

CASE STUDY 2

Anderson Baptist Church, Reading

Introduction

We are a church of about 90 members including those from Nepal, UK, France, Ghana, Barbados and Albania. Half of our congregation are Nepali speakers and half are English speakers. We are learning what it means to be God's family grappling with being multi-cultural and bi-lingual. We have a great sense of being called to be a church that offers welcome to all who come and to work wholeheartedly at being inclusive across age, ability and culture. Our vision is to keep on walking, talking and journeying together as we share the good news of the Kingdom of God.

History

In 2006 our Baptist cluster hosted a visiting team of Nepali Christians who were attending the Baptist Conference in Birmingham. Pastor Tula and Chandra Rai were part of the visiting team. Pastor Tula believed God was calling him to come and work amongst the Nepali people settling in the UK, and in 2007 he approached the congregation at Anderson to receive him and his family as he responded to the call and travelled to the UK to work with INF (International Nepal Fellowship).

Change

For many years Anderson has had a heart for Nepal through the work of BMS, sabbatical visits, and other friends. The decision of the church to welcome Pastor Tula and his family has led us to an amazing and unique ministry. God has used the openness at Anderson to transform us as a community. Pastor Tula's ministry amongst the Nepali people settling in and around Reading has led to a strong Nepali group forming around him. From the outset we decided that we wanted to be a church where everyone was seen as an equal, and that it was important that our worship and our life reflected who we are - rather than sticking to familiar, traditional and comfortable ways of being church. We preached Gal 3:28 *'There is no Jew, no Greek, no English, no Nepali, ...'* frequently as we tackled the importance of all being of equal importance to God, and of all having a part to play. This has impacted our leadership, our worship, songs, prayers, seating arrangements, church meeting, finances, social gatherings and outreach activities.

Leadership Team

As the demographic of the church has changed we have worked at making sure that all voices are heard in church life. On the deaconate we have worked to have Nepali representation beginning with Pastor Tula, John Gurung and Alina Rai. We have actively encouraged Nepali leaders, and this has led to Pastor Tula being recognised as a Sessional Minister for the Nepali Congregation and Alina Rai beginning her Ministerial training amongst us. We place high priority on establishing prayerful and friendly relationships amongst the leadership team. We have faced many challenges and difficulties on the way, but we believe it is the strong loving relational ethos, learning to listen well and our commitment to prayer that has kept us travelling together.

Worshipping Together

Like every church we work hard to worship together. Our model is to be like a family who does what they can together and then to bless each other to do the other things apart. Our default pattern for a Sunday service is all-age, both languages in the first half, and then we divide into children, youth, Nepali speakers and English speakers in the second half, all returning for refreshments at the end of the service. One Sunday a month we keep both language groups together for the whole service, which always includes our Communion. Alongside the regular Sunday morning service we offer a variety of worship services conducted in one language and aimed at a particular group; for example: Saturday Nepali Service in Nepali, Sunday Afternoon Tea Service in English, Messy Church with a family focus, 'Our Place' with a focus on people with additional needs, and trips to Soul Survivor Church with the youth. As we have developed our pattern for worshipping together we have recognised the need to include Nepali language into our services to be inclusive. This started with the Lord's Prayer, and a few songs that were easy for us all to learn. The challenge of different scripts, different musical styles, non-readers in the congregation, different cultural approaches to planning a service and leadership capacity has made this slow progress. Praying together has also challenged us and we have experimented with different approaches. At the present time we use open prayer in both languages, silence, written prayers and translators to keep us praying together.

Church Meetings

Central to the running of our church we were faced with the challenge of including everyone in the decision making process. This was a matter of making our meetings accessible in both languages, offering discussion topics that could be taken away and returned to before making a decision and helping everyone understand the importance of offering their own thinking as we discerned God's direction together. This highlighted the very different approaches to leadership and understanding within Nepali Baptist and English Baptist culture.

Children and Youth

Our vision to work at multi-cultural church was driven by Pastor Tula's desire that the children and youth should grow up within the church community together, English and Nepali. This remains our goal but we struggle to make it a reality. Within the Sunday children's work this has been easier to manage with the children of different ethnic backgrounds mixing well and growing together in faith. However, our youth group has no Nepali members, as there currently are no Nepali families with teenagers connected to our congregation. This may point to a particular challenge of crossing cultures for the teenagers. We are pioneering a new group working with the young adults (20-40's) who are mostly Nepali but seeking to make it open to all. This is in its early stages.

Outreach

Anderson has a long history of youth work and has maintained this through the Scouting groups: Beavers, Cubs and Scouts, and also through the Toddlers group. Whilst the groups continue to thrive it is noticeable that we do not have any Nepali members in the groups and very few others from ethnic groups, despite living in an area of many ethnicities. This brings into question how we should proceed in the future and what the best way to reach out to our local community is, given that we have limited resources. The Nepali community have led us to reaching out through some community events and meals. We have been encouraged to be part of East Reading Festival using Nepali song and dance as a way to connect with others and to join in special outreach programmes at Christmas and New Year, which have been led by Pastor Tula and Alina.



Language

There have been English language and discussion classes offered to help with English which has helped in various ways, breaking down barriers and offering simple language skills to those who attend. There continues to be a Nepali language class where some of the Nepali women meet to help teach Judith, our minister, focusing on language use in the services and studying the Bible passage of the week.

Food

The meals have been a great way for everyone to get involved. We have lovely feasts and times of fellowship over the different food we all bring. But there are problems and it is not always straightforward to sort them out. However, through listening, discussion, prayer, mistakes, reflection and wise leadership we have sought to move on.

Highlights

Last year we took part in a weekend on song writing within a multi-cultural church. It was both challenging and brilliant as we composed our own Anderson bi-lingual worship songs to use. On the weekend we were given seven reasons to celebrate multi-cultural church: God is glorified, we value other people, it challenges cultural pride, it enlarges on vision, we learn more about God, it impacts the world, and it is a foretaste of eternity. This has been a great encouragement to us to continue our journey together. It is God who leads, God who sustains and God who walks beside us.