

Multiculturalism Matters

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA | PRESBYTERY OF SOUTH MORETON | 18 MARCH 2015



UCA research identifies issues facing international students on south-side

ONE-THIRD of international students in Brisbane's southern suburbs feel disconnected from the local community, and almost one-sixth say they experience discrimination or being devalued in work, social or university settings.

These are just two findings emerging from research conducted during 2014 by Pastor Noah Kim of Sunnybank UC.

Noah is the International Student Pastor at Sunnybank, a project officer at South Brisbane International Students Support Partnership, and a chaplaincy intern at Griffith University.

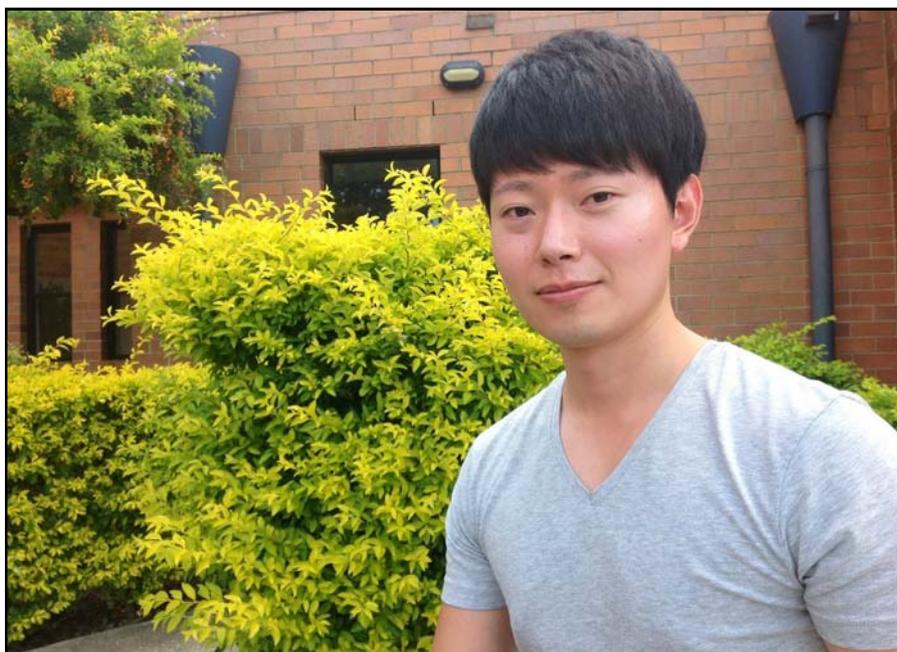
He also founded and leads Students Together Brisbane, a weekly social and online outreach of Sunnybank UC which began in 2013. Stories shared by students in this group drew the church's attention to a range of issues which were then explored in the research project.

Seventy-five students, aged from 18 to 57, participated in an in-depth online and written survey in June 2014. Over 90% were of Asian background, predominantly from Korea and China.

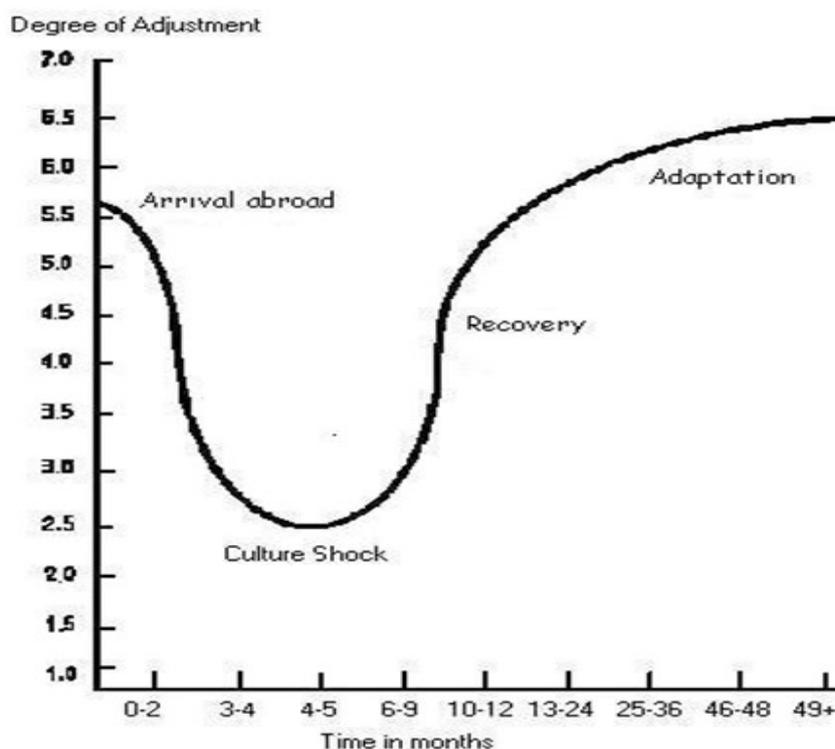
Noah presented his findings to a group of civic and community leaders at Sunnybank UC on February 25.

Brisbane's southern suburbs, particularly those around Griffith University and the Sunnybank area, host an estimated 8000 international students from 100 countries, with at least another 2000 on short-term travel and working holidays.

About 20% of the students plan to stay in Australia after graduation, but most intend to leave after 2½ years.



(Above) Pastor Noah Kim; (below) a typical graph illustrating the emotional journey of international students as they seek to adjust to Australia.



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New Tongan group joins Redland Bay UC

REDLAND Bay UC is hosting a new Tongan worship group.

The group had been meeting informally at a private property in Thornlands, and approached Rev. Viliami Mila in late 2014 to ask if they could use the church for worship.

From that approach has grown a strong relationship between Viliami, the Redland Bay UC, and the Tongan group, which has grown to about 50 adults and children.

They hold a Tongan-language service at the church on Sunday afternoons, and share in a combined Holy Communion service with the morning congregation on the

second Sunday of each month.

Viliami says the group now comes under the Redland Bay UC Church Council and they are keen to be received into membership.

The Redland Bay church's 135th anniversary service on April 26 will include the dedication of elders and leaders for both congregations.

PHOTO shows Tevita Kuti conducting the new Tongan choir at Redland Bay UC at their combined Communion service on March 8, accompanied by Rev. Viliami Mila.

Research highlights students' needs

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This proposed 2½-year average stay coincides with the experience of culture shock and adjustment difficulties experienced by many people who move abroad (see graph on page 1).

After an initial 'honeymoon period,' the new arrivals often become homesick, depressed about feeling helpless and isolated, they sleep and eat poorly, they feel vulnerable and may withdraw.

"In this period, they might experience criticism for their culturally inappropriate actions, they might continue to feel frustrated at communication difficulties, and they might build up feelings of hostility to particular cultural practices of the

host country," Noah says. "On account of these experiences they might isolate and be isolated from the host culture."

Other specific findings include:

- 30% feel disconnected and not welcome by their peers due to differences in culture and language;
- 36% don't feel confident in work and studies;
- 60% feel living costs in Brisbane are too high;
- 41% experience difficulties in shopping and travelling;
- 15% feel used or exploited, or are paid less than the standard rate;
- 15% have been in trouble for not understanding laws and regulations;
- 13% have been involved in or witnessed an attack, high-risk behaviour or violence.

In terms of social outlets, those surveyed expressed strong interest in

day trips, informal social gatherings that are relational and experiential, and music and art.

They are also interested in practical classes that help them develop life skills, such as conversational English, self-defence, cooking and financial management.

And while 25% want to connect with others from their own cultural group, 56% want to connect with local young adults and 53% want to learn about and experience Australian society and culture.

The project now enters a second phase of coordinating and integrating existing student support services and networks to create a more holistic and comprehensive community and civic partnership in addressing the needs of international students.

Also involved in the research were Katrina Tseng, Wilfred Nguyen, Roberto Chata and Rev. Andrew Ross.

‘Hidden’ multicultural past prompts Lesley to promote safe and inclusive hospitality

LESLEY Bryant of Currumbin grew up not knowing about her Samoan and Fijian heritage.

Her great-grandmother came from a high-level Samoan family and moved to Fiji in the late 19th century, where she married an English man.

Their son, Lesley’s grandfather, was born in Fiji, moved to North Queensland and served with the Australian forces at Gallipoli in 1915.

But Lesley’s mother kept her Pacific Island roots a secret because of negative attitudes at the time towards South Sea Islander labourers (derogatively called *Kanakas*) in the Innisfail area where they lived.

Only as an adult did Lesley discover her true ancestry, and come to understand afresh the racial divides in Australia that led her mother to deny her cultural identity.

That discovery has set Lesley on a journey which has both personal and wider cultural significance.

She has visited Fiji and Samoa, and bridged more than 100 years of separation from her extended family. This reconnection has been a source of joy and learning for her.

Lesley has also taken a great interest in the history of South Sea Islanders in Queensland — keen to help their story be told, and that the contribution which Australian SSI labourers made to Australia’s social and economic history is recognised and honoured.



At the Women’s World Café at Elanora UC on March 12: Lesley Bryant (left) with Ree Ali (centre) and Ishrat Abdool. Photo: Beth Nicholls

She helped organise the 2013 commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the first SSI labourers to Queensland — from Vanuatu to Beaudesert.

“Over 60,000 South Sea Islanders came to Queensland as indentured labourers from 1863-1904, and some 15,000 died due to poverty, disease and mistreatment,” Lesley says.

“Their living descendants, Australian South Sea Islanders, are one of the most disadvantaged groups in Australia today.”

The discrimination experienced in

recent years by Muslims in Australia, including local opposition towards a proposal for a prayer centre on the southern Gold Coast, has also caught Lesley’s attention.

Lesley has become an advocate for inter-faith engagement that builds relationships and understanding across religious and cultural differences, especially among women.

“Women are a good place to start because they are the peace-makers,” she says.

Lesley led a Creators of Peace conversation circle in 2009, and is active in the Southern Gold Coast Women’s World Café, which held its third event last week at her home church, Elanora UC, involving about 30 women from diverse backgrounds.

“The Christian church needs to be better at creating safe spaces for people to share their stories with honesty, acceptance and dignity,” Lesley says.

“We need to be much better educated about other faiths and the lives of the people who follow them.

“Sometimes we fear dialogue with people who are different because it might diminish or threaten us — but instead, it enlarges us.

“People should not have to hide who they are, what they believe, or the questions they have.”



Lesley Bryant at home, with a *tapa* given to her by relatives when she visited Samoa



Farewell to Rev Dr Tony Floyd

REPRESENTATIVES of multicultural ministry in the Presbytery and the Synod gathered on March 7 at Kangaroo Point UC to farewell the UCA Assembly's National Director for Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry, Rev. Dr Tony Floyd, who retires on March 31 after eight years in the role. Photos show: (above) Synod Multi Cross Cultural Committee members Akesa Racava, Rev. Viliama Mila, Deaconess Terani Lima, Ps David Busch and Ps Moses Leth, presenting Tony with a framed *tapa*; (middle) Tony Floyd leads Holy Communion after a lunch in his honour; (top) Tony and Rev. Lu Senituli lead Communion at Redland Bay UC on March 8, where Tony was the guest preacher.

Presbytery to host South Sudanese national conference

THE Nuer UC Faith Community at St David's, Coopers Plains, will host the second UCA South Sudanese national conference, from September 25-27 this year.

Around 80 South Sudanese people from interstate and across Brisbane are expected to attend, with more joining in special Friday and Saturday night events.

Rev. James Makuei Choul Khok, executive director of the Presbyterian Relief and Development Agency of South Sudan, will be the guest speaker. The Presbyterian Church of South Sudan is a partner church with the UCA, and his visit is being planned in conjunction with UnitingWorld.

The first national gathering of South Sudanese people in the UCA was held in Adelaide in 2012. This event is being organised by the Nuer Faith Community and a second South Sudanese faith community attached to East Brisbane UC.

Thorneside offers a big multicultural welcome



ABOUT 12 churches in the Presbytery have bought the large, corflute, multi-lingual Welcome posters now available. Here is Thorneside's, fixed to the external wall at the church entry.

Posters are still available at \$30 from the Presbytery Office (pick-up only).

Welcome back!

Multiculturalism Matters returns in 2015 as a bi-monthly newsletter. Apart from sharing significant news of the culturally diverse congregations of the Presbytery, it will look for stories that encourage congregations and agencies to become more attuned to, and engaged with, the cultural diversity of their members and communities. Please contact me with story ideas. And please distribute copies as widely as you can. Thank-you.

— David Busch