



6. Evangelism and ethnicity

How can we learn about evangelism from culturally diverse groups in the UK?

How do we go about listening to what these groups might have to say?

Introduction

British Methodism is a culturally diverse community, and so learning to listen to – and learn from – other groups can strengthen evangelism across the whole Church.

The response to the online survey revealed that many Methodists recognised the importance of listening to Methodists from culturally diverse groups, with some emphasising that this was best seen as a ‘two-way process’. Respondents also shared the ways they had learnt from different experiences of worship and wrote of how diverse churches can work together in reaching out to others.

Why this matters

The New Testament shows the gospel breaking through cultural and ethnic barriers, and inviting all to embrace God’s kingdom. As apostle to the Gentiles, Paul played a key role in this process, encouraging the Jewish believer to accept their gentile brother or sister in Christ and vice versa (Romans 14). The vision in Revelation of people from all nations gathered together before the throne of the Lamb (Revelation 7:9-17) has also been an inspiration for churches working together in mission.

Methodism has always had a global dimension, reflected in Wesley’s famous claim, “I look on all the world as my parish”, and – within Wesley’s lifetime – Thomas Coke was appointed as a missionary to America. Throughout the Church’s history, Methodists from across the world have been involved in mission overseas, and – today – in reverse missionaries are also arriving to help evangelise Britain.

At the consultation, participants reflected on the importance of hearing voices from other cultures. Learning about the experience of coming to the United Kingdom from overseas – including finding Britain a less ‘Christian’ country than expected – can help the Church reflect on its mission today, while exposure to other evangelistic approaches can be both challenging and inspiring.

The participants also pointed out the challenge for culturally diverse congregations engaging with the local community, where people are often surprised to find they are Christians. Those from other cultures can also find it difficult to find opportunities to serve in their churches, and cultural and language barriers contribute to this. In terms of the practice of evangelism, culturally diverse congregations have highlighted the importance of friendship and families in sharing faith. The participants also noted that the ‘missing voice’ within the conversation around evangelism is the younger generation, with many churches populated by few aged under 50.

Further resources

- There are a range of resources exploring evangelism and mission among other cultures available, but - for reaching out to those from a South Asian background – see C Rasiah and Robin Thomson, *Notes for the Journey: following Jesus, staying South Asian* (London, South Asian Concern, 2011).
- For a resource exploring how to ‘welcome’ people into church, including those from other cultures, see *First Impressions Count: deepening your church’s culture of welcome*, available at www.methodist.org.uk/mission/welcome-and-invitation.
- For a range of resources on evangelism, visit www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/evangelism/resources.

Questions for discussion

The following questions are suggested as ways of taking the conversation forward.

1. What is your experience of worshipping alongside those from other ethnicities or cultures?

2. How might our evangelism change if we take account of Methodists from ethnic groups different to your own?

3. What voices in your community are missing from your local church?

4. What are the challenges and opportunities of reaching out to different cultures with the gospel?