiths in this island of Australia.

We have been confused by new ideas and new values.

We are also attracted by materialism.

Our children have been caught between cultures
and are questioning their identity .

We often fail to recognise Your presence among us.

Lord, in Your mercy, forgive us.

The breath of the Spirit offers us new life.

May we receive and live out the Gospel in the world.

Amen.

Written by: *Fatai Slender*

(*Mission Prayer Handbook 1997, page 45*)

I AM AN ASIAN

Racism is a sin against humanity and Christianity. It kills human compassion and justice.

At this time when our community suffers division, mistrust and anxiety, and when it is misled by people who do not know God, Christian faith tries to see the Word of God for us and for Australia.

Readings: Genesis 12: 1, Isaiah 55: 9, Rev. 7: 9

Prayer

My Creator, who formed me out of clay:
 I praise You for giving me a life;
 for my yellow skin, flat nose, almond eyes and small form.
 You made me an Asian, good in Your sight.
 One day You ordered me to leave my father's household
 and to live with many other different looking people.
 What a wonderful sight it was, Lord.
 The land You had sent me to live in
 was like the heaven You taught me to hope for .
 I met a great multitude from every tribe and language.

But they were not wearing white robes yet.
 Rather, I saw some of them setting up a high cultural
 wall around them.
 I saw some of them dominating others, saying "Live as I do".
 Some of them even despised me, shouting "Asian go home".

But my tearful heart remembered Your words;
 "As the heavens are higher than the earth,
 so My ways higher than your ways
 and My thoughts than your thoughts".
 You are right, Lord. I believe You lead my life.
 You call all of us in this country to a new way of living.

My being in this land is like a speck of dust in the air.
 But joyfully and happily, I obey Your ways and Your thoughts,
 trusting Your love and guidance;
 comforting others with Your Good News;
 waiting for the white robe You have promised.
 In Jesus Name. Amen.

Written by: *Seongja Yoo-Crowe*
 (*Mission Prayer Handbook 1998, page 15*)

MAY I BE YOUR FRIEND?

As Australia becomes more diverse in people, language, culture and religion, unity in diversity is what Australia should search for: Harmonious common life with people from different traditions in one community in which we can accept, appreciate and respect differences;
in which we can share, care and learn from each other;
in which we can establish a strong bond of love to build one trustful community together .

To make friends with each other is the first key to unity.

Our hearts open up when we meet.

Understanding is getting deeper when we share our differences.

Unfamiliarity becomes acceptable in willingness to respect one another .

Strangeness is melting in the warmth of our smiles.

A psalmist said: *'How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in unity.'*

Psalm 1: 33

Prayer for unity

God of history and God of all nations,
we praise and thank You for Your presence and work
in our country, Australia, in the past, the present and the future.

You created us all different.

We are just amazed by Your wonderful work creating different cultures,
different languages and different faces.

Grant us courage to accept our differences,
Grant us strength to resist our prejudice,
Grant us love to care for each other.

Grant us spiritual eyes to see Your will for Australia,
Grant us grace to become one big family of God,
Grant us faith to build Your Church together. Amen.

Written by: *Seongja Yoo-Crowe*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 1998, page 27*)

HE GATHERS

The time comes to gather all nations and tongues; they shall come and see My glory. Isaiah 66: 18b

And from east and west, north and south they will come and will be sitting at the table of the kingdom of God. But, mind you, there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last. Luke 13: 29- 30

(Mission Prayer Handbook 1999, page 10)

A MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA

Communities everywhere take pride in keeping
 Their faith and heritage alive.
 But what is our heritage?
 In today's Australia it is multicultural.

Think of who makes up our community: Aborigines have
 been here for millennia. British people have been coming since 1788.
 Chinese have been here for 140 years. The Greek Cathedral in Sydney
 is 120 years old. Old German communities are scattered through Australia.
 Our neighbours today have come from Italy, Tonga, Malta, Korea, Turkey,
 Vietnam, and many more countries.

Let us affirm this heritage with joy.
 Let us make contact with some of these neighbours.
 And find a greater meaning in friendship.

At least let us encourage the growth of bi-lingual education
 that we all may become a people who know more than one language –
 and can enter another culture with some understanding.
 Let us break open our suburban castles, our country bastions.
 In them we have taken refuge.

Let us learn from our children and be thankful for the richness
 of a multi-heritaged Australia.
 But how far must we yet go to realise this potential?

Let us pray.
 We give thanks, O God, for the cultures that enrich the life of our nation.
 We confess the stupidities and insularities of our past.
 We look with hope to the opportunities of the future that we may
 cherish and affirm our heritage and find a new identity as a people.

(Mission Prayer Handbook 1999, page 11)

THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

With matchless generosity the Holy Spirit scatters gifts world-wide among all people, causing them to look for one another and find their fulfillment in the one body of Christ.

We praise You, God the Spirit.

We need Your guidance and Your might.

(Extract from - Mission Prayer Handbook 1999, page 14)

So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves
 And free persons, between men and women;
 you are all one in union with Christ Jesus. Gal 3: 28

AFFIRMING OUR ONENESS IN DIVERSITY

Australia is becoming more and more a multicultural nation. To some, this trend is a frightening thought, while for others it appears to be a doorway to many splendid opportunities. Let us celebrate our oneness today, amidst the diversity in which we find ourselves.

Prayer

L Lord, we acknowledge You as our creator, creating
 in Your wisdom, people of different races, religions and languages.

R Grant us the faith to accept Your wisdom

L Lord, we realise that You have made us all in the image of God.

R Grant us the understanding to see our diversities as reflections of Your image.

L Lord, as we affirm our distinct cultural identities,
 we realise that sometimes such cultural heritages enable us to understand
 the gospel better and, at other times, that they are a hindrance.

R Grant us the wisdom to know the difference between
 what is gospel and what is culture.

L Lord, despite all our cultural differences, we acknowledge
 the oneness to which You have called us in Christ.

R Grant us the determination to pursue that oneness in our diversity. Amen.

(Mission Prayer Handbook 1999, page 15)

CHANGES, PAINS AND BLESSINGS

In Him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. Ephesians 2: 21 –22

L Lord, have mercy on us.

We all feel lost and afraid amid changes.

R Lord, forgive us. We are stubborn, slow to see You working through changes.

L Lord, equip us with hearts to comfort and encourage one another .

R Lord, strengthen us with courage to overcome racism and prejudice.

L Lord, guide us with wisdom, to build Your church of many traditions in unity and joy.

R Lord, lead us with faith to long for Your coming Kingdom of all peoples.

L Lord, we celebrate our diversity, because differences enrich our life.

R Lord, we thank You for changes, because pains bring blessings from You.

ALL Lord, You are the chief cornerstone.

In You the whole Church is joined together and rises to become a truly multicultural church.

In You all of us, Aboriginal, migrant and Anglo members too, are being built together .

Please help us rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn, share burdens and live in harmony with one another .

In Jesus name.

Amen.

JESUS RENEW US

Our society has been rapidly changing into a multi-cultural, multi-racial community. However, we are all very slow to accept these changes, and sometimes we even refuse to accept them.

Changes challenge our traditions, value systems, attitudes and faith.

Changes bring pain and anxiety to every member of the society .We all suffer from the changes, whoever we are, whenever we arrived in this land, whatever culture we came from.

Aboriginal members carry in their hearts the anguish of invasion and the destruction of their culture.

Anglo-Australian members experience fear of loss. They feel threatened by the presence of new migrants.

New migrants, like severely pruned trees transplanted into foreign soil, also experience a lot of pain because of the harshness of migrant life.

Life with people of different cultures is not easy, but our common faith in Jesus will be the strongest power to unite us.

We are all different but we will be able to live and endure only because Jesus rules and renews us as His Church.

THE JOURNEY OF HEALING

(An Australian version of Mark 5:21-43)

Jairus, the local chairperson of the Elder's Council was desperate. His daughter was dying. Despite being respected and well-off he would try anything, even Jesus. So he went to Jesus and asked him to touch his daughter and heal her.

Jesus said yes and went with Jairus to his house. A crowd of people gathered to see if Jesus could do it.

There was an indigenous woman who had suffered deep pain for 12 years. She had tried counselling and had searched for her family, for she was one of the stolen generation. She was poor and suffered from much racial abuse. She lived with the local Kooris outside the township. She valued what she knew of her traditional culture but needed to find inner peace and healing. She had heard about Jesus and believed if she touched his clothes she would feel better. So she went into the crowd, touched Jesus and felt the pain lift from her heart.

Jesus noticed power had gone from him, stopped in his tracks and asked "Who touched me". His followers said, "There's heaps of people here. Why worry? We're in a hurry".

But Jesus insisted and the indigenous woman -scared she would be told off for coming into town, went before Jesus and told him her whole story. Jesus said, "Your faith has made you well, come, be part of the community."

At the same time Jairus' friends told him his daughter was dead and not to bother with Jesus any more. Jesus told him, "It's your turn to have faith."

Jesus made it to Jairus' house -touched his daughter and the little girl rose up. (She was 12 years old).

Jairus' view of indigenous people changed. The community began to talk about its relationship with the people outside the town.

Dear God,
 Help us heal our differences.
 Help us heal our history of poor relationships.
 Cure us of our denial and help us journey together as
 peoples in this land.
 Forgive us our indifference.
 Forgive us our apathy.
 Forgive us when we think less of others because of skin colour or culture.
 Take us on a journey of healing together. And help us
 face the truth and be truly reconciled.
 Amen.

Written by: *Covenanting Agency*
 (*Mission Prayer Handbook 2000, pages 16-17*)

A MILLENNIUM VISION

The Australia I dream of in the new millennium is one filled with vision, renewal and hope. Let us rebuild our shattered relationships with our indigenous people and the marginalised members of society; let it be a time to heal the attitudes of division and indifference that have been propagated by those who want to crush notions of stability and unity in our lives. This can only be done when we as Australians are really challenged to make a difference, challenged to come out of our comfort zones to realise that the poor, the lonely, the weak also make up the fabric of our national being. For too long we have had the attitude that they are *out* (casts) not *in* society. I really dream that every Australian will be filled with compassion, just like Jesus, filled with an attitude to really serve and love those around us.

As a second-generation Korean Australian I also pray that our respective congregations will be invigorated to positively build upon the migrant experience. Understandably, the church has and always will provide a social network for those who desire some connection with their culture, but I dream that such congregations will constantly strive to create communities where the balance between culture and spirituality can meet.

My hope, comfort and conviction for such renewed vision is best expressed through Paul's words:

"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ" Philippians 1:9

Prayer

Thank You for being a God of love, a God of hope, a God of peace, a God of the past, present and future.

As we enter into the year 2000 and beyond give us the courage and conviction to walk more boldly in Your name. The new millennium brings baggage from the past including uncertainties, anxieties, and fears. We confess we haven't lived as Your people Lord. We've abused the rights and place of the original inhabitants of this land. We've rejected the cries of help in the lonely, the poor, trying to smother them with casual indifference.

But we thank You Lord that You are a God who can bring about change. Through Jesus and our relationships with You, we are cleansed and made new. Father in the same way purify our country and teach us to forgive one another for past wrongs.

Renew our hope and give us a new beginning with a clearer renewed vision.

Help us to be a prayerful nation God, one that is guided by Your faithful hand and wisdom.

Unify and heal this land of many cultures so that we will shine as a country with You at its head.

As we journey into the future, quench our parched moral condition and hearts. Please invigorate this land with Your powerful spirit.

All this we pray in Jesus name,

Amen.

Written by: *Gina Aim, Concord Uniting Cheil Church*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 2000, pages 26-27*)

WELCOMING STRANGERS

The harshness of the environment shapes the way people live and work in outback Australia and in recent years, changing patterns of land use have had a marked effect on outback populations.

New mining and exploration leases have sprung up throughout the inland and migrants have arrived in the country to take up the employment opportunities they provide.

Frontier Services continues to help migrant families and communities meet the challenges of these difficult times.

The Pilbara region in Western Australia is often a first stop for migrants who come in search of work in the mining and transport industries. Many are from non-English speaking backgrounds and wives and children may have few chances for social interaction. The fierce climate, combined with physical and cultural isolation, can make their first few years in Australia a misery.

Working from their bases in Karratha, Newman, Port Hedland and Tom Price, Migrant Community workers assist with language and literacy, health care, day care, immigration and domestic violence issues.

Prayer

Mysterious, stranger God
 Never confined by culture, colour, class or creed,
 Meeting us anew in the mystery of the stranger,
 Becoming in Jesus both refugee and migrant.
 Thank you for newcomers,
 Settling bravely in Australia's remoteness,
 Forsaking familiar, families and friends,
 For stranger's insecurity in a strange land.
 Stranger God of the stranger,
 Ever welcoming excluded outsiders
 Celebrating life's richness in difference and diversity,
 May your Spirit still stir this cultural mix, Australia,
 That we may continue to embrace the gift of new migrants,
 Including their skills, valuing their difference.
 And in them, meeting You.

Written by: *Rev Brian Smith*
 (*Mission Prayer Handbook 2000, pages 30-31*)

THE ASSEMBLY STAFF

We Kiwis,
 We English and
 We - various Celts
 abound.
 We Australian born people
 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal
 are here too.
 We are also Korean
 South African
 Ethiopian
 Chilean
 Raratongan
 Singaporean
 Malaysian
 American
 Sri Lankan
 Russian
 Filipino
 and more.
 We are all part of God's Church.

We single people
 We divorced people
 We parents of children
 We carers of animals
 We married people
 We in other relationships.
 We are all part of God's Church.

Creator God
 You see us not as many
 But as One in Your love.

Paradoxical God
 You see us not as a mindless mass
 But as unique individuals.

We praise You
 For the common Love in our hearts
 For our kaleidoscope of culture, features and
 personality.

We ask that You will help the staff of the Assembly
 To work as a well-oiled team
 While treasuring the gifts and talents each person
 brings.

We pray the unity in diversity of that group of
 people
 Will be an example of Christ's body
 To the whole of the Uniting Church in Australia.

We pray in the name of the Christ
 Who loved all and valued all
 Yet is worshipped as One unlike any other.

Amen.

Written by: *Rev Ruth Sandiford-Phelan*
 (*Mission Prayer Handbook 2000, page 35*)

THE DIVERSE WAY

God – You who are who You are
Help us to grasp some small understanding of Your existence
Remind us of Your infinite capacity to hear, see, touch, sense and be what You will,
not what we will.

God – You who will be who You will be
Forgive us when we try to make You fit our own imagination
Stretch us so that we can allow our understanding of You to move wider and higher,
beyond a small box.

God – who is becoming what You will become
Open us to the mystery and expanse of Your people and creatures and life here on earth,
so we may at least glimpse You now.

Amen.

(Mission Prayer Handbook 2000, page 39)

WHAT IS MULTICULTURAL MINISTRY?

In the past these two words, *Multicultural Ministry*, were used to describe a mission area related to the life of migrant members.

Now that interaction between members and congregations of different cultural backgrounds is increasing, and their mutual impact is getting deeper and wider, the true meaning of multicultural ministry is becoming clear.

Multicultural ministry is not only for the newly arrived migrant members. It is not marginalised ministry. It is not an extension of overseas mission. It is an integral part of the life of the whole church, involving every aspect of it and including every member, Aboriginal, Anglo-Celtic, Migrant ethnic and all other members.

Multicultural Ministry is the mission area that is growing and expanding. Perhaps this is the only mission area which is expanding at present. Our diversity in race, culture, language and religion is overwhelming. Multicultural ministry is “a new frontier in mission”. It is becoming clear that “all ministry is in a multicultural setting”, and it is an issue for the whole church.

Life with people from different cultural traditions in one church/community is not a new or simply transitional phenomenon. The community to which Jesus ministered was multicultural. The promised end pictured in Revelation 7:9 is multicultural. Our present multicultural life is a foretaste of the Ultimate Church, the kingdom of God. It is God’s gift, a sign of grace. It is a blessing.

Now as our churches and communities are becoming more diverse, we try to see the work of God for us at a time, standing in between the early church and the ultimate Church. Multicultural Ministry and its mission in a pluralistic community is God’s call given to the churches of multicultural countries in our time.

Written by: *Seongja Yoo-Crowe*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 2001, page 30*)

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 in front of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:9, NIV)

Prayer

We give thanks and praise to our eternal God,
The God of history and God of all nations,
For God’s presence and work in the past
As well as the present and the future.

Lord, You cared for people of many cultures in Palestine 2000 years ago.
And now we are heading to the ultimate Church
In which You are praised by a great multitude from every nation.

As we find ourselves standing in between these two multicultural churches,
We strongly believe that You call us to a new way of living.
We believe that You call us from many different cultures
To build a multicultural church together:

In which the uniqueness of each culture is not lost:
In which we can share and learn from each other:
In which we can establish a strong bond with a common faith:
In which we can serve people of no faith and other faiths with the love of Jesus.

Oh Lord, we are trying hard.
Grant us Your power and wisdom.
Fill us with Your Spirit
Only with Your Spirit will we be able to accomplish the task You have given us.

We feel honoured.
We feel blessed
We feel Your presence. Amen.

Written by: *Seongja Yoo-Crowe*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 2001, page 31*)

THE COURAGE TO CHANGE

Massive racial migration, displacement, along with modern technology and the global free market at present have brought a huge change to our communities in terms of people, language, religion, customs, and value systems.

Many of us suffer from changes. Aboriginal members seem always to carry in their hearts the anguish of invasion, dispossession, and the destruction of their culture.

There are Anglo-Celtic members who experience fear of loss because they feel threatened by the presence of new migrants.

Newly arrived migrants, like severely pruned trees planted into foreign soil, also experience a lot of pain in establishing a new life. Their enthusiasm to maintain their own culture for self protection may develop into nationalistic attitudes, making their community isolated.

Life with people of different cultures in one church/ one community is difficult. It threatens our status, our identity and our tradition. It confuses our value system. It demands sharing and sacrifice. It implies many negative effects on our safe and comfortable mono-cultural life. To live in a diverse community with these changes is our hard reality.

Yet as many members of the same church and community, we share life, building a multicultural church and community together. We are creating a new culture, a new humanity in Jesus. The privilege of being Christian, and the faith we have, give us special confidence and courage to cope with these changes.

We remember what Jesus teaches us: To follow Jesus means breaking through the barriers of race, culture, and religious prejudice that separate the brothers and sisters whom God calls into one family. Through Christ, God accepts us all as we are in our differences, so we are to accept one another.

Written by: *Seongja Yoo-Crowe*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 2001, page 64*)

*“How good and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in unity.
It is like precious oil poured on the head...*

*It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the Lord bestows his blessing,
Even life for evermore.”*
(Psalm 133, NIV)

Prayer:

My dear Lord,
We are amazed by the way of Your creation.
You created us all different but in Your own image,
And You said, “It is good!” with full satisfaction.

When we were rebellious against Your throne,
You scattered us in different languages.

Now we can see that You are gathering us back.
People are moving into safe places to live,
forming multicultural communities together.

Lord, we look up to You, searching for Your work.
What does this change mean, Lord?
What is Your will to fulfil through this huge change in our time?

Show us Your ways, O Lord.
Guide us in Your truth.
Teach us how to live all together in harmony and in unity.

We are all different,
But together, we want to please You and glorify You,
as Your precious and holy people.
Amen.

Written by: *Seongja Yoo-Crowe*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 2001, page 65*)

GOD IS DOING A NEW THING DOWN UNDER!

At Federation, one of the first acts was to enshrine a White Australia policy that remained in place for almost 70 years. There is much about our history that we would grieve but we can also give thanks that God is doing a new reconciling work down under.

Indigenous people, despite many attempts to denigrate their cultural and religious traditions have shown incredible courage and strength to maintain their cultural identity and values. One question for all of us who are newcomers to the land is to let ourselves be grafted onto the rich spirituality of the people who have been in this land for thousands of years - to be open to learn their wisdom, to listen to the heartbeat of this land. Successive waves of people have brought this country their own rich cultural traditions. They have sometimes faced hostility from a dominant culture that has wanted people to assimilate and *fit in*. The vision of a multicultural nation is of us all being able to take pride in the cultural traditions that have formed the various tapestry of peoples that makes up Australia, this Great South Land of the Spirit that has become our new home. Since 1945 six million people have migrated to Australia from over 140 countries.

We are learning to ways of relating, based on respect for this land and the indigenous custodians of this land, building relationships of trust rather than fear and suspicion. Can we discern the work of the Spirit in our midst, crossing cultural barriers, bringing healing, renewal, harmony and reconciliation? We are called to share in this work of weaving, a tapestry of grace. Let us make sure we don't neglect but rather, we treasure and nurture this gift.

Written by: *Rev Helen Richmond*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 2002, page 10*)

A Prayer

Thank You for our nation, Australia.
Thank You for the way it has developed over the years.
Thank You for the diverse cultures that make up Australia that we can experience and enjoy.

Thank You God

Forgive us as a nation when we fall short of what You want for us.
Forgive us when we subject others to injustice, racism and oppression.
Forgive us when we don't extend our hospitality
And when we make others feel unwelcome.

Forgive us God.

We pray for our Government and all decision makers,
Guide them and guide us all.
We pray for unity for our nation and for Your continuing presence among us.
Lead Your people, enable us to accept each others' differences.
Reshape us and as we celebrate the new life You bring.

Hear our prayer Lord. Amen

Written by: *Karen Guiao, a youth member of the Assembly Reference Committee on Multicultural Ministry, of the Uniting Church.*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 2002, page 11*)

GROWING-UP IN TWO WORLDS

While there is the richness of having two cultural heritages to choose from, children of bicultural backgrounds and 'second generation' migrant young people may experience a sense of being 'different'. They may ask themselves "Who am I" and experience the pain of not fully belonging to either cultural heritage and may even have feelings of guilt or embarrassment about family and self- and their perceived cultural *different-ness*. They may have difficulty finding others who understand their struggle. Some children suffer because of the high expectations of parents who, though well meaning, want to encourage their children to maintain their cultural heritage at all costs. It can be very stressful for the young person trying to live in two cultures. They need understanding and support as they seek to integrate distinctly different cultural traditions into their identity.

"Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" Psalm 139: 7

Written by: *Rev Helen Richmond*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 2002, page 18*)

A CRY FROM THE HEART – BETWEEN CULTURES

God, Your steadfast love has sustained me,
Your light has guided me during the time of my transition.
You called my family and I to this new land,
A land which is filled with Your blessings.
I thank and praise Your name.

Hospitality God, where do we go apart from You!

Here I am growing up in a foreign context
I face the dilemma of identity crisis, pulled in different directions.
No one seems to understand my life situation.

Migrant God, where do I go apart from You?

My parents hold on to the traditions and cultures
they brought with them from the Southern seas.
They impose on me their cultural values,
We find it hard to understand each other.
They look back while I am trying to take some steps forward.

Risen Father Mother God, where do I go apart from You!

The traditional worship services no longer caters for my need.
I do not get the help I need to live with my questions.
I don't feel I belong.

And Your church becomes self-centered,
internal politics takes priority over mission.

Communal God, where do I go apart from You?

At school, I intimidate other students and teachers.
I have no joy in pursuing further study.
My heart is filled with bad feelings and depression.
No one seems to know my real need - to be accepted as I am.

Reconciling God, where do I go apart from You?

Trying to escape my pain and confusion
I leave home, I leave Your church.
I just try and enjoy freedom, choosing what I think is best for the day
later meeting the consequence.
I end up at the place where the worst of sinners gather –
playing touch rugby on a hot sunny afternoon.

Liberating God, where do I go apart from You?

And I cry: “Abba father, who will come to liberate me?”

Written by: *Otto Fava, Theological student at United Theological College NSW
(Mission Prayer Handbook 2002, page 19)*

GIVING THANKS FOR OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

What has shaped us and given us our sense of belonging? Often our sense of identity is linked to our roots, our culture, the values of the community in which we grew up, the land and the landscape that has nurtured us. For each of us these roots are part of our story, our identity, our memory. Migration can be a traumatic experience but it can also be liberating. There are many stories of celebration that come from the experience of migration. Our cultural roots may give us stability and confidence but they can also restrain and restrict us. Sometimes by being *set adrift*, by moving from a monocultural setting we break free and new horizons are opened up.

Parents want their children to gain the skills they need to flourish where they have been replanted. This means preserving and passing on our faith and cultural heritage but it also means being open to the new possibilities that are present in each new moment and each new context. It is important to recognise and nurture our roots, at the same time, it is important to be open to the new thing God is doing in our lives and find ways to express our faith in each particular time and context. It is possible to meet the living Christ in every place!

Pushpam Vythiantham came to Australia from Sri Lanka five years ago

"We have a rich tradition and culture. We want to pass this onto the next generation though they don't know our language; we want to pass this tradition and culture on to others who we live with and meet in Australia for the future"

Written by: *Multicultural Ministry Agency*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 2002, page 54*)

A PRAYER OF A MIGRANT PARENT

We give You thanks for the gift of our children.
They mean so much to us.
And we have gone through so much hoping that they can have a good life in this land.

We know they really belong to You.
Forgive us for being so fearful for their future,
For not trusting that You will lead them as You have led us.
Sometimes we are concerned that they are losing what means so much to us.
We don't want them to be hurt.
We want them to know who they are.
We don't want them to feel ashamed of their roots,
As sometimes we were made to feel.

We want them to know their culture, their language,
to be proud of their heritage.

But sometimes we have tried to make them in our own image.
Forgive us God.

Help us to trust that You are working in their lives.
Give them Your wisdom in knowing what is important from their heritage
that they need to hold onto;
and what they can let go of to take hold of a new identity.

Pilgrim God, You are ever creating and renewing human communities.
You are shaping a new future in this land and they are part of it.
You will take them along new paths that we have not travelled.
You will lead them in new directions.
We give them as a gift to You and to this land.
May they be happy and may they flourish here.

We entrust our children to You.
Protect them and walk with them as You have walked with us. Amen

Written by: *Multicultural Ministry Agency*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 2002, page 55*)

IS THIS OUR CHURCH TOO?

Any Sunday around the country worship in Uniting Churches takes place in many different languages. We give thanks to God for congregations that are finding their home in the Uniting Church. Many are growing in what it means to belong to the Uniting Church, learning new ways and are proud to be part of the Uniting Church. But it can be a painful process. Cross-cultural conversation and understanding isn't easy. It takes time to listen to each other and build bridges of understanding. Language can be a great difficulty to the participation of ministers and lay leaders in the life of the wider church. The wider church can lack understanding of these congregations' issues and concerns, and grievances may not be understood or adequately dealt with. What we want is not a withdrawal of congregations and ministers from the Uniting Church. We are seeking ways these congregations and ministers can sense more fully being a part of the Uniting Church; can contribute more fully their gifts to the Uniting Church; can experience more meaningful pastoral care and be encouraged and supported in their mission and ministry within Australian society.

Written by: *Multicultural Ministry Agency*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 2002, page 68*)

WE ARE A MULTICULTURAL CHURCH

You say "we are a multicultural church", but sometimes those words sound hollow.

It feels like only one culture is more valued, that there is only one way of doing things. We find it difficult to work with your regulations that you love to apply. There are traditions we bring which we want you to also value.

We want to be with you but we hear you talk of us as a "problem". We should just fit in and learn to do things the Uniting Church way.

We are trying. We go to Presbytery meetings, and other meetings but none of our concerns seem to be on the agenda. Bombarded with this and that, all in your language. With our limited English it is hard to express what we really feel. We want to tell you what it is like from our side but you speak too quickly and you don't listen. Our voice becomes silent. Sometimes it feels we are invisible - you can't see us or hear us unless we look and sound like you.

We approach you to share property, you are quick to say no. Why belong to this church that treats us as if we are not important? And where we do share property, are we equal partners? You still act as if this property is yours and we are just guests.

Hurting inside, sometimes we wonder if it is too much trouble. Can we really belong to this Uniting Church? Will we always feel an oppressed minority and our ministers second class?

Is this our church too? Is it possible to really belong together? Do you really want to be a multicultural church?

Written by: *Rev Helen Richmond*
(*Mission Prayer Handbook 2002, page 69*)

ADDITIONAL**PRAYERS OF CONFESSION**

If we have rushed in, thinking that we know the answers,
assured of our own wisdom, failed to listen,
if we have used our church's constitution and regulations
in ways that bind the spirit
Lord have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

If we have held back, given in to despair.
If we have believed that change was impossible,
Or given up on Your church
Lord have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

If we have not lived out the good news of the gospel, but wanted to stay with the security of the known and familiar instead of stepping out in faith to be your witnesses,
Lord have mercy.

Christ have mercy.