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Challenges and Opportunities for Asian Canadian Immigrant Churches and the Educational Implications

Abstract

Although many Asian Canadian Immigrant churches (ACICs) offer concurrent English language services for their English-speaking congregants, broadly speaking, these churches are experiencing either decline or stagnation of their membership. This research therefore explores the beneficial opportunities and challenges experienced by Asian Canadian Immigrant churches (ACICs) that simultaneously house first and second-generation congregants in separate language services. This qualitative investigation uncovers critical information to help transform current challenges into opportunities, by revealing the responses required by ACICs in order to meet the needs of the two or three language congregants. At the end, this paper draws out the educational implications for these churches, in the hope of creating for them a sense of direction for the future.¹

1. Problem and Rationale

ACICs have played a significant role in immigrant history in Canada, with Chinese, Taiwanese and Korean immigrant churches in particular functioning not only as spiritual centres, but also as social, cultural, and psychological homes for these ethnic communities—the so-called “homes away from home”.² Several ACICs conduct separate services in different languages to accommodate the needs of first and second-generation members, respectively—typically a service in the mother-tongue (e.g., Korean) for the benefit of the first generation congregants, and in the English language for the second and succeeding generation congregants. That is, two or more language services are held with members of varying generational statuses under the “same roof” of a single Asian ethnic immigrant church.

The demographics of Asian Canadian immigrants have shifted in recent decades. The population of first-generation congregants has either stagnated or declined. Furthermore, the population of second generation congregants in these same churches is not increasing at a rate on

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² David Ley, “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub,” in *Urban Studies* 45, no. 10 (September 2008), 2057-2074, 2063. Peter Cha, Steve Kang, and Hellen Lee (eds.), *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches: Ministry Insights from groundbreaking Congregations* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006).

a par with the growth of this generation group nationally, despite the efforts by these churches to offer services in English. This evolving demographic shift, though gradual, has and will continue to have momentous impact on ACICs and their congregants in the present and into the future.

Henceforth, ACICs are faced with a crucial, emerging concern about whether or not their churches will remain “Asian” or “Immigrant” in the decades to come. There is currently little known about how these churches are affected by and are responding to these important sociodemographic changes. Ministry can only be implemented effectively when the context of the congregation is understood fully and critically. ACICs have gone through many significant experiences in Canada, and yet these experiences have not been critically assessed or documented. Hence this study has significant implications for ACICs, including the ever-growing numbers of Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean churches, particularly in the highly multicultural and cosmopolitan city of Toronto and its neighboring areas.

The findings of the study offer an overall picture of the issues faced by all immigrant churches, and how practically these issues might be resolved in the present, while also seeking to discern what the future of immigrant churches might look like. Such insights have the potential to benefit the Canadian/U.S. church at large, by helping other churches also envisage their future in new ways. Ultimately, this research allows us to re-imagine the future of churches in both Canada and the U.S.

2. Research Methodology

This qualitative research consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 lay adult participants (15 males and 15 females), ranging from ages 20 to 80, and 20 ministers (18 males and 2 females) from Chinese, Taiwanese and Korean churches across the GTA. Participants were recruited from diverse church sizes, denominations, and locations in the GTA. There were 15 ethnic language lay participants who were Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese or Korean speakers, and 15 English-speaking lay participants. There were also 10 ethnic language ministers and 10 English-speaking ministers.

Each interview ranged from one to two hours in length. All interviews began with 22 demographic questions, followed by 13 main interview questions. The research also allowed for improvised questions by the interviewers arising from the flow of the interviews. Each interview was audio recorded and later transcribed; those conducted in ethnic languages were first translated into English and then transcribed.

Data was analyzed using QSR NVIVO 12, based on Braun and Clark’s (2013)³ recommendations for conducting a thematic analysis. Specifically, the data was first coded and analyzed with respect to the themes. Thematic similarities and differences among the Chinese, Taiwanese, and Korean groups, and between the first and second generations of each ethnic group were noted for preliminary analyses. The Ethics Review Board of the University of

³ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners* (London: Sage, 2013).

Toronto approved the protocol for the qualitative research.

3. Research Findings

When conducting interviews and reading transcripts, several common themes emerged, including passion for the church, love for the next generation, fear about the uncertain future of the church, desire to navigate the future of ethnic churches, a renewed call for well-supported English ministry for future generations of worshippers in the church, and what changes, if any, are needed for congregations to remain as a church going forward. Correspondingly, some of the more common phrases and terms used in the interviews included leadership for the next generation, English ministry, and multicultural or multiethnic church.

This paper, drawn from this extensive research presents the key opportunities (benefits) and challenges arising from this demographic change, and outlines the central insights about the future of these churches as perceived and envisioned by the first and the second-generation congregants in GTA-based ACICs in Canada.

1) Key Benefits Holding Different Language Services under the Same Roof

Although the language barrier prevents different generations of family members from worshipping in the same service, most family units still prefer to stay together in the same church. According to both the lay and clergy interviewees, one of the major benefits in having multiple worship services under the same roof is the ability to **accommodate different generations, cultures and languages**. Liu noted, “Each congregation—the TM(Taiwanese Ministry) and EM(English Ministry)—can grow on its own. Congregants can choose to worship in their own language or the language of their preference. In short, congregants can worship in the language they are most comfortable with.”

Interviewees were excited to find out how the ethnic immigrant ministry as they have experienced it might evolve to meet the needs of second and third-generation congregants. In addition, ethnic immigrant churches can help address specific **ethno-cultural needs of second and third-generation children** raised in culturally hybrid or bi-cultural environments. Min Woo confirmed how holding two or three different language services meets these specific needs:

The Korean immigrant church can meet their language needs, associated ethnic sentiments, and cultural character. Although the English-speaking second generation were born in Canada and educated in the Canadian school system, they were raised in a Korean household by Korean-speaking parents. They have certain ethno-culturally specific needs that cannot be met in an English-speaking mainline church.

Another beneficial opportunity in having multiple worship groups under the same roof is that **families can come together in the same church** and worship in different rooms based on their personal preferences. This makes for an easy, convenient arrangement that renders church attendance problem-free for the entire family. Such an arrangement also helps **create important bonding opportunities between family members** while contributing to a family atmosphere at the church. Moses addressed intergenerational bonding in this arrangement, saying young people “get to see their grandparents regularly at church, which is an intergenerational bonding opportunity. Although family members may worship separately based on language preferences,

the family ties are retained through their membership in the same church.” As mentioned previously, each family member can choose a worship service based on his/her preference in language and culture. Accordingly, second-generation children often choose the English service while the first-generation parents choose the ethnic language service. Afterwards, **parents and children can join together for intergenerational fellowship. Family members feel most at home and most comfortable** if they are able to worship in their preferred language. Jae Min noted, “In attending the same church, the bond and love between family members can be strengthened. ... Having both English and Korean services helps bring families closer together because family members with different language preferences can still remain in the same church.”

Kate agreed, as follows, “The parents go to the adult congregation and the children can be in the youth service or the English congregation. They are still together even though there are different services; they’re still able to worship together in one church in a sense. It might be different services, but it is one building, one church.” Stuart expressed his joy of worshipping with his parents as follows:

I love worshipping with my parents. It is a very family-oriented thing. The other second-generation [members] have some of their parents in the church as well. ... My parents’ friends are like my friends; they are almost like my [own] parents. They saw me grow up. I saw them grow older. And I grew up with their kids and we have seen [each other] getting married and growing our families with our own kids. So we are all one big family.

The first-generation members in particular are encouraged to share stems of faith and pass on **that faith to the next generation**. As Jin Hee put it, “We can share stems of faith by staying together as a family in the same church, just as faith was passed on from generation to generation in the Bible.” The vast majority of ministers also agreed that **the transmission of faith from generation to generation** is one of the most valuable assets of offering multiple services under the same roof. Jane echoed this, saying,

I think it is a way that the first generation is able to sow [seeds] into the next generation, by leading through example, serving as credible witnesses, but also at the same time not enforcing their own language that might no longer speak to the second generation. ... It is biblical to be multigenerational, or for that relationship to continue—fostering this continuum is very important.

Another related opportunity arising from such an arrangement is that it presents **intergenerational learning opportunities that bridge the gap between different generations and language groups** sharing the same cultural roots. In addition, the ethnic church helps to resolve generational differences between family members by building mutual understanding and respect. For instance, first-generation members are called to guide and mentor the second-generation members, and not simply instruct them, through sharing common experiences, offering support, and praying together. Again Jin Hee noted,

The Korean-speaking first-generation members have a chance to learn about the younger generation’s views and values through a mutual interaction at close quarters. The Korean-speaking first-generation members can benefit further from learning about English-speaking second-generation members’ views and values, most of which overlap with those of the mainstream Canadian culture.

Ann echoed these comments as follows,

Because of different values growing up, it's nice to be able to come and talk to the kids and feel connected and find a solution together. Also some of the adults in the Chinese congregation are second generation, so talking to them really helps, because they went through it and they can give us a better perspective on our parents while relating to us.

Ga Eun and So Young stressed the importance of the bridging role of housing two or three language services. Ga Eun said, "I think being able to attend the same church and worship God together even in separate worship rooms helps bridge the gap between the first generation and second generation." So Young agreed, saying, "Older members can serve as a model of faith to younger members, and I think that is a plus. But if we have a complete separation of EM and KM, that connection will be lost and it will be like two separate entities." Susan noted that her own learning opportunity came from seeing the other generation praying, "When I see the older generation pray and the amount of prayer things that they have, it just reminds me of how important that is, and even though, yes, it's difficult and really early in the morning, you still go. So yes, I think there's things to be learned, you just have to look very carefully."

In addition, both generations see that having two or three language services **facilitates the growth of church**, since this arrangement makes it easier to reach the other generation and language group, as Seok Ho pointed out: "Non-Koreans can be invited to the church freely without having to worry about the language barrier." Brad agreed, saying, "If we are trying to reach the English-speaking second generation in the community, whose parents are either Cantonese or Mandarin-speaking, we are able to meet their different language needs and preferences at our church. The second-generation children are able to attend the same church as their Cantonese-speaking or Mandarin-speaking parents. " A few others echoed Seok Ho and Brad, saying how this arrangement helps them bring their friends and family to church.

In particular, the ethnic immigrant churches help **connect both the ethnic language congregants and English congregants to their roots** by sharing similar experiences, ethnic foods, and cultural holiday traditions, such as the Lunar New Year, and August Full Moon. **Being able to connect to ethnic roots is integral to the creation of a hybrid identity**, which helps congregants to navigate their lives in Canada outside of the church. Ruth said her church is the only place she receives cultural learning, which is an added bonus that comes from ethnic churches. She spoke of "a love for my Korean heritage, but it's definitely tied into church, because that's the only place where I get my cultural influence from ... that extra bonus of being part of a Korean church." Stuart echoed her point, speaking of the importance of "learning the significance about family and just keeping some of that [Taiwanese] culture." Ming Dao stressed, "We can still enjoy understanding life together, so we know where we are coming from."

Ji Hun noted what a benefit it is to have two language services in ethnic churches so that second and third generations can build up their hybrid identity.

They end up with a hybrid identity. As we go from one generation to the subsequent generation, the Korean immigrant churches can help make sense of this hybrid identity from combined cultural experiences – the

good, the bad, what to accept, and what to discard. ... If they want to take root, they must first understand the roots of their parents. I am not saying the second generation ought to adopt the ways of their parents. It is about making sense of who they are as second-generation Korean Canadians.

Spiritually, ethnic immigrant churches with two or three language groups make members **feel at home and more comfortable being themselves** due to the ease of communication. Given the lack of language barrier in the worship service, members are able to get the most out of sermons and actively participate in the worship. This leads to **personal spiritual growth and maturity**. Jasmin saw this as a blessing, saying: “I feel very comfortable coming and going, because I have travelled quite an amount over the years, and coming back to my present roots each time is a blessing in itself.” Lian put it like this:

The beauty of having two generations of congregants in two different languages is to provide them place for worship, gathering and fellowship, especially for the second generation. ... We have provided them an environment in which to feel comfortable to grow spiritually. Having friends is one of the important strengths (or advantages) for them, in finding companions for this spiritual walk.

2) Key Challenges Arising from Different Language Services

Opportunities and benefits that come from providing two or three language services mainly have to do with accommodating different generations and language groups under the same roof. Interestingly, the most difficult common challenges faced by these ethnic immigrant churches are the same **language and cultural differences** that make it difficult to become one church under the same roof. For instance, the Taiwanese interviewees identified the leadership erosion caused by the language barrier as one of their major challenges. While young Taiwanese members speak either English or Mandarin, the older Taiwanese members speak neither of these languages. Instead, they speak the traditional Taiwanese dialect. Most Taiwanese churches are unable to locate leaders who can speak all three languages fluently. Nor are they able to afford two ministers—one for Taiwanese, one for English—to care for the two congregations separately.

From these language and cultural barriers **communication challenges** arise naturally. This is the biggest ongoing challenge for all ethnic churches with two or three language services to date. Given the communication problems, the ethnic immigrant churches often face difficulties in holding joint services, meetings, ministry programs and activities. Although some ACICs have one joint session or board with members from all language groups, the communication challenges often make working together difficult. Sometimes, miscommunication between different language groups leads to long-standing misunderstandings. In short, there is not only difficulty in communication, but also a general lack of communication between different languages groups in the ethnic immigrant church.

As Sui Hui said, communication is a challenge for the whole church. “Communication is always a challenge, not just day-to-day talks, but in the church as a whole.” The styles of communicating in different languages are different also. Kate expressed her concern as follows: “I think how Mandarin people...communicate is very different from how Cantonese or English people do.” Communication challenges unintentionally exclude people from meetings and joint

services. Melia brought up an example of exclusion, saying, “People might get excluded just because of language, not intentionally, but I guess we forget sometimes that [in] running meetings if we don’t have a proper translator, some people get excluded because they don’t understand the content of the meeting.” Chen Yi also noted, “It is difficult because we have different languages. For instance, we have been trying to arrange some family worship in English, but [because] the parents do not understand English, they don’t go and [there is] no participation.” This communication challenge between different languages also makes people feel uncomfortable, as Ji Yang put it: “It can be a barrier because I don’t speak Mandarin, or I can understand English but not too much, then that can become a barrier between two congregations. It is quite difficult, or you know you will not feel too comfortable in communication in one of those languages.” Also, because of the language barrier between two or three congregations, the ethnic language group does not know what the English group is doing, and vice versa. Liu said, “If you are worshipping in the English congregation, you don’t even know what is going on in the Taiwanese congregation. The language barrier, coupled with the cultural barrier, doesn’t help either. This all makes things more challenging for our church.”

Not only language differences, but also cultural differences create communication challenges and misunderstandings accompanied by shocks, which can lead churches in different directions. Ji Yang said,

We should note that the “cultural differences” that feed into communication barriers are multi-faceted: While the first-generation members espouse mainly “Asian culture,” even the traditional ones, the second-generation members, identify with a hybrid of Western [Canadian] and Asian culture. Not surprisingly, these two different ways of thinking and communication have resulted in misunderstanding between the two generations, hampering not just efforts of communication, but also cooperative ministry. They are thinking differently [because] they are culturally different.

Lian echoed the point, “It is quite easy for our church to become a three-head-chariot, if we all run in different directions. That is why we seek unity, and that should not be lost from sight. However, cultural differences could be the major barrier to good communications. I always find our communications are an issue in our church.” Jane agreed, “I think the challenge is to keep the communication going, so that there is a deeper insight and understanding. Sometimes, this constant relaying of information between the EM and CM becomes quite challenging.”

Different cultures added to the generational gap makes for an even greater communication challenge. Brian expressed it as follows: “The culture ... this is kind of getting into the ethnicity, but I think ethnicity may be less important than the culture you are embedded in ... you still have a generational gap. That adds challenges. Older people have older ways of doing things; younger people may want to do things in a different way.” Furthermore, different cultural backgrounds bring different issues to the table, therefore, first and second-generations have different issues to deal with in the church. Ba Men articulated this challenge, saying,

There are some struggles in coordination and communication. As for Mandarin and English, other than the differences in language, the topic is an issue: the Mandarin group likes to talk about what happened in their mother country, including politics, which touch their feelings. But the younger generation wants to focus on what they face in social media, how to deal with drugs, school life, how to deal with parents and teachers etc.

The focus is different and their patience is also different. The English topic they like to be finished in fifteen minutes, while the Mandarin people want it longer, up to one hour, and this is a big difference. The older ones want a longer sermon also; they feel they learn more, but not the younger generation.

Although the two or three congregations often yearn to co-exist harmoniously as one united church, there is an ongoing challenge of **disconnection between generations and languages in two or three congregations**. It is problematic for the two or three different worship groups to maintain an intrinsic longing to become a unified church. Jia Xing pointed to the reduced harmony between two or three groups: “We may be more isolated because when people are not speaking the same language . . . there is a distance when you worship separately. Again, it is the problem of communication; the harmony is reduced between two different generations.” Seok Ho added, “having two separate groups under one roof weakens the notion of one unified community.” Sui Hui lamented the reality of this disconnection: “Somehow it’s an upstairs-downstairs-church, upstairs you do your things, downstairs we do our things.” Furthermore there is a mindset of “us and them.” Susan responded that in “two separate services, I think there’s [something] very like an ‘us and them’ mentality,” while Ji Yang echoed, “They are doing their own and we are doing our own.” In the end the groups look like two or three separate entities. So Young concluded, “I think the biggest challenge is the generational disconnect. Although being under the same roof is better than the complete independence of EM, there is a lack of common ground between the EM and KM. Sometimes it feels like there are two separate entities under one roof.”

Shirley described a divide of two or three groups in the same church:

So there’s sort of like a divide where we feel like we can’t bother them and we can’t really interact with them in a sense and we’re not really there together. We’re not sharing the same space at the same time either, so even though we’re under the same church, I don’t know them. I would see them and say, “oh, hi, hi” and then pass them. We have nothing to do with each other, because we don’t do the same things.

Kate uses the word “segregation” under two or three different ministers as well: between the ethnic language minister(s) and the English minister.

I have no idea what the Mandarin congregation is doing, or the Cantonese congregation. . . . I guess my focus is on the English ministry. Pastors are able to focus on their own ministries, but that in a way segregates us. I have no idea what the Mandarin deacons are doing . . . and so that causes more independence—we’re doing our own thing.

Another key challenge for ACICs comes from **leadership**—or lack thereof—in both laity and clergy. It is challenging to find, from a small pool of qualified candidates, a suitable pastor who is equipped with a sound theological understanding and a good grasp of the ethnic language to meet the needs of an ACIC. It is even more difficult for a senior or lead pastor and associate pastors to form working partnerships, due to the hierarchical power structure of East Asian cultures. Ministers serving the same ACIC may thus experience an early burnout from the double burden and workload.

Kate described leadership concerns as a whole: “[There are] so many challenges from leadership all the way down to even just lay people, and so I think leadership-wise there

definitely is a mess in terms of [what]you're dealing with. So at the senior pastoral level it's as with the Mandarin, according to all the different pastors, it's sometimes very silo'ed ministries."

Charles also noted, "I know that our pastor is very biblical in his teaching and preaching. It is hard if you are a non-Christian to even understand him, because he is very black and white." Brian has experienced a different kind of leadership challenge because of the language issues: "It is much harder to find leadership or suitable pastors. It is because we must have a [bilingual] pastor who speaks both Taiwanese and English. It is very rare to find a candidate who satisfies this condition."

Abraham has faced a different challenge of imbalanced leadership between the English and ethnic ministries: "One of the major challenges of ministering to the EM congregation is that the church is structured in a way to favour leadership on the CM side. Right now, most of the board members and deacons are from the Chinese congregation. As a lead pastor of EM, I am essentially on my own."

Liu addressed the challenges of hierarchical politics as follows: "You are not really equipped to navigate a system shaped by a specific culture. It's tough. I think this is where all the pastoral burnout comes from. Everyone I talk to—the people in the EM—are great. It is the other stuff, the hierarchical politics and associated drama within the church that causes burnout in the ministry."

Another challenge comes from **passive or inactive English-speaking second-generation congregants who lack a sense of ownership of the church**, especially given the rapidly aging demographics of Cantonese, Taiwanese, and Korean congregations. The decrease in the rate of immigration from these home countries (Taiwan, Cantonese-speaking parts of China, and Korea), coupled with the aging members of the ethnic congregations, is contributing to the declining membership of a number of ACICs in the GTA. Despite some positive projections, the overall English-speaking membership of such churches has yet to grow, and the ownership of the church by the second generation seems not quite there from the perspective of first-generation congregants. However, from the EM perspective, they feel they are considered secondary to the ethnic ministry. Jae Min articulated this challenge:

In many immigrant churches, the EM is of secondary importance to the KM. The EM is not as active as the KM at my church, so the EM is not able to carry out major mission projects or relief efforts at this time. I hope the church can raise the EM up so that it can join forces with the KM in different mission initiatives and relief efforts. One of the most pressing challenges at my church is getting more second-generation members to attend the service. ... We have actually seen church membership decreasing over time, because of the relatively high proportion of senior members, younger members leaving the church, and other factors.

Moses expressed the same concern, "While it is necessary for the second-generation EM members to take ownership of their own church, their sense of ownership—or lack thereof—is not an end in itself. Having a sense of church ownership would just help the EM congregation stay committed to this church."

There is, however, a different challenge, which comes from **unequal treatment of English**

congregants. Although they are all grown adults and professionals in society, ethnic congregants treat them as children and their ministry as secondary, in terms of allocating space and resources and running programs. Some of the English congregants expressed deep concerns that their voices are often ignored in favour of those of the ethnic language ministry, even though ethnic ministry says EM is its future. For example, the ethnic language service typically takes place in the main sanctuary on Sunday, while the English language service often takes place in the basement or auditorium. Such unequal allocation of church space, time, and resources can become a source of resentment amongst the English-speaking second-generation members. They feel that they are being treated as second-class citizens in the ACIC. Likewise, several English-speaking interviewees drew attention to the need to treat English congregants with respect and accord them equal rights regardless of age. Shirley, for example, believes the decrease in numbers is because their voices go unheard and their ministry is not prioritized.

And we are not growing anywhere in size or spiritually, or the youth. There's no youth anymore. It's diminished, that whole side. It's just gone. It's not there because we were not heard. No one prioritized the English side, which is why the English side was only decreasing in size because ... when you go to church you expect to be fed in a sense. Sometimes I feel like they're looking down on the English service, they feel like we're belittling our faith in a sense, just because we're steering away from the traditional way of worshipping.

As a first-generation interviewee, So Young agreed with Shirley, saying, "The church prioritizes the Asian ethnic language service attendees. In this case the church revolves around the Korean service members. Do you think that this makes the English service members feel excluded?"

Seok Ho, also a first-generation interviewee, agreed with Shirley.

Members of the EM want full recognition from the rest of the church. They do not want to be treated as second class citizens at the church or be regarded as rule breakers by older church members. In other words, they want equal treatment, but are often viewed as rebellious children in need of discipline by some older church members. Members of KM want to be treated with respect, regardless of age group and status within the church.

4. Critical Information and Educational Implications

Although the members of ACICs frequently feel as if the ethnic language ministry and English ministry are separate churches under the same roof, and that both language services face challenges connected to being together as one church, they still see possibilities for turning current challenges into opportunities. No one mentioned having plans to leave the ethnic church because of the challenges the church faces. They still love their ethnic churches and want to stay and work for the future as one church, even if that church might be an English language dominant church.

First, they would like to create opportunities to move forward in a multicultural or multiethnic direction, starting with having friends and members of local community join their English services on Sundays. **The multiethnic church beyond Asians**, which Jasmin aspires to

means “*more coloured faces, and different nationalities.*” This is their vision of the church for both lay and clergy in 25 years’ time. The majority of interviewees, both lay and clergy, believe that opening the church doors to all will help nurture a multicultural or multiethnic congregation, which will in turn facilitate church growth. They are not only open to diverse ethnic groups, but to celebrating diverse cultures in the church. Seok Ho envisioned, “having a separate English service at our church [that] can serve as an open invitation to non-Koreans or those of diverse backgrounds.” Biming also envisioned a multiethnic church:

Perhaps the opportunity for this church lies in expanding beyond the Chinese. I think this church has two choices: Either open a separate Mandarin language service and take in the next wave of immigrants like many other ethnic Chinese churches in the GTA, or become a multicultural Canadian church and no longer be an ethnic Chinese church.

Ruth sees the future of the church as a multicultural and thinks this is a natural evolution: “It’ll be more multicultural and that’s just natural evolution of generations. I mean, my generation. I’d say half my friends married Koreans, but half didn’t, and then our children....”

Second, in order to bring the different congregations together, congregations want opportunities for **joint worship services** with communion once a month or a couple of times a year. The regular joint worship service will help promote oneness of congregations in Christ. Sui Hui noted, “That’s why we started having combined services once a month, with the Communion service.” Melia expressed her joy from joint services, “I think for myself, a very distinct moment came for me, when we had one worship where we had Cantonese, Mandarin, and English, all worshipping together, in our languages, singing together.” Likewise, frequent interactions between the different congregations via joint church services, events and activities help both congregations understand each other better. A few churches have carried out joint programs such as mission trips, church-wide summer retreats, church-sponsored Christmas markets and so on.

Shirley shared her joint experiences in the church: “We have volunteers going over for example and it can be a mix of congregations, we can have some Cantonese or some English, or summer camps. Summer camps we have a mix of those people, individuals from different congregations coming together.” Kate also shared that “there are so many opportunities to have a more family style, or [cultural type] of event and I do enjoy those things and each congregation brings strengths and weaknesses when all the gifts are put together. ... It’s a beautiful picture of God’s kingdom.”

Third, the members of different congregations would like opportunities **to learn from each other’s strengths and mistakes.** The different ministries in ACICs can complement one another, by working together and sharing their unique gifts, talents, and professional experiences. Jin Hee described it this way: “Some older first-generation members of KM have even benefitted from learning about the conventional Canadian practices of EM, such as proper recycling and composting. In other words, they have come to accept the EM as an equal partner of our church after being better informed.”

Fa hopes the two congregations can complement one another:

The opportunity is right there, to be able to complement one another. Every culture has its own focal point and its merits. What matters is each one can take up the cultural lens of another so that each can objectively see what others see. It would be nice if one could temporarily put down one's cultural baggage and then step into other people's shoes.

Abraham saw a possibility to improve: "There is a possibility if we think of each other more, to see how we can use each other's strengths to improve our respective congregations."

For the younger generation of ACICs, the provision allowing worship in two or three languages is a model example that reflects the changing demographics of their surrounding society. They consider this an opportunity for their church to grow by accommodating different generations, languages, and ethnic groups. Despite the challenges they face from these different cultures and languages, they value coming together as family and their relations with those of the same ethnic roots. In general, the younger generation has cultivated a vision of becoming a church for all, and hopes to reach beyond their own ethnic groups. Thus, the ethnic church works to accommodate their different language needs, cultures and preferences.

This research looked for critical information to help these churches transform their current challenges into opportunities by examining the responses required to meet the needs of the two or three language congregants. Connected to opportunities to respond to challenges are significant educational implications these churches need to take seriously, especially in order to become unified churches that overcome differences.

The first educational implication concerns the importance of improving communications between different language congregants and cultures. Not only are communication skills required, but so too intercultural and intergenerational education. All the churches face a triple difficulty in communication, which arises from being made up of different cultures, languages and generations.

The second educational implication is the need to empower second generation leadership, that is, leadership for English ministry. Leadership in general requires attention. The first-generation leaders, both lay and clergy, need to learn how to communicate with the second and third-generation, how to understand their culture, and how to empower leaders of English ministries to demonstrate their leadership in the entire congregation, by giving them opportunities to initiate programs for the whole church. In particular, ACICs need to enhance women's leadership in both laity and clergy, and in both the ethnic and English ministries.

The third educational implication concerns strategies for building a multiethnic church in the future. As mentioned above, the majority of interviewees would like to move to a multiethnic church that reflects the changing society in Canada, particularly the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and also follow a biblical model of church and the Kingdom of God. This requires intentional intercultural education and practice. Many of interviewees asked and wanted to know how to become a multiethnic church, and how to move beyond their own ethnic groups or Asian-ness. This might be the future of the Asian church: i.e., not framing itself as an Asian church. Are Asians in Canada able to change the perceptions of others, in no longer perceiving an Asian church as being for Asians only? Also, can Asians resolve the dilemma between an ethnic church

rooted in their own culture and a church that is multiethnic?

This paper concludes with Melia's words about faith for the multicultural church.

I think it would be multicultural. Very multicultural ... this is kind of what I've observed. As God transforms our hearts to be more like Him, we begin to see our identity as more in Christ. And as it is more in Christ, He puts it in our hearts to open our eyes more. My heart is not only for the Asian people, it's also for all nations. And as He puts that in our hearts, our church will naturally become more and more multicultural.

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