

## A world church

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**Abstract:** At the All Nations City Church's Christmas service, held Dec. 8 at Trinity Baptist Church, groups with diverse cultural backgrounds helped lead worship, showing that the definition of worship varies with cultures. [...]the All Nations City Church's welcoming of churches is an extension of what the Rev. Hunegnaw Bekele, pastor at International Ethiopian Christian Fellowship, and other pastors provide to new immigrants and refugees at their own churches.

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**Full text:** At All Nations City Church, the sounds of worship -- singing, clapping, the jingling of a tambourine -- transcend the need for everyone to speak the same language.

When Blandina Yuyada, wearing a bright yellow dress, and four other women step on stage as part of the Sudanese Choir, they don't bring any instruments with them. But the music builds as they begin singing. A drummer soon joins them on stage. People begin clapping and then dancing near the stage.

If you close your eyes and listen, you might think you're in Africa.

At the All Nations City Church's Christmas service, held Dec. 8 at Trinity Baptist Church, groups with diverse cultural backgrounds helped lead worship, showing that the definition of worship varies with cultures. A group from Iglesia Restauracion en Cristo (Restoration in Christ Church) sang one verse of "Away in a Manger" in Spanish and then repeated the verse in English. A Bhutanese choir sang a cappella. A Liberian choir sang, "Jesus is the lover of our soul." Between the choirs, a worship team led carols sung in English.

The mix of worship styles, cultures and languages is integral to All Nations City Church services. All Nations City Church serves as a bridge between the Anglo and ethnic churches in Sioux Falls, says the Rev. Carl Bruxvoort, who serves as president of the church's board. The church's aim is to provide a place for Christians from all backgrounds to worship together and to foster relationships between established and developing churches.

The Rev. Larry Caldwell, a visiting professor of intercultural studies at Sioux Falls Seminary who also serves on the All Nations board, estimates there are about 30 ethnic churches in Sioux Falls. That number includes more established churches, such as Ethiopian and Hispanic churches, and new churches recently formed by the Nepalese and Bhutanese.

All Nations City Church focuses on reaching out to the immigrant and refugee community in Sioux Falls, but everyone is encouraged to attend. "We want the unifying body of the whole church, not just the immigrants, although that's part of the big picture," says the Rev. Bjorn Lervik, vice president of the board of All Nations City Church. "We need to expand and think, 'What is the church really like?' The church is a world church -- it's not just American."

Nick and Joellen Welder of Sioux Falls, who attended the Christmas service, didn't know what to expect the first time they attended an All Nations service. "Growing up Norwegian Lutheran compared to everyone else, it's interesting just watching the worship styles," Joellen Welder says.

The couple attends services for All Nations City Church in addition to worshipping at their home church, Hillcrest Church.

"It gets us out of our comfort zone of our normal church. It allows us all to be together for an hour," says Nick Welder, a student at Sioux Falls Seminary.

Board members and pastors say the ethnic diversity at the services reflects what heaven will be like. They point

to the Bible verse Revelation 7:9: "... 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 in front of the lamb."

"It's a taste of heaven on earth," agrees Yuyada, who's an associate pastor at New Jerusalem International Church in Sioux Falls. In 2000, Yuyada moved from what is now South Sudan to Sioux Falls.

"Whoever doesn't come is missing out. God is a God of diversity. It's (the worship) so rich -- all colors, tongues and languages."

#### Developing connections

All Nations City Church helps to welcome ethnic churches into the citywide network of churches, Bruxvoort says. Ethnic churches can face language or cultural barriers, and they often meet at host churches at different hours than the host church's services, which can inhibit interaction between the congregations.

"From my experience dealing with the immigrant refugee churches and their leaders, (I became aware of) their isolation from the rest of the body of Christ," says Bruxvoort, who also serves as a chaplain at John Morrell as part of his ministry with the immigrant/refugee outreach effort New Roots that he founded. "They often met in the afternoon hours and were often not connected to the wider body. This is our way of welcoming them, making them visible."

In a way, the All Nations City Church's welcoming of churches is an extension of what the Rev. Hunegnaw Bekele, pastor at International Ethiopian Christian Fellowship, and other pastors provide to new immigrants and refugees at their own churches. Bekele says the main challenges in his congregation are communication and culture shock. When people come to Sioux Falls, Bekele says the church connects those individuals or families with other people within the church body and with community resources such as Lutheran Social Services. It also provides interpreting or helps with finances until they gain employment.

The vision that the Rev. Samuel Gayetaye has for his church, the International Outreach Ministry, which meets downtown at the Sioux Falls Ministry Center, is similar to that of the All Nations Church. Members are from countries including Nigeria and the Ivory Coast. "(We are) bringing diversity together and multicultural building in this community," he says. The church started in 2010 and has about 49 members. Gayetaye moved to Sioux Falls from Liberia in 2007.

#### Ethnic churches

Since Salvador Jaimes and his wife, Edith Jaimes, began attending All Nations services, they have met other Hispanic pastors and pastors from Africa, Europe, South America and Bhutan.

"We know the needs other congregations have. It's given us a chance to pray for other congregations," Salvador Jaimes says.

The Jaimeses are pastors at Iglesia Restauracion en Cristo, which meets on East 15th Street. The church was founded in May 2006 and has an average attendance of about 50. Salvador knows at least 10 other Hispanic pastors in Sioux Falls, but there are at least three he hasn't met.

Many immigrant and refugee pastors may not have a connection within their own ethnic communities, Bruxvoort says. "For the immigrant refugee pastors, life is extremely busy as it is, running from one crisis to another, so that to do anything beyond their own group -- even within or among the Hispanic churches -- is too much. There may not be a lot of connection with each other or also from one African group to another African group. They may not necessarily know each other, even though they might be together at John Morrell. ... We have a number of pastors who are bivocational, because they are working at Morrell's or somewhere else."

But Bruxvoort noticed connections being made between people at an All Nations City Church picnic last summer in Sertoma Park. "There were Congolese and Hispanics saying to each other, 'See you tomorrow' (at John Morrell). Now they recognize each other. Now they see each other not just as co-workers but also as Christians."

While All Nations City Church helps develop these relationships, Bruxvoort and others say more can be done for established churches to connect with the immigrant and refugee community. Those needs range from

pastoral training to cultural education.

"The problem is cultural differences. It's important to realize that the mission field is here," Bekele says.

Ethnic pastors often are not equipped with the educational training needed to lead a church, Bruxvoort says. Sometimes those pastors may be unaware of how to run the business aspects of a church, such as knowing how tithe money can be spent or how to incorporate a church.

The Sioux Falls Seminary is developing an ethnic training ministry to address key areas of pastoral education and training. The seminary has had several focus groups to learn what skills or information would be useful to ethnic pastors and lay leaders. They have focused on key areas such as how to work with Anglo churches, information about practical matters such as how to incorporate as a church, and basic training for counseling, Caldwell says.

Caldwell notes that there are no firm statistics on the religion of immigrants and refugees who come to Sioux Falls. Many Christians attend church to find a community that resembles home. "It gives them some stability in the midst of lives that are totally unstable. ... It gives them a connection back to their home country as well," Caldwell says.

Caldwell says Anglo churches can help all immigrants and refugees in general; their help doesn't need to be restricted to Christians. "These other groups would still have the same assimilation problems. ... We're not saying look for a Christian family, but look for a family."

The challenge, though, is how to maintain a dialogue among church congregations when the language difference often impedes such conversations. When Caldwell speaks to area churches, he says Anglo churches have two responses: They either don't know what to do with the information about the ethnic population, or they ask how they can be involved.

Sometimes that dialogue takes the shape of a community garden, as it has at First Assembly of God. A Swahili congregation formed at First Assembly about four or five years ago, initially meeting before the main church service and eventually forming its own Sunday morning service.

"It started growing and growing," says Theresa Kashale, who helped start the Swahili congregation and also helps translate between the congregations. "They decided to do their own service because they had more people coming, and they wanted to have it last long. One service can last four hours."

The interactions between the original church body and the Swahili congregation were more difficult once the services lacked an overlap. Then Kashale started the First Assembly Community Garden three years ago. "That garden brought interaction. I had to teach the women how to can tomatoes and vegetables. People from the church donated the jars for canning," she says. Fifth-graders from Christian Center Elementary came to the garden and saw how the African women were putting in the seed.

Kashale, who came to Sioux Falls in 1995 from the Democratic Republic of Congo, knows the difficulty of adjusting to a new culture. "This is huge. People heal through these interactions. People get immersed in the culture through interaction. People heal through relationships. That's what will heal people," she says.

The garden itself symbolizes how developing the relationships between cultures takes time. "You need to be patient," Kashale says. "This is something that God is teaching us, to be patient and understand and learn about other people's culture."

About All Nations City Church

\* Founded: 2007

\* Origins: All Nations City Church grew out of City Church, an effort led by the Rev. Bill Carpenter to bring together the churches of Sioux Falls across denominations. In 2006, after City Church slowed for a year, a group of pastors and individuals decided to re-form City Church and start a new church that would focus on reaching out to the immigrant and refugee churches and their communities in Sioux Falls.

\* Progress: "It's become something much bigger and sustaining," says the Rev. Carl Bruxvoort, president of the church board. "... Beyond worship, we want relationships to develop, for people to be there for each other and

learn from our mutual experience."

For the first four years, All Nations City Church had a monthly service, but the church now meets quarterly at host churches around Sioux Falls. A typical service includes participation from various churches in scripture reading, worship or preaching. They try to involve many ethnic communities in the services "to have all of the nations participate," says Brenda David, secretary and events coordinator of All Nations City Church.

\* More information: Visit [www.allnationscitychurch.wordpress.com](http://www.allnationscitychurch.wordpress.com)

\* To sign up for email updates: Email [allnationscitychurch@gmail.com](mailto:allnationscitychurch@gmail.com)

\* Facebook group: All Nations City Church of Sioux Falls

\* What: All Nations City Church quarterly worship service

\* When: 6 p.m. March 23

\* Where: Central Baptist Church, 3102 W. Ralph Rogers Road

#### Process for new immigrants

Immigrants and refugees face a multitude of challenges upon resettlement or migration, says Tim Jurgens, program director and state refugee coordinator at Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota.

"Between language, integrating into the U.S. school systems, health care and trying to get them up to speed with the workplace environment, housing orientation and integration, it's very challenging within that first eight-month timeframe," he says. Refugees are eligible to receive up to eight months of cash assistance through federal funding beginning at their date of arrival to the U.S.

Lutheran Social Services contracts with Lutheran Immigration Refugee Service, located in Baltimore, Md., and the Department of State to provide resettlement services for the state of South Dakota. LSS has refugee resettlement offices in Sioux Falls and Huron and provides a variety of services for immigrants, including English language training and employment services. New arrivals complete a 36-hour orientation class conducted by community stakeholders and LSS staff that addresses topics such as eligibility of benefits, law enforcement, pre-employment training and housing safety. Refugees also are required to attend English language and literacy classes.

LSS projects that it will resettle 400 individuals within Sioux Falls and 100 in Huron in the next fiscal year. Those numbers do not include secondary migrants, refugees who may travel within the U.S.

Jurgens notes that churches and cultural affiliations play an important role in helping new arrivals adjust to the community through mentoring or even providing transportation. To further assist a family, LSS often will reach out to mentors from the affiliation or volunteers from the community because the refugees might trust their opinion more than a case manager they just met. Furthermore, he says, "Many of the groups are very faith-driven. That's an asset to the community as well as a vital resource."

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