



# Stages of becoming an intercultural faith community



**This resource has been designed to:**

- Help you identify where you are in the process of becoming a healthy intercultural church
- Recommend some practical steps forward

**Stage 1**

**Preparation →**

**Stage 2**

**Cultural encounter →**

**Stage 3**

**Tolerance →**

**Stage 4**

**Transition →**

**Stage 5**

**Intercultural church →**

# Which stage is your church in?

Please read the descriptions of the five stages and consider which stage your corps is currently in. Once you have done so, scroll down for some recommended next steps.

Note: Your journey will not always be linear, and it is common to experience aspects of multiple stages at once.

## Stage 1: Preparation

At this stage, your faith community is mostly monocultural. Existing members still need to adjust attitudes towards people from different cultures. The demographics in your surrounding community have become intercultural, but this is not reflected in your faith community. Different corps programs (e.g., playgroup) may have some participants from diverse cultures, but people from other cultures have not become part of the faith community.

**Stage 1: Preparation** (Page 4 →)

## Stage 2: Cultural encounter

At this stage, members of different ethnic groups may meet during planned services or events. However, they do not form emotional or meaningful connections with one another. Most corps members are observing at this point. They are cautious, curious and reserved. Some established members may leave. This may be due to fear of the unknown and/or an unwillingness to embrace the change that is occurring in the church.

**Stage 2: Cultural encounter** (Page 5 →)

## Stage 3: Tolerance

In this stage, some church members are interested in learning about and appreciating different cultures. Other church members will be indifferent. Some church members welcome immigrants who are keen to learn the English language and integrate into Australian society. They tolerate them being present but are hesitant to build meaningful connections. There are interactions between people of different cultures, but it is still limited to planned church activities. Some church members feel a sense of ownership of the mission, values and vision but are not sure how to implement and strengthen it.

**Stage 3: Tolerance** (Page 6 →)



## Stage 4: Transition

In this stage, individuals from two or more different cultures are beginning to form meaningful connections with each other. Relationships are deepening. There is mutual respect, teaching and learning. Individuals begin to adapt to each other. The church is becoming more unified and values Kingdom culture rather than being segregated into ethnic cultures. A variety of cultures may be present within the corps, but leadership, discipleship and worship are still based on monocultural understanding and perspectives. At this stage, cultural conversations and needs may still be neglected. At this time, it is common for corps leadership to be approached about a potential church split – with different ethnic-specific congregations. Corps leaders find they need to be sensitive, hold firm and continually cast the vision and promote the blessings of an intercultural church.

**Stage 4: Transition** (Page 7 →)

## Stage 5: Intercultural church

In this stage, the church is diverse and vibrant in every aspect, including leadership, discipleship, missional focus, and worship. The church community is made up of people from various nations. The members of the church are committed to the vision and mission of being an intercultural church. Members discover a deepened sense of unity. They treasure Kingdom culture. They have a rich, shared identity of being one in Christ Jesus. There is no dominant culture. Instead, the church consists of people from various cultures and nations.

**Stage 5: Intercultural church** (Page 8 →)



## Stage 1: Preparation

- **Begin with prayer.** Pray with your leadership team and in your faith community gatherings. We also recommend identifying those who are interested in reaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) communities, and doing regular prayer walks together. This may only be two or three people at this point.
  - **Preach and teach.** Preach and teach on topics like love for one's neighbour and God's vision and heart for people of all nations.
  - **Training.** Make intercultural competency training available to staff and corps members.
  - **Intentional events.** Organise some events that will be attractive to people from CaLD communities (e.g., a food sharing night, games and food night or cultural engagement night).
  - **Key leaders.** Take key leaders and influencers to multicultural events within the council area to increase familiarity with the communities around the corps.
  - **Visual signs of welcome.** Create a sense of welcome through signage (e.g., welcome posters in different languages, flags, The Salvation Army 'A Church for All Nations' banner).
  - **Build on any existing connections.** If you have people from intercultural communities in some church programs (e.g., Mainly Music or playgroup), introduce evangelistic resources into the space. This could include prayer, encouraging Scripture verses or Salvos magazines.
  - **Create intentional connection.** Encourage corps members to engage with new people by finding 'common denominators' for connection such as shared interests, hobbies, faith and family. Hold connection events based around these common denominators.
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### Reflection questions:

- What steps can we take to deepen our corps' understanding of God's heart for people of all nations?
- How can we better reach the diverse communities around us?
- How can we make our signage, visual cues and atmosphere more welcoming?



## Stage 2: Cultural encounter

- **Multicultural food events.** Hold multicultural food events to create a space for non-threatening engagement and connection.
  - **Teach how to make deep connections.** Use preaching and training to equip leaders to go beyond superficial contacts and make deeper connections. Don't forget to encourage them along the way.
  - **Intercultural welcome team.** Form an intercultural church welcome team. The team will meet newcomers, introduce themselves and provide a contact number. They will also follow up on newcomers and let them know about available support.
  - **Intentional culture.** Celebrate the unique aspects of people's cultures while prioritising the culture of the Kingdom of God.
  - **Use simple English.** Preach in simple English, as it is easier for non-English speakers to understand. Understand your audience and make appropriate adjustments to time and delivery. Corps officers have reported that preaching verse by verse (rather than topical) has been effective for intercultural church growth.
  - **Meet with those who are struggling to adjust.** Facilitate open dialogue with people who are seeking to leave, gently reminding them of God's heart for people of all nations. You could refer to relevant passages of Scripture. In grace, accept that some will choose to move on.
  - **Small groups.** Set up small groups that are intercultural rather than groups just meeting with people from the same culture or language.
  - **Identify needs.** Identify real, felt and practical needs that immigrants and people seeking asylum and refugees (PSAR) may have. Consider how you can support them to integrate into Australia and into church.
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### Reflection questions:

- Can we picture what a flourishing, intercultural faith community looks like in our context? What vision has God given to us?
- What steps can we take to promote more unity and interaction between people from different cultures?
- How can we prepare ourselves for grace-filled conversations that still hold fast to the vision God has given?



## Stage 3: Tolerance

- **Intercultural events.** Hold intercultural events and activities where bonding and memories can be made with people from different cultures.
  - **Preach on Kingdom culture.** Preach and teach on Kingdom culture. Focus on loving one another and on our unity in diversity as Christ's disciples.
  - **Involve people from different cultures in church services.** Allow people from different cultures to preach or share their testimony. Provide those who preach with some intentional development pathways with mentoring, feedback and input.
  - **Encourage ministry leaders.** Encourage ministry leaders (women's, men's, worship, youth, children) to model and promote unity in diversity. Remind them we are one body of Christ.
  - **Model respect and love for all cultures.** Show mutual respect of people of all cultures and grow your personal love for people from all cultures. Love genuinely.
  - **Adjust your worship times.** Allow people to pray in their own language. Provide opportunity for worship from different cultural aspects (e.g., dancing, drums).
  - **Raise cultural competency.** Discuss potential cultural conflict resolution strategies through cultural training and awareness workshops.
  - **Remind the congregation we have been created equal.** Take every opportunity to focus on identity in Christ, intentionally teaching that all people are a creation of God and have been made equal and in his image.
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### Reflection questions:

- How can we help our ministry leaders and team feel stronger ownership of this journey?
- How are our ministry leaders and team contributing to a culture of love and belonging for people of all nations?
- What opportunities and supports are we providing for people from diverse cultures to serve in our church? (E.g., Sharing their testimony, participating in the worship team or preaching.)



## Stage 4: Transition

- **Teach and cast vision.** Teach and cast vision on the eternal mission of God, the Great Commission, and the vision of being an intercultural church.
  - **Invite input from multicultural voices.** Create safe ways for people from different cultures to share ideas, needs and preferences regarding how church is run. It is important as a leadership team to bring in the voices and perspectives of people from CaLD communities. This involves providing safe places for dialogue and having a genuine desire to hear the perspectives of people from CaLD backgrounds. In some instances, you might need to provide individuals with a support person or advocate to ensure their voice is heard.
  - **Identify and develop CaLD leaders.** Begin to develop emerging leaders from CaLD communities. Give them leadership opportunities.
  - **Invite CaLD individuals to serve.** Ensure that people from various CaLD communities are becoming part of the mission of the church by serving in meaningful roles.
  - **Address talk of a split.** If some members are keen to form ethnic or language-specific groups, meet with them to discuss this. Listen to their point of view and share the vision of an intercultural church with them.
  - **Promote intercultural relationships.** Train your welcome team to connect new people with groups or individuals from different ethnicities. Deliberately shape and create the expectation of intercultural church rather than multicultural church.
  - **Engage key influencers.** Engage key influencers from CaLD and non-CaLD members within the church to advocate, support and reinforce the vision of an intercultural church.
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### Reflection questions:

- How are we supporting people from various cultures to be raised up as leaders?
- How are we ensuring that the vision of an intercultural faith community is understood and shared by corps members and leaders?
- What opportunities and activities are in place to promote unity in intercultural relationships?





## Stage 5: Intercultural church

- **Train leaders.** Train and support leaders who have a passion and vision for intercultural church, ensuring that the values and mission of the church strengthen and multiply.
- **Coach other church leaders.** Provide coaching and mentoring for other churches and ministry teams that are on this journey.
- **Diverse leadership team.** Ensure the leadership team is diverse and people from CaLD backgrounds have meaningful input into the direction and running of the church.
- **Keep casting the vision.** Hold regular events and church services sharing the vision of an intercultural church and celebrating God's heart for people of all nations and cultures.
- **Reinforce the culture.** Strongly encourage deep and meaningful interaction and fellowship between various cultures. If certain cultures/people groups are being exclusive, challenge it in line with the vision of being an intercultural church.

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### Reflection questions:

- How are we identifying and developing emerging leaders from various cultures?
- Are there opportunities to share and inspire others on the journey towards intercultural church?
- What is God saying to us about the next step in this journey?





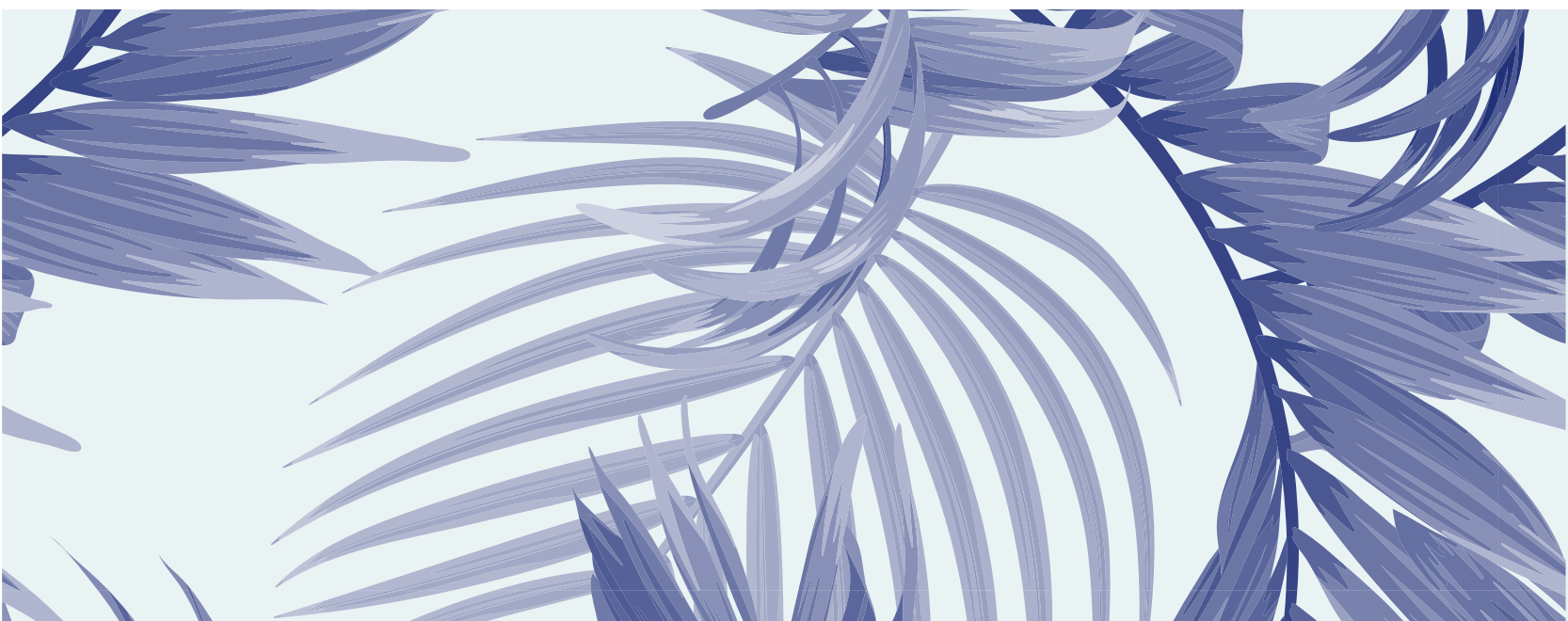


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**References:**

Dikanwa, D (2021) Intercultural Ministries

Plueddemann, J (2009) Leading Across Cultures







<sup>9</sup> 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 before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> And they cried out in a loud voice:

*“Salvation belongs to our God,  
who sits on the throne,  
and to the Lamb.”*

REVELATION 7:9-10