

ARTICLE

## Learning to love: Pastoral care as mission at church-based, intercultural initiatives

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### Abstract

This article speaks to the relationship between social action and mission. It argues that mission at church-based, intercultural initiatives is better understood and enabled when principles and practices of pastoral care are applied. A study of four church-based intercultural initiatives in Melbourne demonstrated that the development of intercultural pastoral care practices offers a way to understand mission that is relevant for local-church-based community initiatives.

Pastoral care and mission have a confused relationship in the literature and are brought into conversation with these four case studies, demonstrating that pastoral theology has insights to offer mission. In particular, this article explores themes of compassion and empathy, formation for hospitality, and the need for deeper spiritual formation in local, church-based, intercultural community initiatives. This is an important understanding at a time when many Western Christians seem at a loss to know how to effectively engage with others in a rapidly changing and often indifferent society. It is suggested that mission is framed as pastoral care at similar church-based initiatives. Pastoral formational practices of reflective practice, spiritual engagement and supervision are recommended for all engaged in church-based, intercultural mission and this has broader relevance to all engaged in mission.

**Keywords:** Pastoral Care, Mission, Church, Community, Intercultural

### 1 Introduction

For several years during the 2010s, I worked with a mission agency in Melbourne, helping congregations relate interculturally, both internally and within their wider community. During my time in this role, I founded an initiative in a highly intercultural locality in Melbourne, providing a welcome and support for newly arrived asylum seekers. I recruited some missionaries operating in the locality and several local church leaders to help run this initiative. Many of our guests were Muslim, had made

the hazardous journey to Australia by boat and now awaited news as to whether they could stay. The first day we opened people streamed through the doors, confirming my sense of a need that could be met by local churches.

I soon regretted my open invitation to churches and agencies, as it transpired that we had very different ideas as to what we should be doing. I simply wanted to provide a safe space, offering hospitality to people who were largely traumatized, with an offer of English lessons if wanted. I was in a minority, however, in believing the initiative should not be a tool for evangelistic practices. Many guests had lost everything other than their Islamic faith. They needed stability at that point in their lives. Other volunteers insisted on Bible studies during English classes. This insistence overlooked emotional needs in favour of the purely practical and set conditions for receiving care.

One church leader wanted to demonstrate to the local council that Christians cared for asylum seekers by inviting media and local counsellors to visit for photo opportunities. I was horrified, believing the last thing the migrants needed was official visits, many having been tracked down and watched by authorities in their country of origin. Some were not emotionally ready for English lessons. The volunteers were largely untrained, but resisted the idea of training, and I was left wondering what they wanted to achieve, what was really taking place, and what motivated them. I regretfully resigned, being unable to influence the running of the initiative in what I believed was a non-invasive, nurturing manner.

As a result of this experience, I decided to conduct research into what takes place at church-based intercultural initiatives. Four intercultural initiatives, all based at evangelical churches in Melbourne, were studied to find how love of God and neighbour was expressed and what might enhance this.<sup>1</sup>

While such initiatives might be assumed to be missional, I discovered that in contrast to the joint church initiative described above, motivations and practice often aligned more closely with practices of pastoral care. This understanding may be key to effective mission and the following article will explore these connections.

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1 The full study can be accessed at <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.13057/5116>

## 2 Interpathy for pastoral care and mission

Interpathy is a term used to describe a deeply pastoral and spiritual mode of care with great relevance to mission. Definitions of mission have broadened over past decades. Newbigin defines mission as a collaborative partnership in which we share in God's mission, personified in Jesus' love demonstrated towards humankind (Newbigin 1978). Bosch proposed that the Church is missionary by its very nature (Bosch 1992: 372). Together with Flett and based on the work of Newbigin, Bosch describes mission as participation in the *missio Dei* (Flett 2010: chapter 4; Newbigin 1992: 372). Mission is thus an encompassing term, covering many modes. This review argues for pastoral care practices to underwrite Christian practices of empathy and compassion, hospitality and spirituality. These are additionally missional practices in the context of the four initiatives studied.

The motivations of most volunteers were to provide care through the provision of a service. This fits with the aims of pastoral care as mission. St Nicholas<sup>2</sup> was the exception, where the overriding aim was evangelistic, with the sewing club being an entry point for evangelistic conversation and interaction. The following review demonstrates that practices of pastoral care are applicable to mission.

Augsburger defines interpathy by clarifying the boundaries between sympathy, empathy and what he terms interpathy. He argues that interpathy supports cross-cultural counselling or care. It requires a willingness and ability to bracket out or suspend one's own beliefs and worldview, to be fully present to the worldview and consequent lived experience of someone who is culturally (or religiously) different (Augsburger 1986: 26). Most participants in the study did not demonstrate interpathy appearing more interested in talking than listening or guiding conversation onto topics of their choice. The absence of this deeply pastoral and spiritual mode of care was a loss for mission.

Doehring complements Augsburger's discussion by describing empathy and compassion as central to pastoral care, a theme that resonates in the field of spiritual care (Pembroke 2019: 133–46). She explores the practice of empathy and compassion in intercultural contexts where "empathy involves imaginatively stepping into another person's emotional experience while remaining aware of and anchored in one's own emotional state." She describes compassion as empathy with a desire to help (Doehring 2015: 39–40). For the purposes of safe practice and boundary awareness it is clear emotional regulation is important when expressing empathic concern

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2 Pseudonyms are used for all study locations.

as it allows the caregiver to remain involved, rather than withdraw and, therefore, allows for ongoing compassionate care (Doehring 2015: 40). There is a clear implication that training and supervision are required to enhance compassionate care while moderating any damaging effects. These skills are routinely taught to chaplains and spiritual care practitioners in Australian healthcare settings. For instance, Spiritual Care Australia highlights empathetic engagement with clients as a fundamental quality of spiritual care professionals at all levels (Spiritual Care Australia 2021). While this study concerns volunteers rather than professionals, these standards should influence volunteer practice.

Unlike pastoral texts, recent missions texts from evangelical and catholic traditions are noticeably quiet on the specific importance of empathy or interpathy. Although the Cape Town Commitment addresses the necessity for mission to be rooted in love (Lausanne Movement, 2011), there is nothing like the detailed articulation, description and learning opportunity afforded by pastoral literature.<sup>3</sup> In a section entitled “Taking the first step, being involved and supportive, bearing fruit and rejoicing,” *Evangeli Gaudium* refers to a theologically-oriented expression of empathy: “An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.” (Francis 2013: 124). To better explore the meaning and application of such an embrace, we might ask how this works in practice and how it is evaluated.

## 2.1 Hospitality and listening as expressions of interpathy, formed out of Christ’s mission and ministry

The literature of pastoral theology and missiology reveals common themes on hospitality, in which the roles of hosts and guests are reversed (Ross 2016; Nouwen 1975; Gittins 1989). This reversal is particularly important when our ‘guests’ have experienced trauma. This “flipped hospitality” builds trust and a sense of safety in relationships (Kiser and Heath 2023: 188–94). Being a guest is disempowering and Doehring focuses on the nature of interpersonal relationships and suggests that the “process of stepping respectfully and compassionately into another’s narrative world can be described with the metaphor of hospitality” (Doehring 2015: xvii). Respect and compassion require deep listening, and spiritual practices including prayer and reflection to gain discernment necessary for what Bevans and Ross term prophetic dialogue (Bevans and Ross 2015). This includes bringing hope and peace in situations of despair. We develop deep sensitivity to people in need by connecting with our own experiences of being vulnerable and dependent (Pohl 2022: 65). Those of us

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3 For example, the Spiritual Care Australia literature just noted.

from Western nations will gain insights into how hospitality and community might liberate others when we adopt what Russell calls postcolonial theological perspectives. Western thinking is not superior to other cultures and people should be free to define themselves and to do this as equals (Russell 2009: 29–33).

Expressions of these aspects of spirituality display the love of God within the practices of pastoral care and mission and offer practice goals that each can aspire to. They can also be expressed through practices of hospitality that embrace all people and are earthed in an understanding of who is at the centre and who is at the margins of society. Hospitality offers hope, promotes lasting friendships, considers others within a hierarchy of agendas (Phil. 2.3-4), listens deeply to others, considers group as well as individual needs and celebrates diversity while offering Christ's love to all.

I suggest it is that in Christ there is pastoral care and mission. This is expressed in practices of hospitality and listening, which are visible expressions of interpathy. What might this look like on the ground, at church-based intercultural initiatives?

### **3 The research context: four intercultural, church-based initiatives**

Swindon Baptist is a large, wealthy, suburban congregation running English conversation classes for local migrants, based in its modern, purpose-built building.<sup>4</sup> The classes had commenced many years previously, in response to need. Classes ran for one and half hours, most days a week, with different volunteers each day. Volunteers did around six initial sessions of training before commencing, although no further training was offered. Most did not feel confident to take classes of more than three or four students.

St Nicholas Anglican is also a large wealthy church, in Melbourne's east. It has congregations spread over four locations, including the social housing estate where this study was conducted. The estate was inhabited by many former refugees who had arrived years earlier from south-east Asia. They still wore their cultural style of dress, unavailable to buy in shops and therefore requiring home sewing. The sewing club offered equipment for this purpose and women would arrive and leave as they pleased, bringing their sewing projects with them. The club had run for around twelve years.

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4 Names, locations and other identifying features have been changed to preserve anonymity.

Govan Church of Christ was in a blue-collar area of the city, where many young migrant families had settled. English conversation classes had been started, out of perceived need, by a church member who wanted to help migrants settle in Australia. She decided to teach English as something she knew she could do well. Tutors were drawn from the congregation. All appeared to enjoy their occasional volunteering.

Hope International was a highly multicultural Pentecostal megachurch. A training school was the focus of study, run by members, all but one of whom were migrants themselves. Despite being qualified for other high-paying professions, they had chosen to retrain as childcare educators. Their research of the locality had indicated a need for migrant women to be empowered to adapt to Australian life. The school therefore offered a government-accredited qualification in childcare for migrant women, to help them gain employment.

## 4 Method

Many hours as a participant observer were spent sequentially at each initiative, between 2015 and 2017. This allowed me to be involved in the running of the initiatives, and able to witness the minutiae of interactions between volunteers and those attending. Interviews with participants and church leaders, attendance at services and other church activities, and searches through church records provided thick data.

Observations were coded together with interview transcripts and data from church records. Reflexive comments were written during note taking and analysis to monitor my responses. Grounded theory methodologies allowed theory to emerge through coding and categorizing data in an iterative manner (Charmaz 2011, Bryant and Charmaz eds 2007). In this way, theory was built which can be further tested and expanded by future researchers.

Qualitative research and practical theology partner creatively when investigating projects based in ministry practice with a pastoral and theological perspective. Nigel Rooms and Cathy Ross argue for a close collaboration between practical theology and missiology, suggesting that practical theology challenges practitioners to “make connections between various disciplines, and within the context of differing global theologies” (Rooms and Ross 2014: 144–47). This study sought to make interdisciplinary connections by letting the data initiate discussion within a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory attempts to engage and capture as much of the complex realities of a situation as possible, attempting to obtain multiple perspectives for

theory generation by recognizing the wider contexts in which studied events occur, very much the context for the four projects (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

Participants were mostly volunteers, plus some church leaders. The exception was Hope International where participants received a wage. This acted as a useful comparison with the first three situations, as I noted differences and similarities in motivations and skill levels resulting from wage earning.

Findings regarding themes of mission as pastoral care, compassion and empathy, and hospitality and spirituality will be described in the following section. This will lead into discussion of these pastoral themes for effective, caring mission.

## 5 “Just caring” for others

Participant observation showed how care was provided differently between the four contexts. Practices of teaching, prayer, and practical offers of help varied across the four intercultural initiatives. Expressions of love were often noted at Swindon where one volunteer helped students make and attend medical appointments, while another invited students to her home at Christmas. The English classes at Govan started after asylum seekers came to church asking for practical help. The founder of classes felt unable to offer goods at that time, but offered what she could in the form of English lessons. These participants spoke of their primary motivation for service being one of care. The training school at Hope was an example of what might be achieved when church members desire to make a positive contribution to the local community, as an expression of care. They pro-actively cared for physical and emotional needs of students and were committed to enabling every student to be successful. The result was an experience for students of love, acceptance and academic success. Teachers were content to offer a high level of care with no evangelistic agenda attached. For instance, meals would be provided to students in crisis and several teachers would pray regularly together for students. Bonds between teachers and students were displayed through student teacher interactions and reports of students in crisis texting teachers late at night, requesting prayer. I was left in little doubt that this was a special time for both students and teachers, one which would probably stay with them for life.

In contrast, volunteers at St Nicholas, while faithful and hard-working, revealed a care hindered by evangelistic aims. For instance, these participants described the women as difficult (for being strong minded) and one described the “tough ground” in which they worked. This resulted in them celebrating and loving the women attending less than they might if they had aimed simply to care.

Spirituality was hard to discern when volunteers failed to pray or work together as a team, something resisted by volunteers at Swindon and Govan. While Govan volunteers mentioned they prayed privately, talk about God was often absent at Swindon, leading me to note, "God has gone underground!" Teachers at Hope and St Nicholas met together weekly for prayer, and this was reflected in the sessions where informal talk about God and faith took place. This seemed forced at St Nicholas, with volunteers actively seeking opportunities to lever talk about God into conversations. Talk about God seemed more spontaneous at Hope International. An example of this was when a teacher spoke during her class of a dream she had about the school's manager taking up art. The manager was reportedly amazed by this, having felt God had recently been encouraging her to do just that. The volunteer, Lilly, later told me this anecdote was shared spontaneously. In other words, this was not a calculated attempt at evangelism. This behaviour reflected a strong sense of God's immanence amongst the Christian teachers, an overflowing of nurtured spirituality.

The following discussion will explore how pastoral care, offered through expressions of love, is an effective and appropriate framework for church-based, intercultural community initiatives, as participation in the *missio Dei*. I will focus on the areas of empathy and compassion, hospitality and spirituality, all practices of pastoral care applicable to mission.

## 6 Expressing love of God and neighbour

If "pastoral care is an expression of human concern through activities" (Lartey 1997: 25–6), essentially expressions of love, then this can include many activities, from counselling or celebrating, to simply being present with people. The four initiatives aimed to address human need through activities, ranging from learning English to assisting integration into Australian life, and training childcare workers hopeful of employment. For Doehring, pastoral care takes many forms and in North America often takes the form of crisis intervention, followed by supportive care. She describes this as spiritual care that comes alongside others to offer sustaining presence in either an ongoing way or through difficult seasons (Doehring 2015: xxii). Developing internal resilience through tough times is where Lartey sees that "pastoral caregivers have a concern for what meets the eye about human persons as well as what may lie deeply buried within them." (Lartey 1997: 26). These pastoral values often resonate strongly and sometimes by implication with participants.

The provision of a community service is a form of spiritual care according to Lartey, Bosch and Kirk, but given the level of mutuality this care could also be extended through the formation and maintenance of friendships (Lartey 1997: 25–6;

Bosch 1992: 512–18; Kirk 1999: 205–25). Because of this overlap between pastoral care and mission in a practical theological framework, each has a spiritual element, and the source of love is God. Mission is at the heart of the church and when mission and pastoral care are undertaken, evangelism may take place, as appropriate participation in the *missio Dei*.

Caregivers addressed in the pastoral care literature are often specialists, professionals or interns, so it would be unrealistic to expect the mostly volunteer participants to perform as qualified pastoral carers. However, their effectiveness as intercultural pastoral carers is assessed simply on their ability to communicate love. The following discussion is guided by the finding/insight that participants were motivated by a desire to see migrants flourish in Australia. All participants, whether practicing Christians or not, acted on behalf of the sponsoring church, prompting a working assumption that they therefore possessed some level of concern about the wellbeing, and perhaps the spiritual wellbeing of migrants.

## 6.1 Empathy and compassion

Lartey suggests that empathy has “three characteristics ... a *feeling* (affective) level, a *thinking* (cognitive) level and a *tendency to action* (conative) level. Empathy then, is a way of being with other people, which enters into how it feels like to be who they are” (Lartey 1997: 92). While it was not possible to observe and trace the feelings of participants, a cognitive level of empathy was expressed during interviews as participants spoke with understanding of the difficulties faced by new migrants and related these to their own experiences. This was then fed back into their volunteering or work.

For Doehring, the intercultural dimensions of “empathy and compassion play a central role in pastoral and spiritual care. Empathy involves imaginatively stepping into another person’s emotional experience while remaining aware of and anchored in one’s own emotional state” (Doehring 2015: 39–40). Participants at Northern Training demonstrated such empathy through boundaried emotional involvement with students. Participants at Swindon spoke of a desire to help their students learn English, based on their own experience of living overseas, having to study a foreign language, and observing a family member from overseas adjust to life in Australia.

Participants were engaged in mission, often through formation in the “disciplined exercise” of empathic listening, creating what Augsburg describes as “sharing another’s feelings, not through projection but through compassionate active imagination. Empathy is an intentional affective response” (Augsburger 1986: 27). For Pembroke, whether in the parish or healthcare context, care that is “built on a foundation of empathy and compassion is an expression of *agape* ... a commitment to

extend oneself in acting in a loving, kind, and beneficent way towards one's neighbour" (Pembroke 2019: 133–46). This is an essential factor if those attending initiatives are to experience and sensitively express God's love.

Pembroke's deceptively simple, but pastorally and vocationally complex principle becomes a highly desirable criterion for selection, training, and formation of volunteers. One participant had previously had little to do with migrants before volunteering at the English lessons, but she was, however, someone who cared deeply for others and this concern was expressed through her plans to serve and her attentive listening and responses to her students.

Shared experiences of migration enabled empathy with new migrants. Cognitive and conative levels of empathy were apparent in the advocacy framework of one person's provision of medical care for women who rarely received the level of care enjoyed by other Australians. The affective level may have been there, but it was "acting in a loving, kind, and beneficent way" that counted.

Lartey describes the pastoral carer as needing to progress from sympathy (often counter-productive) to empathy and then to interpathy. Augsburger's definition captures the movement that needs to emerge across the sites, through formation and reflective practice if possible. He revisits and extends comment on interpathy by identifying the core dynamic of this shift in affect as an intentional cognitive envisioning of another's thoughts and feelings, even though the thoughts rise from another frame of moral reasoning and the feelings spring from another basis of assumptions. "I (the culturally different person) take a foreign perspective, base my thought on a foreign assumption, and allow myself to feel the resultant feelings and their cognitive and emotive consequences in my personality as I inhabit, insofar as I am capable of inhabiting, a foreign context" (Augsburger 1986: 30).

Lartey warns that interpathy must "rest upon the premise of human universality." (Lartey 1997: 94). Interpathy was the next learning bridge to be crossed when participants described their feelings or experiences. A truly interpathic caregiver may become as close as possible to being "emic", as described by Hiebert, based on a definition by Kenneth Pike (Hiebert 2009: 90; Pike 1990). To be emic is to be a cultural insider, while a cultural outsider is classed as etic. The aim of the missionary, the anthropologist, or in the case of this study, the intercultural carer, is to move towards an emic stance, even though this is ultimately not possible for someone from a different culture. Formation and training in reflective practice can still enhance this skill. Few people would be naturally interpathic. For westerners raised into a worldview that often implies that Western culture is superior, this may be a particular

pastoral formation challenge. One participant stated that she did not need to understand the cultures of her students, as she was there to teach them English! While she was naturally empathic, embodying interpathy would have enhanced her caring skills.

Doehring describes compassion as empathy that results in action, or more accurately, care in action (Doehring 2015: 43). By this definition, compassion was strongly in evidence at all initiatives. Already open to international students because of her intercultural experience, Jean, a volunteer, worried about her students because “they had real trouble getting through to others ... what their needs were”.<sup>5</sup> Another responded to the needs of asylum seekers by initiating the English lessons at Govan, a motivation not always the reason for engagement. Some volunteers were motivated initially by their belief that, as Christians, they needed to serve in the life of the church which meant that compassion was harder to discern at St Nicholas. Participants had a functional approach to their service and spoke of the women in a matter-of-fact manner, indicating some knowledge but no empathy, and at times with some frustration with their lack of responsiveness to Christianity. Formation of volunteers that embraces a pastoral care view of reflective practice while engaged in cross-cultural encounter would enable more honest self-awareness.

Empathy is easier to attain when based in shared experiences, although it is possible to learn. The progression from sympathy to empathy to interpathy is often a reflective journey of self-discovery and if interpathy is like being emic, then being a cultural insider is a goal that pastoral practitioners and anyone in mission can aspire to. Empathy is harder to access when care is driven by a desire for conversions, a tension each initiative faced without effective resolution.

## 6.2 Hospitality: A friendly and welcoming environment

Hospitality is a gateway to mutuality, friendship and community, and all initiatives held potential for long lasting friendships and community-building. The biblical theme of hospitality amongst Christians served to identify aspects of hospitality noted at each project.<sup>6</sup> For Lartey, loving one’s neighbour as oneself

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5 Jean interview.

6 For example, Isa. 58.7, Tit. 1.8. These references support my arguments on the theme of hospitality.

*is closely linked in the teaching of Jesus to that of "loving God with all one's mind, strength and heart." The Church as the Body of Christ in the world manifests its theological insights most clearly by the ways it relates within itself and with the world community around it. (Lartey 2006: 121).*

The data suggested that the practices of hospitality and friendship-building in a community context should be viewed as key elements of a model of pastoral care. Deep and careful theological reflection upon this theme can inform carers as they re-assess the levels of care they are willing or able to provide, and also reframe the focus of further training.

How do volunteers learn to welcome strangers? Ross describes hospitality as a two-way process in which hosts (participants) have much to learn from those at the margins and indeed become guests of the migrants attending initiatives (Ross 2016). This suggests, therefore, that pastoral care and all expressions of mission are two-way processes of hospitality that become a meeting point where an exchange of power teaches and empowers and holds the possibility of transformation for the carer. Most participants at all locations sought to express some form of friendship with attending migrants and a cultural context of friendliness and welcome were significant findings. While for some this friendship was expressed only in the sessions, others sought to foster relationships at other times. These friendships were life-enhancing and nurturing, especially when attendees were marginalised in Australia due to ethnicity, culture, and limited English.

A commitment to friendship and journeying together (to varying degrees dependent on context) is a realistic expectation of Christian practice in similar intercultural, church-based initiatives. Hospitality is a practice to which Christians are called throughout the New Testament.

Where mutuality was observed, genuine friendships were therefore possible. Gittins describes the roles and expectations of hosts and guests, noting that while guests and strangers are differentiated in the English language, they share the same term in many languages. Therefore, if strangers (and all volunteers were initially strangers to their students) do not allow others to be hosts they demonstrate disrespect and cause confusion. This involves deferring to them and respecting their cultural norms. Not allowing others to be hosts is to demonstrate aggression (Gittins 1989).

Attendees may not experience aggression, but unthinking colonization or lack of awareness of power may well have the same impact. Hosts, whoever they are, therefore hold a great deal of power and the task of balancing this power echoes

Doehring's description of the co-creation of theological meaning in the care-giver/care-receiver relationship (Doehring 2015: 100–102). An appreciation of this can challenge participants and volunteers in similar, church-based initiatives to invite their guests to become, not a part of their culture, but to step into a space within which a third, new and shared culture can emerge – one where roles may be exchanged. I am reminded of Pembroke's application of the "relational space" within the Trinity to pastoral care practice. Members are unified, yet with space between them that allows for distinctiveness (Pembroke 2016: 26–8), a liminal movement potentially empowering and certainly defining of identity.

Glimpses of friendship and sparks of compassion appeared in the findings and while a few volunteers at Swindon only wanted to teach English others were concerned to care any way possible. Northern Training participants clearly wished to empower students in line with the school's rationale and ethos but where on the training and development agenda were processes for developing empathy, interpathy, and reflective listening skills? Where the aim of an initiative is evangelism, love-in-action may demonstrate truth claims but the tension remains of creating what Nouwen describes as the sensitive but life-giving task of creating space for strangers in our lives:

*When hostility is converted into hospitality then fearful strangers can become guests revealing to their hosts the promise they are carrying with them. Then, in fact, the distinction between host and guest proves to be artificial and evaporates in the recognition of the new-found unity. (Nouwen 1975: 67)*

We are therefore called to invite the stranger to "a free and friendly space where he can reveal his gifts and become our friend ... Really honest receptivity means inviting the stranger into our world on his or her terms, not on ours" (Nouwen 1975: 98). To do this in an intercultural setting, we acknowledge and contain our tendencies towards ethnocentricity and develop listening skills that take us beyond empathy into interpathy (Augsburger 1986: 27–32). This necessitates education and intentional formation in growing and developing pastoral and spiritual care skills, often lacking in mission preparation and actual settings.

### 6.3 Spirituality for pastoral care and mission

Christian spirituality may not be readily discernible, as observed at Swindon. It is suggested that a rich inner life will express itself in outward manifestations, in commitment to living a Godly life and in care for others. Care for others is, however, also a societal value and where participants did not easily speak of their faith, it was not clear whether their care for migrants was rooted in the internal and transcendent

movements of spirituality. This is a loss, in that mutual encouragement in fostering a spiritual life was absent and those attending the initiatives could be less likely to appreciate that the care they received was an expression of God's love (Bevans and Ross 2015: xv-xvi).

Bevans and Ross describe mission as necessarily prophetic dialogue in which deep listening to others precedes engaging in what they term prophetic dialogue as mission. Deep listening is a prerequisite for discernment, a mature pastoral skill and a spiritual discipline. Mission can only be done, in the final analysis, by women and men who pray regularly, who spend time in contemplation, who share their faith in theological reflection, who study and read the Bible individually and in community, who understand cultural trends and current events (Bevans and Ross 2015: Introduction).

This applies equally to practices of pastoral care and mission, especially if we add opportunities for pastoral supervision. The value of being a reflective practitioner is strong and clear whether the person is a volunteer teaching sewing or leading complex international programmes.

Jesus teaches us to love others as we love ourselves (Lk. 10.27), often a difficult concept for Christians warned against selfishness or taught that if we lose our lives then we will gain them. Jesus taught that loving others as much as ourselves is the greatest commandment, a benchmark that suggests that to love ourselves and practise self-compassion also provides the psychological flexibility and embracing hospitality important for loving others. When our awareness of God is rooted in a sense of God's love for us, we may gain the sensitivity to discern how he would express God's love for others, through us. This may involve proclamation but more often it will be by listening, celebrating others and through acts of service.

## **7 Summary and conclusion**

This article has explored interactions between pastoral care and mission. I have demonstrated that effective expressions of love of God and neighbour at church-based, intercultural initiatives depend upon pastoral care practices including expressions of empathy and compassion, hospitality and spirituality.

Three proposals emerge from this article. First, I propose that church-based intercultural initiatives will most effectively communicate love of God and neighbour when organisation and delivery follow the principles, practices, and functions of intercultural pastoral care. Second, mission planning and practice should always be informed

by the foundational elements of pastoral care. Third, spirituality needs nurturing in individuals and groups for participants to better express love of God and neighbour.

Ongoing group prayer and reflective practice are recommended as pastoral practices for church-based groups engaged in intercultural community initiatives. Supervision is also important for pastoral carers and warrants further consideration for those engaged in mission.

If I was to return to the ministry I started, outlined in the introduction, I would do a number of things differently. Training sessions would be run for all volunteers before they commenced. It would be taught that pastoral care was our mission, expressed through our care of asylum seekers. Deep listening would be taught and the concept of interpathy. The importance of allowing our guests to take the lead in relationships would be emphasized, with the promise that they would ask questions about the Christian faith, if and when they were truly interested. Team sessions would take place following each session which would include reflection and prayer.

## About the author

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